

The Red Hen Essay Collection



Vol. 4
REGARDING
POTTERVERSE PEOPLE
Character Studies



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The Red Hen Essay Collection



Vol.4

POTTERVERSE PEOPLE

Elders & Historical Personages
Concerning Tom Marvolo Riddle
A Closer Look at the Weasleys
Another Look at the Marauders
Man on a Tightrope
Other Persons of Interest

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Regarding Potterverse People

Elders & Historical Personages

Under this heading is where you will find either historical persons whose actions and alleged beliefs have been used to justify a good deal of the mindset which we encounter once we enter the British Wizarding world. As well as the Black family tapestry, and a look at those elders, senior to, say, the Weasleys, who remain active over most of the course of the series.

Salazar Slytherin

As I've stated in any number of forums; one of the more irksome problems with in the Harry Potter series (there weren't a lot of *major* ones up to DHs, but there were a handful — and a whole slew of little ones) is that the tight focus on Harry's personal experience so limits the viewpoint of the reader that — as much and as detailed as the information we have been given us sometimes appears to be, we seem to get no sense of a living, developing history for the wizarding world as Rowling has presented it.



For all of her slinging around blithe statements about; 'A thousand years ago...' we get no real impression that the average wizard, at any point in their history, has ever thought, felt, or behaved in any manner other than the way he does today. Such a reading is only sound insofar as that, no, human *nature* does not really change. But human schools of thought, and human perception invariably do. Wizards can be no exception.

It also *appeared* to be obvious throughout the first 6 books in the series, that Harry was going through a very deep process of learning to recognize and evaluate the nature of good and evil. This was only to be expected in what had been positioned as a of coming-of-age quest adventure.

And we expected him to ultimately learn to distinguish and separate these fundamental concepts from the manner in which individual people might treat *him*. Frankly, he didn't appear to be doing very well at that part of the process. And ultimately this did not matter, since the story turned out not to be about

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any question of good vs. evil after all.

But for quite a long time Harry appeared to be dealing specifically with the face of evil as it presents itself in the modern day. Rowling never found it necessary to modify the image she shows us to the point of acknowledging the fact that the *face*, even if not the *nature*, of evil *does* change over time.

Such considerations turned out to be irrelevant.

Nevertheless, the perception of evil changes at least as much as anything else in human civilization does. Consequently, we have been denied the luxury of having any sort of historical context in which to evaluate the actions of the historical figures in the Potterverse. Any of them.



Given that we had been told nothing regarding the existence of a wizarding royalty (and it was confirmed in HBP that there is none, and probably never had been), taken together with the fact that to that point in the series, every subject of every one of Rowling's titles throughout the books in the series — apart from that of "Lord" Voldemort — had been absolutely literal on at least some level, this suggested that if the 6th book concerned an honest-to-ghod half-blood Prince, either this gentleman was a foreigner, or he was a character tucked away somewhere in History.

Instead, Rowling took a sidestep on us. The Half-Blood Prince was a nickname. An ironic one, at that.

Until Book 6, all of Rowling's book titles had been literal and meant exactly what they said. Even if the subject of the title might not be central to the action. Consequently, "Half-Blood

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Prince" was a considerable departure from the pattern established. And, in fact, prior to HBP she had given us *some* precedents for "titled" even if not "royal" wizards.

The Gryffindor House Ghost is "Sir" Nicholas de Mimsy-Porpington, which is a *title*, even if only that of Knight. The Slytherin House ghost goes him one better, being commonly referred to as the Bloody "Baron." For that matter, the Peverill Ring which was passed down through the Gaunt line was engraved with what Marvolo Gaunt claimed was a "coat-of-arms" (although it turned out to be nothing of the sort), misidentifying the Peverills as armigerous, even if not titled. The Black family also has a coat-of-arms prominently on display in their Head of the family's former home. As may the Malfoys, and possibly some other pre-Seclusion wizarding families.

Which draws a lot of inconvenient attention to the consistent weaknesses of Rowling's handling of History. We do not know anything of the truth of the History of the Potterverse. Only the "authorized version" as distorted by Bathilda Bagshot, which, even from the few glimpses we've gotten in the text appears to have been drastically edited. This pervading ignorance seems to be shared by every one of the series characters, with the possible exception of the Sorting Hat. Apparently, it isn't just the Potterverse Muggles who have had their own history rewritten at the discretion/direction of the Ministry of Magic.



For example; we do not know any of the truth about the oh-so "heroic" Godric Gryffindor. He could well turn out to

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have been about as heroic as the 15-year-old James Potter. Conversely, he could have exuded a greatness even more obvious than that of Albus Dumbledore. We flatly do not know. And it is beginning to look like we are not ever likely to find out. Rowling seems completely uninterested in any event prior to about 1920. (ETA: modify that to 1899.)

We also don't know much of the background or character of the clever Rowena Ravenclaw, or of the doughty Helga Hufflepuff.

Nor, for that matter, the cunning Salazar Slytherin.

Other than that he had allegedly come to Hogwarts via the fens.

Beginning in May of 2007, however, each of the four founders of Hogwarts was featured as Wizard of the Month on Rowling's first official website. Not that this added a great deal of information to our store of knowledge on them. But it did at least add a little.

Helga was evidently renowned for her food-related Charms, and many of the recipes still served at Hogwarts Feasts were of her devising. Madam Hepzibah Smith in the mid-20th century, claimed to be one of her descendants.

Rowena evidently was regarded as the most brilliant witch of her time, and died young (well, in her 40s). Of a broken heart, it is believed. This is gone into with marginally more detail in the course of DHs. She did produce one daughter who was murdered at a comparatively early age. It is uncertain whether she predeceased her mother. It is unknown whether Rowena left any other descendants.

Godric Gryffindor is reported to have been an accomplished duelist, and ultimately fought against Muggle discrimination.



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(ETA: Post-DHs it turns out that he was an insensitive sort who, for all that he was willing to enroll human Muggle-borns in his school had no respect for the traditional views on property ownership of Goblins.) Everything else we already knew.

Salazar Slytherin turns out to have been, in addition to a Parselmouth, an accomplished Legilimens.

From all of which it is possible to propose that in the Founders' day, Helga may have been the Charms Mistress, and Gryffindor the teacher of what in those days was the equivalent of DADA. It is uncertain, from what we have to be able to speculate what studies were taught by Rowena and Salazar. At a guess, one taught Potions and the other Transfiguration. But it is just as likely that in those days none of the teachers specialized in only one subject.

We have been told more than once that Salazar Slytherin, an ambitious pureblood wizard, had wanted to bar Muggle-born students from attending Hogwarts. We were told originally that the other three Founders having overruled him on this issue was the primary reason for his breaking with them and leaving the school.

Later we were told that, in fact, the whole school had been locked in a violent power struggle incited by "deadly exterior foes" and that Slytherin's breaking away from the conflict and leaving the school broke the stalemate. That these two accounts are in fairly complete disagreement with one another has never been openly acknowledged by Rowling.

I would be more inclined to accept the Sorting Hat's version of the matter than Professor Binns's, however. The Hat at least was there at the time.



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Over the course of the series we have been deliberately led to assume that Slytherin was motivated in his objections to Muggle-born students by the same sort of blind, unthinking, unsupported prejudice displayed in the modern era by Lucius Malfoy and his ilk. But is it true?

(“Assume” after all, makes an ass of both “u” and “me”.)

While this conclusion is far from impossible, I find it somewhat difficult to swallow whole. Even if my reading of the distinction between the natures of Dark and Light (i.e., domesticated) magic is completely out in left field, I am too well aware that conditions and prevailing social viewpoints change over a thousand years to be able to accept such a simplistic summation of such events.

This is, imho, the very worst sort of “history” and a perversion of the truth. Rowling’s presentation of the wizarding world’s treatment of the subject of History throughout the entire series has been dismissive, disrespectful and just plain BAD. Effectively this is robbing the dead. I speculated for years that she might turn out to have had a reason to do this, which would ultimately be made known to us. But it was no such thing.

And, while we are on the subject of perversions of the truth; what little we were shown of the “great historian” Bathilda Bagshot’s ‘HISTORY OF MAGIC’ — which is established as the official authorized version which is taught at Hogwarts — appears to be nothing less than exactly that.

Without any sort of a recognizable historical context, it is impossible for us to know just why Slytherin was so opposed

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to the admission of Muggle-born students. Yes, he could certainly have just been a spiteful old bigot. He could have just as easily been paranoid in the style of Mad-Eye Moody who viewed Muggles in mobs as such a serious threat to wizarding safety that they must be given no clue of the school existence. He could have been any of a half-a-dozen other things. What we have actually been *told* is that he did not *trust* Muggle-born wizards, but not that he necessarily hated, despised, or held them in contempt. We also have no information whatsoever regarding his opinions concerning actual Muggles. But is easy to conclude that the last thing that he seemed to believe is that wizards had any business trying to *rule* them.

Taken as a whole, Slytherin appears to have virtually defined the wizarding isolationist mindset, but there is no indication that he would have supported any notion of wizarding supremacy in its modern iteration.

We have also been told that as time went by he became more, rather than less, determinedly opposed the admission of Muggle-borns to the school, and that when he was overruled by the bold (and possibly rash) Godric Gryffindor, and the other two Founders backed Gryffindor up, he refused to work with them any longer and stormed off. (In a high-perch dudgeon.)

Leaving behind a secret chamber in which there was a Basilisk.



In any event, we have very little — apart from people’s unsupported speculations — to go on when we try to examine the rather slippery question of just what this particular one of Hogwarts’s four Founders was really like. The very shallow-

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ness and internal contradictions of Rowling's presentation of this figure to date constitutes a positive invitation to Slytherin apologists.

Well, as I have stated elsewhere, on more than one occasion, the Harry Potter fandom has no shortage of Slytherin apologists.

My own feeling is that we might do best to give a bit less weight to the fact that Slytherin eventually split with the other three Founders and a bit more to the fact that he had joined in with them on a project of such a magnitude in the first place. For I seriously doubt that either Gryffindor or Slytherin would have ever chosen to be partners in such a monumental endeavor if they had started out so thoroughly at odds over a matter that was so basic to its purpose. It must have been obvious going into the Project that they were all four engaged upon what would probably turn out to be their life's work.

Even the Sorting Hat was finally forced to remind everyone that Godric and Salazar had originally been the best of friends. And that Slytherin's leaving the school was felt to be a definite loss, rather than a "good riddance."

We also do not know how long the school had been in operation when Slytherin left it. Ten years? Twenty? Fifty? For that matter where are the relevant *dates* of *anything* to do with this matter — which is still a sore point nearly a millennia later? Wizards are presumably literate. And people *did* keep records back in those days, you know.

Evidently the records have been lost.

Unless they have been deliberately suppressed.

Given the caliber of the rest of the teaching of History at Hogwarts *now*, that would not surprise me in the least.



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Nevertheless we were handed a second possibility when, in Book 5, the Sorting Hat sings that it was *outside* pressures which had finally brought matters to a head. What on earth was going on outside the school which finally sent Slytherin into a such a tailspin over admitting Muggle-born children to it? Widespread "witch-hunting" did not develop until the Reformation, remember? A cool 500-600 years later. (Unless the whole claim that Hogwarts has been around for about 1000 years is just so much gammon and spinach.)

And was this a conflict from outside the School, or from outside the *castle*?

In fact, given that Slytherin reportedly had worked contentedly enough with his three partners for years before his ultimate falling out with Gryffindor, the very thinness of the official explanation leads me (and many others) to suspect that there must have been some other factors at work in the matter.

For example; doesn't it seem likely that there must have been some specific *incident* — either one of local experience or one of far-traveled rumor — that caused Slytherin to start seeing his colleagues' Muggle-born students as a potential threat?

And, given that there is a distinct strain of Dark Arts-tolerant thinking running through Slytherin House to this day, we cannot overlook the possibility that whatever this incident might have been, it may have been something that would not have suggested such an interpretation to a wizard who was not already at risk of developing the sort of skewed perceptions related to some form of Dark Arts-related dementia.



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And unquestionably Slytherin was. In fact, we have been positively *invited* to simply write Salazar Slytherin off as “a Dark wizard,” as though that was all there is to be said about him. (Which; given that we now know that he and Gryffindor were friends for years, raises some questions regarding Godric, as well. And about Rowena and Helga, for that matter.)

As I have stated in the article on a history of Magic; if we can take former Professor Snape’s description of the nature of the Dark Arts at face value (“...many, varied, ever-changing, eternal.” “...unfixed, mutating indestructible.”) then getting in too deep sounds like a positive recipe for developing some form of delusional thinking.

I am convinced that Slytherin may have been among those who had adopted the school of thought that one could judiciously combine both Dark and Light magic without ultimately coming to grief. For that matter, a wizard probably can use the occasional Dark spell without putting himself at any serious risk. I propose that it is the prolonged exposure to the insidious distortions of perception, and the delusions which the chaotic forces which underpin the Dark Arts generate and deploy in response to any attempt to control them — particularly by way of the direct channeling methods utilized in this now generally obsolete style of directing magic — which leads one astray.

But the damage seems to be cumulative, and it may be irreversible (it was certainly irreversible in Slytherin’s day) and some people are more subject to such damage than others. The only sure way to avoid drifting into some form of the dementia which results from this kind of damage is to recognize when you are being harmed by such processes and to avoid further



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exposure to them.

Unfortunately not every wizard is sufficiently self-aware to recognize when he has entered the danger zone and has become increasingly at risk. It is not unreasonable to suggest that Salazar Slytherin’s involvement in the Dark Arts had already blunted his capacity for empathy and had also begun to affect his perception of the world around him. Nor that one of the primary symptoms of his descent into some form of dementia may have been *exactly* this growing suspicion of, and opposition to the presence of Muggle-born students in the school.

If this is the case, (and this is by no means certain) his partners must have realized what was happening. Such descents were no longer so common as in the days that all magic was Dark magic, but they were still common enough. The other Founders must have tried to help him. But it is likely that their efforts were either rebuffed or were unavailing. At length they must have realized that he was beyond their help and represented a danger to the school and everyone in it. I do not know whether it is most likely that they forced him out, permitted or encouraged him to leave, or, however regretfully, took the necessary steps to “restrain” him. But if there had ever been any mention made of any particularly ancient tree in the Forbidden forest, I would have been regarding it with grave suspicion.

There is also the possibility that the Slytherin bloodline already had a touch of the strain of violence and instability which so characterized his last direct descendants. But in the Gaunts, the tendency had been strengthened immeasurably by generations of inbreeding. This tendency might also have been contributed not from Slytherin, but from the Peverill line into



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which a Slytherin descendant must have at some point married. Or some other introduced bloodline to the mix. There is no certainty that, even if it was present, it was anywhere so pronounced in Slytherin himself. But if it was present, it wouldn't have been at all helpful once he started fixating on the "mudblood threat" to the point that there was no reasoning with him.



It also blew past us in year 5 that, according to the Hat, the problem wasn't *just* Slytherin. *All four* Founders were engaged in a nasty power struggle related to the school.

Or possibly, the castle. I still contend that until comparatively recently there was more going on in that castle than just Hogwarts school.

And when the going got really rough, Slytherin skipped out. Had enough, bye-bye! A plague on all your Houses! Frankly, that sounds a lot more like Horace Slughorn ("that pestilential school") than it sounds like Tom Riddle.

Of course, Slytherin could have merely stomped off to the other end of Europe and founded his own school where Muggle-borns would not be welcome. We are reminded that Durmstrang Academy does not admit Muggle-born students, you know. Openly still teaches the Dark Arts, too.

Or — and this is a more recent speculation, but one which rather amuses me — he could have dug himself a bat cave under London and founded a subterranean research center which later morphed into the Ministry's current Department of Mysteries.



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Later to be added to by three brothers from a family named Peverill. Who succeeded him.



Which brings us back around to the pesky consideration that whatever the circumstances were of Salazar's leaving, he didn't take all of his property with him. There is the not-so-minor, 30–60-foot question of a Basilisk to be considered here.

Which rather calls for an additional side note on that Basilisk and the Chamber of Secrets. Some of this may have been mentioned in other articles, but it really does merit collecting and restating here.

Rowling's "history" is total bollocks. She really wasn't creating a proper fantasy world; fantasy worlds each have their own history. Rowling probably thought she was writing a fairy tale. There is no historical context to a fairy tale. In fairy tales, all times are one.

Consequently, you have to do a major bit of retrofitting in order to simulate any kind of an historically plausible method of getting that Basilisk into that bathroom.

Hogwarts castle is approximately 1000 years old. Castles, like any other human habitation are continually being modified by their residents. And the longer there are residents the more modification is made. Hogwarts Castle has been continually in use for nearly 1000 years. If we are trying to overlay any kind of plausible history onto its construction, it is not difficult. That castle is described as one hell of an elaborate and complex bit of architecture. And that kind of complexity does not date from year 1. The original Hogwarts Castle probably consisted



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of no more than what is now the central block. The original Hogwarts by now is surrounded and encased in numerous later additions and modifications.

Even just 300 years ago when wizards split off from general society the population of England was no more than about a 10th of what it is now. The wizarding population would have been correspondingly smaller too. 1000 years ago when the school was founded the school probably consisted of only 3-4 dozen students, and four teachers. The Castle — whatever the other purposes it may have served for the wizarding community in addition, at that time, or over the years — has grown as the wizarding world has. And since occupants have virtually all been magical, far more modifications have probably been inflicted upon it than would have been made in a similar structure occupied by Muggles

For example; the current dormitory towers are probably a recent addition from maybe the 15th–18th century (decent arguments could be made for any point between those dates). Consequently the original school had its dormitories in the central block, which is now exclusively given over to classrooms and offices. The Founders and the early staff were also originally housed in the central block. As were the people who were in charge of whatever other functions the castle may have served to the community as a whole.

The bathrooms throughout the Castle have been modified and upgraded any number of times, and that particular loo, being in the central block, may have originally been a part of a private suite of rooms rather than serving as a “public” loo. It may have originally been in Salazar’s own living quarters.



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The room itself has been enlarged since those days. The tap that doesn’t work probably replaced an earlier tap that didn’t work, etc., that was simply plopped on top of the original shaft, which had always been activated by Parseltongue. The snake scratched on the current tap was probably added by Tom Riddle himself. Not because he needed it, but because he wanted to “leave a mark.”



As to the Basilisk itself; Rowling clearly doesn’t seem to know squat about snakes. Or maybe she just doesn’t care.

She shows us a boa constrictor (natural, not magical) winking, when snakes have no eyelids, she has Nagini acting like a devoted pet, whereas snakes have scarcely the brains to register human presence at all. Snakes are part of nature’s clean-up crew. They don’t need brains. Their whole purpose in life is to eat anything that they can catch and swallow, and keep the vermin population down. In reptiles pretty well everything is hard-wired in. They operate on instinct, not considered thought. Go to a zoo one day and visit the reptile house. Some of those snakes have been in those enclosures for years, yet they show no awareness of anything outside the glass. (There will be exceptions. There was a python in San Diego who seemed *very* aware of his visitors. I suspect that the poor thing was somebody’s pet and accustomed to being handled, and was given to the zoo when he got too big to be handled safely.)

Nor are snakes’ teeth designed to tear bites off of anything or to chew before swallowing. Snakes have teeth that are designed to hold onto things (or to inject poison into them).



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Snakes don't rip the meat from the bones (regardless of what she has the Basilisk muttering about in the pipes, and that is bollocks, too). Snakes do not tear their prey at all. They grab it, swallow their prey whole, and digest it, bones and all.

In other words; there would have been no rat bones lying about at that level of the chamber if the Basilisk had slithering about eating all the rats. Rowling just stuck a lot of bones there to make everything seem more scary.

If the Basilisk had the freedom of that level of the Castle, there might have been ossified snake droppings, lying about, but there would have been no bones. Admittedly, we were never actually *told* that the Basilisk has been eating rats for 1000 years, we saw the bones and were expected to draw our own conclusions. The obvious conclusion which most readers have been invited to draw is a conclusion that does not make any kind of zoological sense.

The best retrofit that I can think of is that since Riddle had to call the Basilisk into the Chamber, and it entered from a hidden passage through a statue which did not open until it was addressed in Parseltongue, the Basilisk did not actually live in the Chamber at all, and that from its own lair it had access to the lake and has spent the past millennium feeding on the lake fauna. Snakes can hold their breath under water for an amazing length of time. It is probably only thanks to the merpeople's vigilance that it never got past them to the surface. (Hm. Maybe that is the real function of that giant squid. Salazar left it to keep the Basilisk from getting out into the grounds and raising havoc.) And the Basilisk's fatal glance may very well not work through the distortions, or the density, of water.



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One point which only a few people seem to have brought up so far is the fact that a Basilisk is a magical creature which can be created artificially. (And in Rowling's interpretation appears to be practically immortal until killed.) Slytherin did not merely discover his monster. He created that Basilisk. We do not know when and we do not know why.

We could come up with any number of possible, if contradictory, scripts, however. For example:

- 1 He was in the process of creating a Basilisk in connection with some unspecified project. Possibly even with the intent of immediately killing and harvesting it for specific body parts, or milking it for its venom. The Basilisk hadn't hatched yet when he was "forced out." The other Founders were unaware of its existence and it was an internal Slytherin family story that claimed that it was left behind for his heir. In a thousand years of telling, the story mutated and details like the reason for its creation and the location of the Chamber were lost.

Otoh, harvesting it for body parts doesn't play altogether well, since he had evidently arranged that inner lair for its comfort. But maybe he had set the lair up for it first and left it to hatch there. Keeping it on hand as a source of Basilisk venom plays well enough though.

- 2 As the hostilities in the school escalated, he decided to create a Basilisk — a monster which, as a Parselmouth, he knew he could control — to use against the other Founders and thereafter run the school as he saw fit.



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He was forced out before it hatched. The other Founders' ignorance of it and the family story play out as above.

This version does have the virtue of reflecting the general modern beliefs regarding the aims and intentions of Salazar Slytherin. But there is no conclusive proof that these alleged beliefs were ever altogether accurate.

- 3 He had already created the Basilisk, either for an unspecified future project or simply because he could.

[Note: Rowling has already given us ample evidence to support the view that wizards can have really eccentric notions of just what constitutes appropriate behavior. It should also be pointed out that the Gaunt bloodline was afflicted by a pernicious lack of common sense, which ultimately ruined them financially. They could have got that from Slytherin.]

Or, not impossibly, he created a Basilisk and kept it more or less as a pet. When the rift occurred he was stumped as to just what he was to do with it.

A Basilisk is not a kneezle. You can't just casually take it traveling about with you across Europe. Since he couldn't take it with him, and the inner lair and lake were reasonably secure — the squid and the Merrows could keep it under control — he just left it there. He may have anticipated that one of his descendants would someday find it. But if not, there was no real harm done. Family story as above.



As to where the "legend" came from; The statue in the Chamber which is assumed to represent Salazar Slytherin is described to us as looking "ancient" and "monkey-like." Con-

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sequently, *if* Salazar is also responsible for the statue, we can probably conclude that by the time of the rift, Slytherin was already an old man. His own children were probably grown by that time. And while they had no doubt been told to regard Muggle-born wizards with suspicion, they also probably recognized that Dad had gone a bit dotty on the subject.

And possibly on more than one subject. They may have dismissed the story of his Basilisk as the ramblings of old age or a Dark Arts-induced fantasy.

Some time afterwards, probably during the equivalent of a "spooky story campfire night" somebody could have popped up with "My great-great-grandad said that there was a monster in a *seeeecret* chamber hidden somewhere in the school!" and the tale spun out from there.

In any event; what we cannot depend upon is any interpretation of the events as they have been given to us by the former Tom Riddle, or the Death Eaters.

Tom Riddle — who we've all seen is probably as mad as a whole convention of hatters — may be perfectly happy to reason backwards in order to "prove" that everything HE claims to consider important must have been what Slytherin considered important because he is Slytherin's *heir*, but I am a good deal less than totally convinced by that particular line of reasoning. Tom and Salazar are not the same person. Not even close.

For one thing, Salazar, at least originally, actually had *friends*.

[Note: even Riddle's anagrams are biased. How the hell likely is it that his legal name is actually "Tom" rather than

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“Thomas”? Huh? Especially if he was named after a Muggle father. Or that the orphanage didn’t formalize the name into its conventional form on the official papers. Orphanages *do* that kind of thing.]

But, so long as we are speaking of the “Heir” of Slytherin; does it occur to anyone else that by this time, through all of these cumulative exchanges of blood, power, very specific magical gifts, and even taking into account some of his own underlying personal qualities (and, ghod help us, the Peverill connection), Harry Potter has enough marks on the checklist to make at least a viable claim to be considered *one* of Slytherin’s heirs as well?

And given that the Trelawney prophesy, like just about every other prophesy which has ever shown up in literature, seems to be based on the “Mirror, mirror on the wall” principle, it is looking as though it is just too, too terribly in accordance with tradition that since every action Voldemort has taken to evade his fate of destruction at the hand of Harry Potter has contributed instead to bringing it to fulfillment. Such actions might have gone a long way toward providing Salazar with another, more “worthy” heir, who will supplant him.



And, for that matter, once she played that particular card to produce her big scary set-piece for the climax of Book 2. Rowling gave us all precious little reason to be giving much further credence to the whole “Heir of Slytherin” motif at all. By this time it’s looking as though Tom Riddle was descended from Salazar Slytherin for no other reason than to provide some jus-



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tification for that big scary “use once” set-piece.

Much in the way that Ron Weasley was built up to be good at chess only because Rowling was in love with the idea of the giant live chess game in Book 1. Once the card had been played, *that* never went anywhere, either.



Even before DHs came out I was suspecting that even that much was to give far too much credit to Riddle’s delusions. Rowling has always been very good at fending off any kind of inquiry related to the “heirs” of any of the other Founders. And I had come to suspect that it was with good reason.

In fact, I’d come to the conclusion that the whole Blah-Blah about the Founders was a gasping, flopping red herring. Just as with the bloody Prophecy, the Founders were only tangentially important to the story because they were important to Tom Riddle.

Being descended from Salazar Slytherin mattered *tremendously* to Tom Riddle. Once upon a time, at least. But when you come right down to it, the man was no more than one powerful wizard, and a reasonably famous schoolmaster.

Yes, he and his associates founded a school, and the school itself is still operating nearly 1000 years later. Bully for them. That’s because there is a continuing *need* for that school, not because of anything those *specific* founders did to ensure it. They saw a growing need and met it. Good for them. If someone else had done so, *their* school would probably be the preeminent school for British wizards.

But they weren’t the four kings and queens at Cair Para-



Salazar Slytherin

vel. I finally decided that the whole build-up that we'd been given in CoS regarding the "Heir of Slytherin" was just buying into Tom's delusions of grandeur. Otherwise you would have expected Rowling to have *done* something with it by then. And she hadn't. She really hadn't.

Mind you, I suspected the Founders would probably get referred to again in Book 7, even if only to debunk the theme of the Heirs, much the way that the significance of the Prophecy was devalued by Albus in HBP. But I could no longer convince myself that they were central to anything. They had merely served as a useful distraction to string us all along with for six books into the series and keep the readers from cottoning onto whatever Rowling WAS up to. I suspected that anyone who was still waiting around for the "Heir of Gryffindor" to show up and solve the problem for us was living in a fool's paradise.

The Founders simply do not have the answer to the problem. The problem is one deranged wizard who has been allowed to cast his shadow over two whole generations, and who seriously *needs* to be *stopped*. It was an outside possibility that some further information about the Founders might reveal a weakness in the enemy, but even that was a pretty faint possibility (ETA: a variant of that actually did turn out to be the case. Woo-hoo!)

And the "opposite" of the Heir of Slytherin wouldn't be the Heir of Gryffindor anyway. It would be something a lot more on the order of the (Muggle-born!) miller's third son who was left with only a cat.

And, post-DHs, it is clear that the standard fan "Heir" theories were all speculations that ended up going nowhere. The Founders turn out to be all but irrelevant to anything but the



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providing of bases for some of Tom's Horcruxes. And that was only because Tom had fixated on them.



In any case, I lived in hope that we might finally get a somewhat more balanced view of the history issue before the end of the series. Although I wasn't holding my breath. Fortunately, as it turned out. If anything, the whole situation only got *worse*.

But the times had certainly been right for it. In fact, if anything, they were badly overdue.

Rather more to the point; Harry and his contemporaries had finally reached an age to at least begin to be ready to entertain a more balanced and rational view of their own history.

To that point in the story (i.e., just before the opening of DHs), Harry had taken the — rather simplistic — views first introduced to him by Hagrid and a pre-adolescent Ron Weasley and simply adopted them wholesale.

Nor is Harry the only one. To that point in the story just about ALL of the kids in ALL of the Houses had been operating on autopilot, never questioning the tenets of their early "programming." And by this time it is clear that this was doing nobody any identifiable good. If the theme of this series is choices, then nobody in the school seems to have made *any* kind of a choice yet.

But Harry and his classmates were closing on 17–18 years old by now and some of them really ought to have started questioning such assumptions.

Harry in particular cannot have missed seeing that the adults around him are neither perfect, nor automatically right. Not even the ones who claim to be on his side. Not even the ones



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whose good intentions are beyond question.

It really wasn't too much to hope that he might have finally reached the point where he can begin to recognize that if his own side is not beyond criticism, the other side may not be totally evil. That *all* Slytherins are not his enemies. Or even that there are some people who really *are* caught in the middle with no easy way out, and that it isn't their *fault*.

Or, even that there *really* is more than one side to the problem.

He certainly got a hint of this in HBP, and he understood enough of what he was shown to begin to have a bit of pity for Malfoy's position in this conflict. Even though he still hates Malfoy's guts.

I thought we were going to need to see a lot more of this sort of thing before there could be any sort of a satisfactory conclusion to this series, and we were getting a bit too close to that end to still be confident that such a development was forthcoming.

And in the end, it wasn't. And from where I am standing, a satisfactory conclusion to this series is still MIA.

It should also be obvious to us from the excerpts that we've seen from Bagshott's A HISTORY OF MAGIC — going all the way back to Year 1 — that every one of these kids has been being deliberately fed a steady diet of lies where it comes to the history of their own society. And that the myths of Glorious Godric vs. Sinister Salazar aren't even the half of it.

And, y'know, kids really hate to discover that they've been lied to.

And, perhaps, concerning the monumental collection of Muggle-dismissive twaddle that passes for history according to Bagshott, that it may be long past time to reflect that Bathilda Bagshot's own family produced one of the most notorious wizarding supremacists in history.



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There is sufficient oddity connected to the extended family of the Blacks that it seems worthwhile to set an essay aside to try to collect most of those oddities into one place. Not that they don't spill out into several of the other pieces in the collection as well.

And, for that matter, I suppose that I ought to give an advance warning that the whole exercise of trying to make the Tapestry information make sense, is inherently futile.

Yes, this whole exploration started off based upon the Black Family Tapestry Sketch. I am given to understand that Rowling has changed her mind again regarding the ancestry and lineage of the Noble House of Black. From what I've been told, the material on Pottermore has little to do with the original sketch that I used.

And, I rather suspect that as is usual with Rowling, neither source will altogether line up with what she actually told us in the books.



In all fair warning, this essay is *really* long. And “graphically enhanced.” You'd best settle in for a longish read. And be prepared to chill. Indeed, this is largely composed of multiple explorations of “what if”

Admittedly, from where we were standing at the point the Black Family tapestry sketch first made its appearance, the illusion of clarification on certain matters was extremely welcome. And at that point, we also weren't much inclined to seriously question what Rowling (or Sirius) had to say on the matter up through OotP. We've learned better since then.

Unfortunately, that trusting relationship with the author's statements started breaking down around that point. In Feb-



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ruary of 2006, JK Rowling took part in a charity auction for a group by the name of Book Aid. As her contribution for this event she donated a sketch which purported to be a portion of the Black family's genealogical tapestry. As you might expect there was a great deal of interest in this item generated across the fandom. Partial shots of the page were published in a couple of magazines. In one the page was artfully masked by other items, in the other it was carefully greyed out except for a section along one side. These partial views were tantalizing.

And illuminating.

And as frustrating as all get-out.

Which, rather circuitously, brings us to:

A funny thing happened on the road to enlightenment. We seem to have hit a number of potholes concerning the reliability of any information which we had ever been given by Sirius Black.

We already knew that his judgment of character was faulty.

But we were provisionally willing to believe that his grasp of actual *facts* was still to be accepted. However, post-DHs it is clear that he was a bit of a fantasist. And he typically managed to convince other people that his "likely stories" were true.

Some of his "facts" were that; he was the elder of two brothers, and that he and his younger brother had three female cousins. All slightly older than they. This much, at least, has proven to be truthful.

We were further led to believe that his parents were both still alive when he was sentenced to Azkaban. And that they allegedly died some "ten years ago" from the vantage point of the summer of '95. After their deaths, the last of family's House Elves was left alone in the otherwise empty house.



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It has now turned out that his mother had, indeed, died some 10 years earlier, *act*o the tapestry, but Sirius Black's father Orion had died in 1979. As had Sirius's younger brother, Regulus, anything up to a full two years before Sirius was bundled off to Azkaban. What is more, their grandfather, and head of the family was still alive at that time, and outlived both of Sirius's parents, only dying the year that Harry Potter started Hogwarts. Clearly what Sirius implied in OotP about his family history is no longer to be blindly accepted at face value.

He also claimed that his brother was murdered by DEs, and that was not the case at all, either. For that matter, if we take Harry Potter's reading of it, according to that tapestry Regulus had died in 1980, not 1979.



From our first look at the publicly revealed entire tapestry sketch, with the 1979 death date for Regulus, we did not know for certain whether or not Regulus had survived their father. But we at first assumed that he had most probably not, from Sirius's comment that their father had put every knut he could spare into security spells upon the house. Presumably we were left to conclude that this was due to the belated discovery that the Dark Lord was quite as willing to prey upon purebloods as anyone else, and that being a Black was absolutely no protection.

From what we knew at that point, such a discovery didn't *seem* likely to have been made prior to Regulus's death. But we may have been a bit quick to dismiss the possibility.

We were also told that all of the Black family had traditionally been sorted into Slytherin (yes, including Sirius's favorite



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cousin Andromeda), and he states with conviction that his own parents had not been Death Eaters, although they were in sympathy with the kind of sentiments Lord Voldemort had always been reported to stand for. In which case, one has to ask, why *weren't* they Death Eaters? Riddle seemed determined to “collect” the scions of every prominent pureblood wizarding family that he could, and turn them all into his own minions. The Blacks would have been a considerable plum, and Tom was *very* persuasive.

Well, once again the LiveJournalist known as Professor_Mum has provided me with a launching pad to spin theories off from. In the summer of 2006 the two of us and four other online theorists collaborated on a collection of essays concerning what had been going on behind the scenes in ‘HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE’. As her contribution, she had extended and revised her Black Family history theories as they relate to the manner in which the various connections of the Black family seem to have intersected with the ambitions of the former Tom Riddle, usually with unfortunate effect for all parties.

As is usually the case, I spun off from Professor-Mum’s original premise in a slightly different direction.

My own original supposition was that neither of Sirius Black’s parents were of an age to have been thrown into proximity with young Tom Riddle, and so had escaped largely by the good fortune of never having met him at a vulnerable age. But this supposition was thrown into disarray by the Black family tapestry sketch which solidly places both Orion and Walburga Black at Hogwarts during the Riddle era, although Walburga is some

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2 years ahead of Tom, and Orion would be a couple of years after him. At present we have no obvious explanation for their ability to hold out against his influence. Unless their resistance was due to pure snobbishness based upon what they remember of his poverty and Muggle upbringing. Which is always a possibility among such a narrow-minded lot of hardliners as the Blacks have been depicted.

However, the tapestry sketch also raises the rather intriguing question regarding the dog who did *not* bark in the parlor.

Or, to put bluntly: why did Sirius Black not tell us that his own parents were never the heads of the family at all? Orion Black died in 1979. Walburga in 1985. Orion’s father, Arcturus Black outlived both of them, to die in 1991, the year that Harry Potter started Hogwarts.



It isn’t that Sirius doesn’t mention Arcturus at all. He contemptuously discards his grandfather’s Order of Merlin, First Class, with the sneering comment that the honor just means that that worthy gentleman had effectively bought it by giving the Ministry a great deal of gold. We do not know for certain that this was Grandfather Arcturus, rather than Grandfather Pollux, his mother’s father, but one assumes that Pollux’s awards, if any, would not be in this particular house. His artifacts would have passed into the keeping of his own sons and their children.

And it really is difficult to accept that Grandfather Arcturus was not a member of the household at #12 Grimmauld Place, for it is obvious that — if only due to the presence of the Family

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tapestry — that the house is the “official residence” of the Head of the Black Family, which Arcturus quite clearly was.

And yet Sirius Black says nothing of any of this. Until the tapestry sketch was made public, in February 2006 we hadn’t a hint.

Well, it belatedly occurred to me that although Arcturus was the Head of the family, and #12 had almost certainly been the house in which he raised his own children, if his wife, Melania, had already passed on, Arcturus might not have chosen to continue to live with his son — and his son’s shrieking wife and their squalling infants.

He might choose to live with his (apparently childless) daughter, Lucretia, instead.

Indeed, it is not impossible that Lucretia might have been widowed by that point as well. Her husband was one of the Prewett family. We do not know whether it was only the brothers Gideon and Fabian who were targeted by DEs, or if her husband Ignatius might have been as well. Or, Ignatius may simply have gotten along very well with his father-in-law.

But this still requires a blatant case of fan-wanking to make it fit.

We’ve other problems with the tapestry, however: ones which even more blatantly contradict canon. In GoF Sirius had also claimed that, while still at Hogwarts, Severus Snape had been part of a “gang of Slytherins,” who had nearly all gone on to become Death Eaters. He listed among them “the Lestranges,” and identified them as a married couple, now in Azkaban. Interestingly, he did not name Lucius Malfoy as being a part of that group. (Nor his cousin Narcissa, nor his own younger brother Regulus, nor Barty Crouch Jr, etc. etc.)

It is possible that Black was not listing all the members of

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that particular group, but only that group’s members who had later turned out to be *convicted* as Death Eaters (although he *did* mention Avery, and did *not* mention Mulciber — who was convicted — unless that was Mulciber’s father). Snape may not be the only one of that “gang” who had never come under official suspicion and remained unmentioned.

And yet, Sirius absolutely did *not* include Malfoy — who had at least been *arrested* as a DE. Even if he did get off on an Imperius defense. As had Avery, who *was* mentioned.

Given the conflicting revelations sprung upon us since that statement was made, even the statement in itself now seems somewhat off-kilter.

For one thing, by the middle of OotP it was clear that everyone, *including* Sirius Black, knew as a matter of course that Severus Snape had been associated with Lucius Malfoy for yonks. So why *hadn’t* he mentioned Malfoy the previous year? Snape hung about with Malfoy, Malfoy was a Death Eater, even if he was acquitted like Avery, why *wasn’t* he on the list? (And why wasn’t Mulciber? I really do think Rowling was thinking of Evan Rosier in DHs, and misspoke.)

Well, given the general hostility between Lucius and Bellatrix, what now seems most likely is that Malfoy was *not* a part of that *particular* group of kids. By which I mean the group that included Bellatrix. Malfoy had his *own* group. His group was a rival to Bella’s. And that Snape and Malfoy may have connected at some point after Snape’s brief association with Bellatrix, and her circle.

Assuming that we can take Sirius Black at his word that Snape had hung around with the Lestranges at Hogwarts at

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all. What seems more and more likely to me, is that Sirius has conflated Snape's association with people who he knows to have become Death Eaters *after* Hogwarts into an association among these people while *at* Hogwarts. Even if they were *not* actually at Hogwarts at the same time. I do not think that it is only happy memories which Sirius Black may have managed to misplace over the previous dozen or so years.

And at that, thinking back to when they were all at school, it may not have occurred to Sirius Black to retroactively associate Malfoy with the "future DEs" because Malfoy's family was not "connected." Sirius Black has every reason to know that you can be the very worst sort of pureblood-obsessed twerp without being a Death Eater. And if Abraxus Malfoy was not a schoolmate of Tom Riddle's it is looking very much as if the Malfoys would NOT have been connected. Riddle will *use* members of the older generation, but he does not attempt to enlist them into his following. He goes after their children, instead.

And Sirius Black may not have learned (for sure) of Lucius's involvement with Lord Voldemort until after his own escape from Azkaban. Malfoy, after all, had not been sent to Azkaban.

Sirius does admit that much of the information he gave us in GoF was information he only pieced together after his escape. He was also inside within a day or two after Voldemort fell. He would have completely missed the whole DE trials period and Malfoy's Imperius defense. Only learning of it later. From those who *didn't* get off.

But nearly all of the timing of his statements now looked a tad screwy. And they were completely hosed by Rowling's endorsement of the 1960 birth date for the Marauder cohort.

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In fact, in view of that, the whole timeline requires a retrofit. Indeed, more than one.



The three Black sisters — Sirius Black's cousins — are identified as Bellatrix, Andromeda, and Narcissa. Early in HBP Bellatrix was stated as being the eldest of the sisters — although this hardly seems possible if she was indeed a part of any group whose Hogwarts days were shared by Severus Snape. Certainly if shared by a Snape who was born in 1960.

Another glaringly non-negotiable stumbling block regarding this issue, is that Andromeda's daughter, Nymphadora Tonks, by the internal evidence of statements actually made in the text, must be at least 22 years of age when we meet her in the summer of 1995, before Harry's 5th year.

We have Tonks's own statement that she had only qualified as an Auror the year earlier. (Right about the time her mentor/trainer Alastor Moody retired to go and teach at Hogwarts, to oblige his friend Dumbledore.) And, in the same book, from Minerva we later learn that Auror training takes three years.

We also learn from Minerva that the Aurors had accepted *no* new applicants for the past three years, meaning that Tonks was one of the last group of candidates to be accepted into the program and could have begun her training no more recently than four years earlier. In that case, if Tonks, like most students was either closing on, or just past, her 18th birthday when she finished Hogwarts, and started Auror training immediately after finishing at Hogwarts, she would have to be around 22 at the opening of OotP. Any flexibility we have within these con-

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straints might support her being older than 22. But not younger.

In order to have a 22-year-old daughter in the Summer of '95 (when we met Tonks), Andromeda Tonks, *née* Black, would at the very least have needed to have married Ted Tonks immediately after finishing Hogwarts, and had her daughter no more than a year later. Most students, as stated above, are right about 18 when they complete Hogwarts. $18 + 22 + 9 \text{ months} = 40 \text{ or } 41 \text{ years of age}$ in the Summer of 1995. Which no longer quite fits.

In short, she would need to be the at least the same age that Lucius Malfoy is stated as being in the PROPHET article that ran in September of '95. Or at any rate to have been in the same year as Malfoy. If not older. And yet she can't be, if Bellatrix is the eldest of the sisters and still at school when the Marauder cohort started. Yet Sirius claims that Bellatrix was still in school when Snape was there.

From these calculations, and accepting the 1959 birth date that I had been claiming for the Marauder's cohort for years, it appeared that Lucius Malfoy would have already been a 6th year student when Severus Snape started his 1st year at Hogwarts. So if Andromeda is indeed the middle sister, and in the same year as Lucius Malfoy, then Bellatrix can have been no younger than a 7th year when Snape arrived. Despite the rather large spanner that the Black Family tree (below) had just tossed into the works, this constraint still held. With a 1960 birthdate for Snape, it doesn't.

With this in mind however, what suddenly began to seem very likely is that Sirius's snide comment about Snape showing up as a 1st year, knowing more curses than half the 7th years,

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was, in fact, a slap at his own cousin Bellatrix. For she and her friends were a part of that particular crop of 7th years.

But; let's take a reality check here. Just how often are 11–12-year-olds really a part of gangs of 16–18-year-olds? Was Sirius really giving us the straight story here? Or is he confusing associations formed at Hogwarts with associations formed after Hogwarts? And Echo answers us nothing.



The easiest solution would be to simply dismiss pretty much anything Sirius Black had to say on the subject as unreliable. But in the absence of any other solid information to reason from, that leaves us all pretty much in the lurch. And by this time we've all invested a fair amount of effort into trying to make it all make sense.

Unfortunately, that cannot be done without editing pretty much all information from all sources, and dismissing a lot of it as unworkable when compared with what we were actually given in canon. And *then* making such adjustments as necessary to bring it into compliance with the published text. The resulting modifications might be unauthorized, but they are at least not unworkable.

So, in an attempt to resolve this question; given what we've seen of Bellatrix, does it sound likely that if a newly arrived, 11-year-old Snape (a "pushing, thrusting young man"?) who was sufficiently full of himself to boast about his homemade hexes she and her friends might have taken him up, and picked his brains? Even Snapes can be a bit naive at the age of 11.

Well, yes, it sort of does. *Maybe*.

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Particularly if she thought she could use it against him later. Bella really doesn't strike one as being the sort who limits her attacks to "fair targets."

And he, being all too willing to be taken up by such an influential crowd, and young enough to not know any better, might have been flattered into being very forthcoming. From all accounts, he *does* certainly seem to have been starved for *any* kind of favorable attention.

However, Bellatrix and her circle would have known perfectly well that there are no Snapes listed in 'NATURE'S NOBILITY'. And from Bellatrix's attitude toward Snape once we had a chance to observe both of them, I should think that if anyone in that circle took him up, it wasn't her.

It seems more likely that Bellatrix disdained the grubby little commoner from the get-go and may have found herself overruled. If so, she may have taken a deal of satisfaction in turning the tables on him.

But, if we are to accept Sirius's statement at all, he was probably regarded as a mascot more than as a member of that gang. Or as a trained monkey. And I suspect that once Bellatrix (who is the kind of user who gives nothing back) and her confederates thought they had gotten all that was of use from him, they would have dropped the little mongrel, probably with a few choice personal comments from Bella, leaving him smarting and resentful.

And the leaders of that particular group might have all been gone at the end of that year, anyway.

So is Sirius legitimately remembering that Snape had been taken up by that lot again after he finished school himself (if

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he even was, he seems more likely to have stuck with Malfoy's rival group). Or is Sirius simply being snotty about a Dark Arts-obsessed little squirt who didn't know enough not to let himself get taken advantage of by the likes of cousin Bellatrix and her crowd?

And again, Echo answers us nothing.

Lucius Malfoy, who at least has some idea of what qualities are worth cultivating over the long term, might have moved in on Snape after Bellatrix and company had finished with him. As noted above, Snape and Malfoy seem to have been have been widely known to be associated for years. And we get no impression of any love lost between Snape and Bellatrix in the chapter set in Spinner's End. Or between Bellatrix and Lucius, at any point in the series.

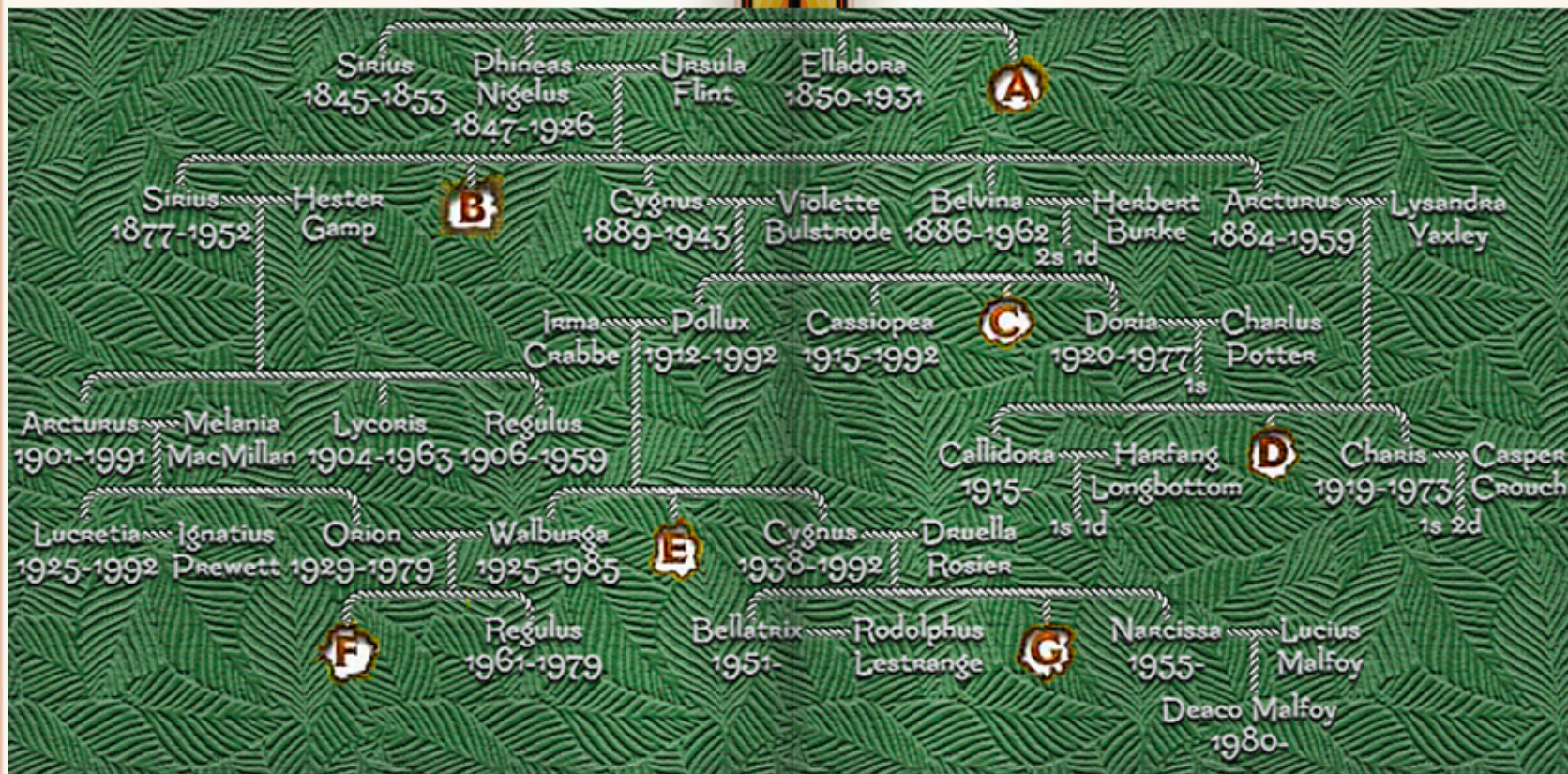
Well, on the day that the Book Aid auction items were made available for viewing prior to the event, as one might expect there were a number of people from fan sites who bought tickets for the viewing and took notes. These notes were posted on the web soon afterwards.

The following chart was adapted from one set of these notes and roughly reproduces the version of the sketch posted on the HP Lexicon at the end of February 2006 (The Lexicon's version was abruptly modified a year afterwards without explanation).

The seven blasted-off names, as per a report posted on the original HP Lexicon site refer to:

A. Isla Black — blasted off for marrying 'Muggle' Bob Hitchens. Since Ted Tonks, who we know from canon is a Muggle-born wizard, is also referred to as a Muggle, this implies that as late as the 1970s, the Black family did not distinguish between

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ordinary, non-magical Muggles and 'Muggles' who are able to channel magic. We don't know which sort Hitchens was.

B. Phineas (Jr) — blasted off for supporting Muggle rights.

C. Marius — a Squib.

D. Cedrella — blasted off for marrying blood-traitor Septimus Weasley. It should be noted that these are almost certainly Arthur Weasley's parents. Sirius states that he and Arthur are 2nd cousins once removed. (Sirius & Arcturus = brothers;

Sirius's son Arcturus & Arcturus's daughter Cedrella = first cousins; Arcturus's son Orion & Cedrella's son Arthur = 2nd cousins: Orion's son Sirius = 2nd cousin once removed.)

E. Alphard — blasted off posthumously for leaving money to disowned Sirius Black.

F. Sirius — blasted off for running away from home.

G. Andromeda — blasted off for marrying 'Muggle' Ted Tonks. Unfortunately we have rather a lot of problems with this

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chart. Some might turn out to be transcription errors which are not in the original, others however are almost certainly a clear case of Rowling accidentally writing down the wrong numbers. Or of just not giving a damn.

For example; I seriously doubt that Rowling intended to present us with two new fathers aged 13. In the first posted version we had a 3rd, aged 14. That one was corrected almost immediately afterwards, so was probably just a transcription error.

Original Example 1 (now dismissed): This one may have been my error, although I am not the only person to have noted it. It could have been one of those mistakes which are not noticed until the file is uploaded and posted, and then quickly corrected and replaced, although not before a few people have seen it. But, when I first saw the posted sketch, I was quite certain that it read: Arcturus Black (1901-1991) and his daughter Lucretia (1915-1992). Lucretia's birth year on the Lexicon's chart now clearly reads 1925. This throws us a curve, since it makes it very clear that Lucretia's brother, Orion Black was indeed at Hogwarts in Tom Riddle's day, two years younger than Tom, and of a perfect age to hero-worship him. And yet evidently he didn't continue to do so. Sirius Black made it quite clear that while his own parents were in perfect sympathy with what Voldemort claimed to stand for, they were not among his followers.

Example 2: Pollux Black (1912-1990) and his daughter Walburga (1925-1985)

Example 3: Cygnus Black (1938-1992) and his eldest daughter Bellatrix (1951-) It should be noted that the Lexicon has since replaced Cygnus's dates with those displayed in the film

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version of OotP. Which are 1929-1979, duplicating the dates of his cousin Orion. I do not know where the film designers got those dates. (From Orion's, evidently.) But you would think that if Rowling were correcting screwy dates, she would correct *all* of the screwy dates. But no one has.

Rumored transcription errors were that Walburga's birthdate is supposed to be 1935 rather than 1925, which would certainly resolve the problem of her father having been 13 when she was born, but would then render the portrait of Madam Black, described in canon as that of an *old* woman, into the portrait of a woman who died at the age of 50. Which does not qualify as old, even among Muggles. And her brother Cygnus would still be fathering Bellatrix at the age of 13. (And fathering subsequent daughters at the ages of around 15 and 17.) Which I doubt is socially approved, even if being a Black does make you "nearly royalty."

I also heard it reported that Cygnus's birthdate was supposed to be 1930 rather than 1938, which would certainly resolve the problem of Bellatrix being born when her father was in his 3rd year at Hogwarts, but this would not let his father off the hook of having apparently managed the same feat.

From the layout of the chart, Walburga is clearly intended to be older than Cygnus. So it would also be unacceptable to show a Walburga born in 1935 placed in the elder spot above her brother, born in 1930. Although we could just have a formatting glitch wherein the point was to get Walburga to the left side of the group in order to facilitate showing the marriage line to her cousin Orion.

And while we are on the question of formatting glitches:

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permit me to direct your attention to the birthdates of Phineas Nigelus's four children whose births on the chart go from 1877 to 1889 and then leap backward to 1886 and then continue to recede to 1884. Such an irrational order as oldest-youngest-2nd youngest-2nd oldest can hardly have been intentional, either. All other lines and groups read oldest to youngest, from left to right, as is proper and traditional. The birthdates of Phineas's 3rd and 5th child appear to have been accidentally switched. This may have contributed something to the muddle that has Pollux fathering his eldest child when barely in his teens.

The LiveJournalist known as Swythiv was convinced that this layout was because Phineas's 2nd son's marriage produced only daughters, and that the entire layout of the tapestry is adjusted to push the marriages which produce only daughters to the right-hand side of the chart, leaving marriages which produced sons on the left. But while certainly possible, that would mean that the family listings must continue to shift around until after all the family members' deaths, otherwise how would the chart be able to anticipate the sex of future children? Nor does this explain why the son whose marriage produced only daughters should be listed after the marriage of a daughter, whose children are not even named. I tend to doubt that this is the solution.

Indeed there are so many bugs and glitches on this chart that one has to wonder whether all the screwy numbers might be intended as a joke, and that we are *supposed* to be regarding it as a "how many things are wrong in this picture?" exercise. And that's even *before* we learned of the 1960 Marauder cohort birth date or the information given us in Kreachur's tale.



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Nor do the anomalies stop here. Rowling informed us all the way back in the year 2000 that wizards have a much longer life expectancy than Muggles. But she certainly does not seem to be able to bring herself to depict any of them actually managing to do it with numbers to back the statement up.



Well, first off, let's sort out the worst of the formatting glitches. There is no way that a viable family tree is going to list the children of a family in a randomized birth order.

I'm going to assume that Rowling really did mean for Arcturus to be the third of Phineas Nigelus's sons, and Cygnus the forth, as she indicated by the birth dates she gave them. I will provisionally assume that she bullied the listing for Cygnus's descendants to the left in order to get Walburga's name closer to Orion's.

I have no idea why she forced Arcturus's line of descent all the way to the right. But the fact that the chart did not start listing any descendent's of daughters by name until there simply were no living descendants of sons that the chart was able to track, means that such measures were likely to be unnecessary. So the first order of business is to re-arrange things enough for Arcturus's and Cygnus's lines to switch places.

That makes it possible to standardize the placement of the names of those who married into the family to the right of the names of their partners, as well.

So. Below we have the line of descent from Phineus Nigelus Black. Same information as above, but more conventionally organized.

Although it is not precisely an error, Phineas Nigelus appears



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to have been a couple of years younger than what Rowling had long ago told us about the age of Albus Dumbledore. (Rowling later adjusted Dumbledore's age too, shaving off some 35 years.) Phineas may have been Headmaster some decades earlier, suggesting that he may have gone into education as a career as a comparatively young man, and didn't live nearly as long. I suppose this might explain his portrait's extremely familiar, rather patronizing manner with Albus, if they had been at

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school together, and even more so if Phineas was the Headmaster who actually hired Albus. Frankly, I am inclined to think that the multiple glitches in the dates of the lower half of the chart are primarily because Rowling set her starting point too late to be able to fit everything in properly. She filled in the dates top to bottom, instead of bottom to top, as she needed to.

Second observation: we were told in July 2005, right after HBP was released, that James Potter's parents were quite

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elderly, “even by wizarding standards” when he was born, and that they died of natural causes when James was quite young. In that case, if the Dorea and Charlus Potter shown in the sketch are intended to be identified as James Potter’s parents, Dorea died at the not exactly ripe old age of 57, and (if that single son of hers is James Potter) would have borne her son at the age of about 40. Which isn’t all that old to be having a baby even by Muggle standards. Although it is rather late to be having a *first* baby.

We also seem to be missing Walburga’s cousin, Arminta Meliflua who was lobbying the Wizengamot to legalize Muggle hunting. Although, if she was a cousin descended from one of the Black daughters, and her own family name was not Black, (and/or Meliflua was her married name) she might be one of the four “d” notations which descend from the Burke, Longbottom and Crouch connections. Or, more probably, Sirius is carelessly referring to cousins of *any* degree, and the name he was pointing out was in an entirely different part of the room, and possibly representing a connection of several generations back.

But, to the fans in general, the most intractable contradiction which we can see here is the bombshell that Bellatrix Black was listed as having been born in 1951.

Sirius Black quite unequivocally informed us in the course of GoF that two of the kids from the “gang of Slytherins” that Snape hung out with at Hogwarts were the Lestranges, identified as “a married couple” currently in Azkaban. There is no way that he was not referring to his cousin Bellatrix and her husband.

There is also no way that Bellatrix Black could have been at Hogwarts at the same time as Severus Snape at all if she was

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born in 1951. Not even if she was born in December. Not unless she had to repeat a year.

Not even if Snape was born in '59, as I had been contending for years, in defiance of the Lexicon (which claimed that the whole Marauder cohort was born in 1960. I do not know whether it still did so after the sketch came out). Rowling has since endorsed the Lexicon’s original calculations, in all defiance of rudimentary arithmetic.

Rowling’s done this before. This is the same kind of stunt as the Weasley calendar muddle. She appears to be, once again, arbitrarily spacing people’s kids 2 years apart (in this case the Black sisters), having forgotten that a mechanical progression of 2 years apart doesn’t add up to what else she has already told us about these people. The progression may work as a schematic but it doesn’t hold up to closer examination.

But, since this particular issue is all fairly peripheral to the story she is telling, she never took the time to go in and fine-tune it.

In my view; for purposes of theorizing, published canon invariably trumps quasi-canon. Frustrating as it may be for us, Rowling is allowed to make any number of minor errors in statements made off the top of her head in interviews (where she doesn’t have access to her notes). She is allowed to make minor arithmetical mistakes in her own peripheral notes. And we are allowed to *dismiss* these mistakes, as mistakes. I think that a sketch fired off to be donated to a charity auction can be ranked along with part of her peripheral notes. We probably ought to accept the relationships represented. We don’t have to accept the dates when they contradict published canon.

What is in the books takes precedence over things that are

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not in the books. In the books, the Lestranges, “a married couple now in Azkaban” were at least briefly at school at the same time as Severus Snape.

And, I am going to at least make a stab at attempting to hold to that. Even though I have been forced to recalculate everything to manage it. Twice.

But I am willing to dismiss it in a heartbeat the moment it becomes untenable, since I am no longer sure that I’m willing to believe *anything* that we were ever told by Sirius Black.

When I was still calculating from a 1959 birth year for the marauder cohort, if Bella had been born in (the fall of) ’52, rather than ’51, the whole problem would just go away. She would have been born after September 1, and had to wait the extra year to start school. I suspect an Autumn birthday for Bellatrix is probably the case, regardless.

At the other end of this equation, if we dismissed the statements from interviews and Rowling’s official website (i.e., things NOT in the books) which are obviously worded in a manner to suggest that the information is *inexact*, it goes away again. Rowling states on the official site that Sirius Black was “around 22” when he was locked up. This would have established his birth year as 1959 if it had been a firm statement. But it isn’t one. It is an inexact statement.

Even more obviously inexact was her original statement that Snape was “35 or 36”, which was made in a Q&A session of an interview a few months after GoF was released back in 2000. Since this is the statement that started this whole caper and was the basis for just about all of our calculations up until February 2006, many of us were understandably reluctant to turn

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loose of it, but there is no question but that that this statement is unclear and inexact. (As also has since turned out the be the claim that Albus was 150, and that Minerva was a “sprightly 70”, at least if you are prepared to accept anything posted on Pottermore. I am not. I *will* at least *consider* statements and postings made on the old Lightning Source website, however.)

If we recast both of these statements as being “close but no cigar” and adjustable by a year or so in either direction, then we have the Marauders cohort born in 1958, rather than 1959. The Lexicon and I would both be wrong. So big deal. One would like to think we are both mature enough to cope with that.

Ergo: the cohort would have started Hogwarts in the Autumn of ’69, and finished with the class of ’76. The Pensieve junket we witnessed would have taken place in June, 1974.

And up to the middle of DHs there was absolutely nothing in the books to contradict this reading. On the chart, the only thing that might have contradicted it, Sirius Black’s own dates, are inaccessible since he is represented by a burn mark. So we had no contradiction on the chart, either.

Unless Rowling told us differently in the course of book 7, this was the reading which I was prepared to be using for all of my future interpretations.

Well. She did.

Carved in stone, even.



So, my original exercise in recalculation (i.e., the Marauder cohort with a birth year of ’58) went: Bellatrix, born in the Autumn of ’51 would be one of the older 7th years at the time

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the Marauders were Firsties. Andromeda, anything up to a year and a half younger (no more than that. Her daughter still had to have been born before the end of August '73) is either a 6th or a 5th year and depending on when her birthday is, Narcissa is a 4th or a 3rd year. I suspect she was more probably 4th year, otherwise she would still have been at Hogwarts when the Pensieve junket we witnessed took place, and I don't really think she was. Under these new calculations Lucius Malfoy is a 5th year when Snape started Hogwarts, and remained accessible until the end of Snape's 3rd year. (With the 1960 birth date he is rendered a 7th year, like Bellatrix.)

There were now 5 years between the Marauder cohort's finishing at Hogwarts and Voldemort's first fall. Frankly, I thought this worked even better than my earlier calculations based on the 1959 birthdates. It gives everybody ample time to defy Voldemort 3 times and get into position for any developments both before and after the Prophecy was made and turned loose to do its damage. Even if you opt for the reading that the Prophecy took place at the date of Harry and Neville's conception, around Halloween 1979. Which I now do, although this seems to be a minority reading and was never proved either incorrect, or otherwise.

Under these calculations, Snape was 23 when he took up his teaching career, and 37 at the end of GoF, rather than the 35 or 36 that Rowling claimed. (So big deal.) Sirius was 23 when he was sent to Azkaban. James's parents (if they were Dorea and Charlus Potter) lived until the year after he had finished Hogwarts and he was orphaned by about the age of 19. James and Lily were no less tragically young to be murdered at the age



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of barely 23 than they would have been at barely 22. I could not see any glitches introduced to the continuum by moving the Marauder cohort's birth dates forward the additional year.

Regardless of when the cohort was born, the Prophecy still had to have been made between the end of 1979 and some point early in 1980. These days, as I say, I am more inclined to believe that it was made soon after Halloween 1979, at roughly the time of the child foretold's conception.

This last detail is a possibility I had not seriously considered up to some time late in 2005, but one which I now consider fairly convincing, since it offers better motivations for various subsequent events related to Tom Riddle's actions of which we have been told.

By recalculating the birth year to 1958 we don't even lose the minor point that if Quirrell, who from his own statements had clearly been at Hogwarts early enough to have seen something of the Snape vs. Potter conflict, was still in school when Snape started teaching, then consequently he was too young to have ever actually been a Death Eater. We can still fit that reading in, if his 1st year was their 7th year.

We still even have Molly safely out of Hogwarts before the willow was planted, since Bill's birth in November 1970 (as it seemed) suggested that she would have finished no later than the class of '69, which would have been at the start of the summer before the Marauder cohort showed up.



Which brings me to the February 2007 modification to the Lexicon's version of the tapestry sketch, in which the dates for



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Cygnus Black, the 3 sisters' father, had abruptly been adjusted to 1929–1979. Duplicating those of his cousin Orion's.

I do not know why the film designers settled on exactly those numbers. I do not consider the films to be canon, in any case. Films are effectively authorized and very expensive fanfic.

The original birth year of 1938 was obviously a problem, resulting in one of the 13-year-old fathers on the original chart. But it also appeared to be intended to make it clear that Cygnus Black could not have been at Hogwarts at the same time as Tom Riddle. To move his birthdate forward to 1929 not only puts him squarely in the same year as his cousin Orion, but makes him only a couple of years younger than Riddle and also of an age to hero-worship him. Maybe that was the idea. I do not know.

The reason for the change in the death date is less immediately obvious, but more internally necessary. Born in 1929, Cygnus Black could still have easily lived to 1992 as originally stated. The only justification that I can think of for moving his death date forward would be to resolve the otherwise intractable question of why Sirius Black inherited the house. For it ought otherwise to have passed to Cygnus upon Arcturus's death. It does not explain why the death was moved all the way up to 1979, however. It needed only to be moved up earlier than 1991. Nor can I see any reasonable point to be made in assigning a 3rd Black death to that particular year. It merely proposes a mystery which we already know to be bogus.

The last obvious glitch in the chart is also the most problematic when dealing with the official chronology of the story arc. And this one directly contradicts information that occurs in canon.

The contradiction is that in OotP it is openly stated that Regu-

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ulus Black's death was noted as being "some 15 years before" from the vantage point of August, 1995.

As you can see, the death date recorded on the chart for Regulus Black is 1979, which is not 15 years earlier, but 16. Even though, in my view, canon virtually always trumps non-canon, until Rowling finished the series I was inclined to just make note of the contradiction and leave it alone. It was textually inaccurate, but there was a real chance that Rowling had since decided to make use of that '79 death date for some purpose of her own. She has misspoken or changed her mind about such things before. We have the Flints to prove it. This could have been another one.

In the event, it turned out just to be yet another indication of unclear thinking, and an inability to count. For the purposes of this essay and the rest of the collection I will continue to assume that Harry Potter can recognize the difference between 1995 and 1980 as being 15 years. Even if Rowling can't.

But. Well. Just for kicks, in the event that the chart was offered in the spirit of a puzzle, the following is a modification of the Black Family tapestry to resolve the glitches, both numeric and implied by previous statements made either in the text of the books or by Rowling when asked questions about the characters, and to facilitate interpretations of what is going on in what Rowling has shown us of these characters. At least as such matters stood circa HBP.

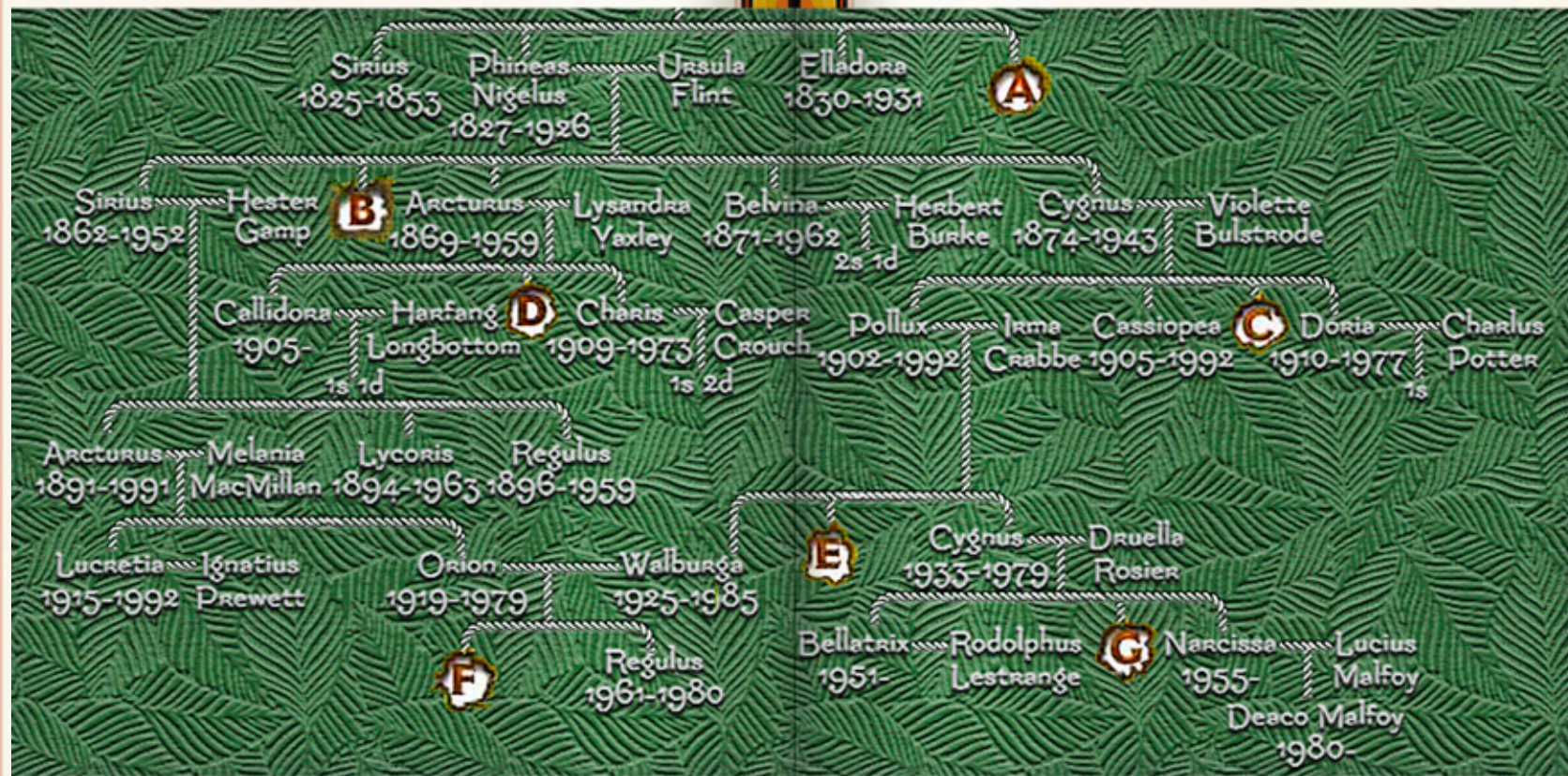
It is absolutely NOT authorized, and is a totally bogus exercise. (And I very much doubt that there is a prize!) So do not take it as official in any way, shape, or form. But it does resolve a lot of the glitches.

In the bottom two rows, those representing Sirius Black and

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Harry Potter's generations, the only adjustment made was to record Regulus Black's death as taking place in 1980. Otherwise those rows are untouched. Those are generations which are still actively in play in the course of the series. Consequently, I did not think that it was a good idea to mess with them. Although it was very tempting to pull Bellatrix's birth year up to '53, and Narcissa's to '57.

The 2nd row above; that of Sirius Black's parents' generation I have done a partial retrofit. I left Walburga's birthdate alone



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and pushed Lucretia and Orion's birthdates back a decade. This makes Orion a few years older than Walburga. Making him older than his wife was not the issue since there are plenty of marriages where the wife is slightly older than the husband. The adjustment also permits him to live to the age of 60, which seemed reasonable. But that was also not my objective.

My objective was that this adjustment gets him out of Hogwarts by the time Riddle arrived there. Walburga was still there, a year or two ahead of Riddle, but young Riddle, who

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seems to have about as much respect for women as his grandfather Marvolo and the Weasley twins, may have categorically dismissed witches as desirable followers (until beautiful Bellatrix came along and refused to be left out, and Amycus wouldn't join without his sister). If Sirius can say with confidence that his own parents were never Death Eaters, and yet agreed with all of Riddle's views, then it is difficult to see how Sirius's father might have gone through Hogwarts with Tom and not chosen to follow him. Tom was very persuasive.

Unless, as I've said already, Tom's poverty was the sticking point. Which I suppose it could have been. They were a snobbish lot, the Blacks. And if Walburga, as a girl, was anything like her portrait, Riddle would probably not have wanted *her* as a follower.

In any case, none of these considerations are really required to deal with actual internal clanks. But the adjustment to Cygnus's dates are.

Cygnus's birth date I pushed back five years, to 1933. This resolves the problem of Cygnus allegedly fathering children when barely into his teens. I really have heard that the birthdate here was supposed to have been 1930, and that 1938 was an error. I have adjusted the date to 1933 however.

Rowling did not appear to intend that Cygnus should have been a part of Riddle's Hogwarts "generation." A birth date of 1938 would not see him into Hogwarts until 1949 at the earliest. A 1933 birthdate would not see him into Hogwarts before 1944, and if born after September 1, not until 1945, after Riddle would have left the previous June. With Bellatrix born in '51, even in the Autumn, the timing might be faintly embarrassing to the family. He would still be a very young father, at 18. But wizards



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are of age at 17, and he and Druella Rosier may have made a run-away match of it as soon as they were out of Hogwarts (or even during their last Easter break). Hogwarts is in *Scotland*. They could have legally married in Hogsmeade on any Hogwarts Saturday if they so chose.

They could have even done this in 6th year after both turned 17, and dropped out of school. In fact, I think it quite possible they did. It's not like either of them needed NEWTs to get a job.

(We can also always pretend that the 2nd 3 in 1933 only looked like an 8, but having seen Rowling's handwriting on some of the Easter eggs from her official site, the pretense is not particularly convincing.)

The death date I left at the Lexicon's adjusted retrofit date of 1979, which someone officially involved with the project (although we've no idea who) seems to think is more reasonable than what was on the silly sketch when Rowling first released it. Upon consideration, there turns out to be more to this particular equation than just the matter of who inherits the house. There is also the issue of the tapestry having recorded Draco Malfoy *by name*. I do not think that it would have done so if there had still been any living male Black, apart from Arcturus's generation that it could trace. With Cygnus and Regulus dead, and Sirius burnt off the tapestry and untraceable, the tapestry recorded the next male descendant to be born, even though through a female descent, as the heir presumptive of the house. In any case, Cygnus's death in '79 with Regulus's the year afterward, would have given Arcturus Black, Sirius's grandfather, adequate time to make changes to his will before his own death in '91.

I left Orion's death in 1979. We got no indication from Krea-



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chur as to whether Reggie outlived his father, but the possibility he that did may have something to do with his becoming a DE in the first place.

We do not know much about Walburga's brothers. Alphard (who was a family member in good standing all his life, and was only blasted off the tapestry posthumously for leaving his sister a nastygram in his will, by taking sides with his nephew) might even have been in Riddle's own year. A Cygnus who was born in 1929 could have been only 1 or 2 years behind him (depending on when in the year Cygnus's birthday lands). In which case we may even have seen those young Black brothers in attendance at that 1940s meeting of the Slug Club. Slughorn only addressed Avery and Lestrage by name. There were at least three other boys in the group who remained nameless. And all of those boys looked to Riddle as their leader. And, with the adjustment of Cygnus's dates act to the film tapestry, all three of those boys could now have been Blacks.

And, given their family's position in pureblood circles, any young Black in the school would have gotten Sluggo's invitation to his Club. Whether they accepted it or not.

Of course, given Sirius's adversarial stance to everything his family stood for, it is hard to understand how an uncle who had been drawn into the DEs would have chosen to leave the boy any of his money. But there are any number of possible explanations.

In the first place, Alphard may not have been one of Riddle's admirers. His nose may have been put out of joint by this upstart Riddle (and just who were the Riddles, anyway?). And he may not have been involved in the Slug Club, either (and just who

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were the Slughorns, when they were at home?) He may have thought that young Sirius was being a fool, and being contrary for the sake of being contrary, but was convinced the boy would straighten out when he was a older. And if Doria and Charlus Potter were James's parents, the boy had not even really left the *family* at all. He'd just run off to live with his mother's aunt.

Or Alphard just left his sister and brother-in-law a nasty message in his will out of pure spite. Most of the Blacks we've met seem to have a pronounced spiteful streak and to be perfectly capable of that kind of behavior. Especially since Old Alphie had no descendants of his own to be inconvenienced thereby.

As for Cygnus: it is quite possible that my earlier speculations were off, and he did sign on with Riddle. Plus, his wife was a Rosier. The Rosiers were unquestionably connected to Riddle. Bellatrix, like Avery, her Rosier cousin, Evan, and the Lestrage brothers, could have all been 2nd-generation Death Eaters. That particular "gang" of Sirius's recollection may have been entirely made up of such. And Malfoy doesn't seem to have been a part of it.

In the next row above; Phineas's various grandchildren, Dorea Black Potter's generation, I globally pushed everyone's birth years back a decade. This makes things a little awkward with Cedrella being Arthur Weasley's mother, since at present Arthur doesn't seem to have been born until around 1950 or so, but it is still not impossible and Arthur may well be the youngest of the three Weasley brothers. This adjustment also eliminated the other 13-year-old father, and let Dorea have her baby (if that baby was indeed James Potter) at the age of 48 (around the same age that Cedrella may have been when she had Arthur).

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These days, this is still not impossibly old to be having a baby, although it's really, *really* late to be having a first baby. In the '50s or '60s it would have been extremely uncommon.

With this adjustment it becomes even more probable that the "1s" notation for Callidora and Harfang Longbottom refers to Neville's grandfather, rendering Phineas Nigelus, who may now be Harry's great-great grandfather, just as he is Sirius's, into Neville's great-great-great grandfather. His Gran, Augusta, would have been born somewhere around the 1920s and would probably have been in school with Minerva. (Who remembers Augusta flunking out of Charms.) Given some of the early marriages that have been hinted at in canon, this notation may have been intended to refer to Neville's grandfather in any case.

For that matter, just about everyone in canon but Hermione now appears to be a descendant or a connection of Phineas Nigelus Black. Harry and the young Weasleys are all 3rd cousins. Neville is a 3rd cousin once removed. Barty Crouch Jr was (probably) another 3rd cousin. Sirius and James were 1st cousins once removed, Sirius and Arthur 2nd cousins once removed (James and Arthur were 2nd cousins. No removes.). Sirius and Harry were 2nd cousins. Harry and the Black sisters are 2nd cousins, and Draco is another 2nd cousin once removed. We don't know just where Marcus Flint, Millicent Bulstrode, Vincent Crabbe, Ernie MacMillan, the Rosiers, or the DE Yaxley fit in. Ignatus Prewett may have been Molly's (presumably rich) uncle. The Burkes are also connected. We don't know about Borgin.



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The main problem in the chart is in the line above Pollux which simply does not leave quite enough time between a Cygnus, born in 1889 and Walburga, born in 1925 to insert two standard 20-year generational intervals.

That row: Phineas Nigelus's childrens' row, is also the one with the flaky layout and (possible) switched birthdates. Here I pushed back all the birthdates one and a half decades. This was a bit arbitrary and gave us a couple of additional nonagenarians, but it still doesn't approach Rowling's claims of exceptionally long wizarding life expectancies. My main reason for doing this is that I wanted to be able to push Phineas's own generation's birth dates back two decades.

The adjustment does lessen (although it does not altogether eliminate) the likelihood that Caractacus Burke, of Borgin & Burkes, was Belvina's father-in-law. It certainly does not eliminate the possibility that he was a brother-in-law or cousin. And now there is also a scant (very scant) possibility that he might have been one of her 2 sons. The Caractacus Burke of the Pensieve memory, described as a "little old man" from Harry's perspective, was a likeness taken at from some point between 1945-'63 and a son of Belvina's might have been well into his 50s by that time. He had purchased the Locket from Merope Gaunt in December, 1926, more than 20 years earlier.

Phineas Nigelus Black and his siblings have had their birth dates pushed back a full two decades. The first Sirius Black, who died in childhood, has had his death date also pushed back two decades. Phineas is now a clear generation older than Dumbledore. Possibly born even before Griselda Marchbanks. And if he went into teaching as a career by his early 30s, it is

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probable that he would have taught Dumbledore, who at that point we still believed would have started Hogwarts some time around the mid-1850s. This would readily explain Phineas's patronizing manner of speaking of and to Dumbledore even more satisfactorily than if they had been at school together.

Under any reading, unless he became Headmaster fairly early and soon threw the post over in disgust, it is very likely that Phineas was indeed the Headmaster immediately before Dippet, and was probably also the one to have originally hired both Albus Dumbledore and Horace Slughorn. He may have hired Professor Galatea Merrythought as well. Indeed, one of these three was probably hired to fill his own former position upon his elevation to Headmaster. The others (and possibly more of the faculty) were hired to deal with staff turnover. He was, by his great-great grandson's account, a thoroughly unpopular Headmaster, so there may have been rather a lot of such turnover.

The times would certainly be right for it. Albus's manner when he went to deliver a Hogwarts letter in the summer of 1938 was such to suggest that he had been at the school long enough to have already developed a proprietary feeling toward it ("My school"). This was only some dozen years after Phineas Nigellus Black's death.

It would be fun to use such a possibility to get a handle on Slughorn's dates as well, but we are missing too much data. All we've got is that Molly claims that he started teaching at the school around the same time as Dumbledore. (Although this was well before she was born, so this is something she must have heard from someone else. Probably her Aunt Muriel.)



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From our glimpse into the Pensieve, Slughorn is indeed younger than Dumbledore. The young Slughorn we saw could have been anywhere from his 30s to his 50s. Whereas the Dumbledore of that period, even factoring in the new information from DHs was around 60.

And all of this is also completely out of the official loop in any case. Like I say, this is absolutely NOT authorized.

These adjustments result in a handful of family members surviving into their 90s, with a couple of early centenarians, but no exceedingly long lives on the order of Griselda Marchbanks's. In this iteration, several of the Blacks survive longer than the Muggle average, perhaps, but despite my tinkering, most of the family have managed to live no longer than many 20th century Muggles.

Well: Okay. That was certainly fun. But it isn't necessarily useful.



However, once the official canon closed, with the release of DHs it became abundantly clear that Rowling did not have any bombshells to lob at us which would finally make sense of the dates in the row representing Sirius Black, his brother, and his cousins.

Instead, she lobbed us the bombshell of officially endorsing the 1960 birth date for the Marauder cohort (which I suspect she just adopted from the Lexicon without thinking about it). Which makes complete nonsense of the statement that Bellatrix (or at any rate "the Lestranges" who are later identified as Bellatrix and her husband) having been a part of the gang of



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Slytherins that Snape ran with at Hogwarts. There is no way that a Bellatrix who was born in 1951 could have been at school with a Snape born in 1960. Even Rowling ought to be capable of counting up to nine on her fingers. Women were expected to be able to do that back when they weren't even taught to read.

She further cut the ground out from under herself with Krea-chur's tale in which Regulus Black is stated to have died about a year after having become a DE at the age of 16. i.e., he died at the age of 17. There is no way that a kid born in 1961 is going to still be 17 in 1979. And he certainly won't still be 17 if you go by the information actually given us in OotP in which we are told that he died in 1980.

So I am not going to continue to hold back from adjusting those dates to the point that we have something that will fit what we are actually told in the books. Even if Sirius Black is completely talking through his hat about Snape and the Lestranges having all been a part of the same group when they were at Hogwarts.

I'm not going to try to patch everything. Dorea Potter's death is stated as being in 1977 and I am going to leave it there. Even though that appears to contradict Sirius's tale of how he left home at about 16, moved in with the Potters, then got his own place at 17 but was always welcome back for Sunday dinner. All that really needs to be adjusted there is to conclude that Sirius was determined to spend his uncle Alphard's legacy by getting a place of his own as soon as he came of age, even though he still had one year left of school. Dorea, and presumably Charlus, now both died during James's final year of Hogwarts.

For that matter, perhaps James being left an orphan at 17 is

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what made Lily Evans finally take pity on him.

I debated moving Doria's birthdate back to 1920, however. A first child at the age of 50, is pretty unusual. But, first children at the age of 46 are not unknown, and that fits what Rowling tells us of Doria's advanced age when James was born. So I did adjust her birth date to 1914.

However, if one is determined to take Sirius's word about the Lestranges still being at Hogwarts when he himself started, then Regulus and his cousins' dates all need to be adjusted to keep Bellatrix in school until the Marauder cohort got there, preferably for Narcissa to be out of school before July 1976 when the Pensieve junket took place, Andromeda to be out of school in time for Tonks to be born in 1973, and for Reggie to die in 1980. At the age of 17.

You will notice that while the intervals between the births of children on the original tapestry vary, at no point does Rowling actually depict births closer than 2 years apart. (I don't think she remembered (or had adopted) the 1960 date for Sirius, since he was represented by a burn hole). In fact, the only siblings in the whole series who seem to be only one year apart in age are Ron and Ginny. I'm going to preserve this element in my calculations.

So okay. Reggie needs to have died in 1980. And he needs to have died at the age of 17. That's an easy enough adjustment. His birth year moves from 1961 to 1963, his death date was already adjusted to 1980. He is now three years younger than his brother.

Bellatrix needs to stay in school at least until the end of the Marauder cohort's first year. Which, with a 1960 birth date,

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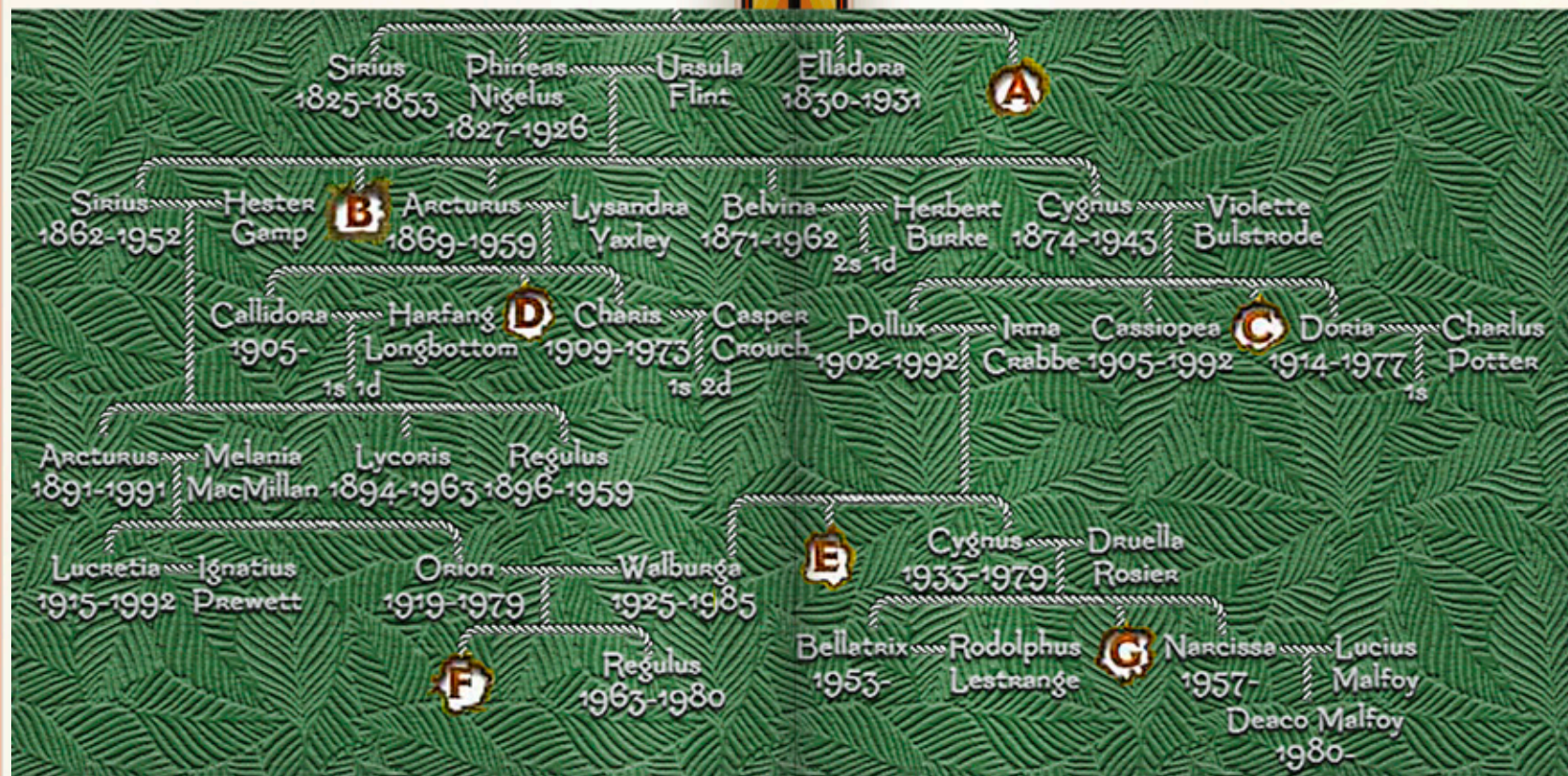
would have been 1972. Since we need to fit three births into the space between Bellatrix and Narcissa, I still postulate that she has an autumn birthday and had to wait an extra year to start. Which moves her birth date to 1953.

Narcissa will have left school by the time of the Pensieve junket. Moving her birth date to 1957 would have her leaving school with the class of 1975. Bellatrix now finishes in '72, along with Lucius Malfoy. The monkey wrench of that 1960 birth date for Snape makes a hash of several statements regarding his

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friendship with Lucius made over the course of the series. But then I doubt that by the time she sat down to write DHs Rowling was much concerned with maintaining realistic motivations for anyone's actions or associations. Or plausible conditions which would support them. It certainly didn't show in the text. Indeed, she seemed to have decided that the Warner Bros. division with whom she was dealing was the cartoon division and was playing everything for laughs (Snape-shaped hole? *Really?*).

Well, we might as well propose that Lucius also has an (early)



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autumn birthday, pushing back his school leaving to '73, which is not impossible, and makes better sense than that he was already a 7th year when Snape first was Sorted. Particularly if Snape was taken up by Bellatrix's circle first.

Andromeda's birth date shifts to 1955. *Before* Sept 1 in 1955 which would put her into the year directly after Bellatrix's. Again, probably in the same year as Lucius.

The problem with this of course is that under normal circumstances, she would not be leaving school, before 1973, and her daughter needs to have already been born by then..

Ergo: we must conclude that she and Ted Tonks eloped as soon as she turned 17 in 1972 and that her daughter was born a year later. Andromeda did not remain in school to sit the NEWTs.

And that's the last I am going to say on the subject. It's not worth stewing over it any longer.



Which brings us back to the continuing puzzle of how Orion Black managed to escape the persuasiveness of Tom Riddle. Walburga and Lucretia might have been dismissed from Tom's consideration, from the get-go, merely by being girls. We get ample reason to suspect that Tom Riddle had little use for females apart from their potential function either as victims or as an audience. But according to the original chart, and the one in Lexicon's modified version, Orion, Cygnus, and (probably) Alphard would have all been at Hogwarts and in Slytherin House at the same time as Tom, and were certainly within a proper age range to have fallen under his influence. And, being Blacks, they would just as certainly have been invited to join

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the Slug Club as a matter of course.

Or, perhaps the relevant question is how did they manage to escape being drawn into the Death Eaters after Riddle's return to the wizarding world at the end of his first 10-year exile. They may not have escaped falling under Riddle's influence while they were all still at Hogwarts. But Orion and Alphard didn't rejoin after he returned.

Professor_Mum certainly hit upon a viable possibility of how they might have managed to escape. Swythv improved upon it. I think they've got something there. Even if Rowling couldn't be bothered.

So. What stopped them from following him after he returned? We all think Arcturus did.

Tom Riddle disappeared from the ww at some point between 1945-'53, after the suspicious death of Madam Hepzibah Smith, and the disappearance of at least two of the valuable artifacts from her extensive collection of wizarding relics.

At some point after the summer term broke up in 1945 (possibly anything up to a handful of years afterward) Albus Dumbledore made an authorized visit to Azkaban, where he interviewed Morfin Gaunt.

Following this interview Dumbledore began to campaign for Morfin's release. It is all but certain that the recovered memory of the true events of the night the Riddle massacre, which Albus later showed to Harry Potter, was presented as evidence of Gaunt's innocence. It must somehow be possible for Parseltongue when spoken by a human, to be translated and understood by persons who are not themselves Parselmouths, because most of the conversation in the recov-

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ered memory was conducted in Parseltongue. (Rowling did kinda/sorta confirm that this is the case — even though she reneged on the statement almost immediately, without offering any explanation of how *Albus* managed to understand what that conversation was about.)

Arcturus Black is known to have had at least some Ministry ties. Otherwise he would hardly have known just when a donation of gold would have bagged himself an Order of Merlin, first class. It is not that much of a stretch to postulate that these ties at least went back to the period that Albus was attempting to secure Morfin's release. Nor even that he may have actually been involved in whatever committee administers Azkaban and was among the people who was permitted to view the evidence.

Evidence that was enough to reveal one Tom Riddle as a halfblood, a thief (of a ring of considerable historical value), and a murderer (of three Muggles).

And Arcturus's children, Lucretia and Orion were only recently out of Hogwarts, indeed, Orion may even still have been attending Hogwarts. Arcturus might well have thought to ask them whether or not they hadn't been at school with a young wizard of that name.

He may have also asked them about the Peverill Ring, as well — which Tom had been very happy to flash about during his 5th year at school. And, learning that they had indeed been at school with a Tom Riddle, he would have warned them against any further dealings with the murdering halfblood.

Orion and his cousin Alphard may have been close enough in age and association for Alphard to have been filled in on the

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matter. Cygnus, who I postulated as being still in his early years at Hogwarts, was somehow not included in these confidences. This was unfortunate. His future wife Druella Rosier was from a family that was unquestionably “connected” to Riddle.

Another Rosier — probably either a brother or a cousin, had accompanied Riddle to Hogsmeade the night Tom asked Dumbledore for the DADA position, soon after his return to the ww a decade later. Cygnus and Druella were already married by then, with a young family, and Cygnus may well have been drawn into the movement by way of his in-laws. The party line, after all, was the same one that he had grown up with, whoever was spouting it.

Orion, however, took his father's warning to heart. Indeed, once a group of masked terrorists' activities began to become known, he and his father began taking steps to secure their home from possible DE intrusion. I doubt they knew whether or not Cygnus was involved in Riddle's activities. He may not have been, or he may have been, and they did not realize it. The party line, like I say, was not one which would have made one's real affiliations clear. And Regulus may not have been approached until after his father was dead.



One suddenly wonders how much input childless Ignatus and Lucretia Prewett's possible disdain for Lord Voldemort and his activities may have had upon Molly's brothers. I would be willing to bet that Ignatus was the Prewett family's “rich uncle,” whose favor was very much to be sought, and that Gideon and Fabian's first act of “defiance” of the Dark Lord was a refusal to join up.

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Moving right along: I cannot off the top of my head recall whether there is a star named Nymphadora, but there is certainly a constellation named Draco. I think it's clear that his mother had the primary say in the naming of him, and it is possible that his status as the collateral heir of the whole Black family is why his name and birthdate are both represented in full on the Black family tapestry, rather than merely being relegated to the same "1s" notation of all the other descendants of daughters. The tapestry by the time of Draco's birth was no longer aware of Sirius, and Orion, Regulus, and Cygnus were all dead.

[Side note: "Nymphadora" does sound very much as if it may be a reference to Nymphidia, the diminutive Queen of the Fairies and central character of a poem so entitled; written by the English poet, Michael Drayton, 1563–1631. i.e., Pre-Seclusion era, so wizards might well know of it.]

By the time Draco was born, he was the default heir presumptive, Regulus, being already dead and Sirius unmarried (as well as disowned and soon to be immured in Azkaban). It is partially for this reason that I thought Rowling may have really meant Regulus's 1979 death date. Otherwise Draco might have gotten the simpler notation allotted to the mere descendant of a daughter. But no. Evidently Reggie merely died earlier in the year than Draco was born. Presumably over Easter break, given that he was still only 17. Draco's birthday is in early June.

But actual inheritance in the ww may be more likely to transfer by a legally recorded will rather than on the say-so of a tapestry. And it may also be that the choice between a previously disowned son of the family and the prospect of an heir who was both not a Black, and also tainted by association with Riddle —



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who would have been strongly suspected of being the person behind this "Lord Voldemort" business by someone who was as much in the know as Arcturus Black would have been, was so odious that Arcturus reinstated Sirius as his heir in a formal will (tapestry bedamned), enabling Sirius to inherit after all. i.e., The Malfoys would have to just wait until Sirius was dead too before they'd ever get their hands on Arcturus's property.

According to the original sketch, at the time of Arcturus's death, Cygnus was still alive, and the house certainly didn't go to him. I believe this may be why the film designers moved Cygnus's death date up to 1979. By 1981, of the Black men, only (old) Pollux, (old) Arcturus, and Sirius were left.

It is also now necessary to consider the possibility that Lucius Malfoy may have also been recruited into the Death Eaters by his father-in-law Cygnus Black. Which would be around the time of his marriage, rather than upon his finishing Hogwarts in 1972 or '73. Narcissa, some three years behind him at school would have finished in '75, and both the marriage and his recruitment might have taken place at any time after that. We still have no indication in canon that Abraxus Malfoy was ever "connected" to Riddle. It is possible that Abraxus was far enough ahead of Riddle at Hogwarts to have escaped falling under his influence, which would not have been so very great in Tom's earliest years there.

Or he could have been another one of the original Death Eaters who was at school with Riddle. We simply cannot know. We also do not know who Lucius Malfoy's mother's family were



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Moving on:

As a fugitive from the law, Sirius Black was severely limited in just what contribution he could make towards furthering the objectives and goals of the Order of the Phoenix. But he did have one material asset, and that was the house at number 12 Grimmauld Place. With his death, that house, and Kreacher, passed into Harry's possession.

Given that there are independent, reliable witnesses to the fact that it was Bellatrix who knocked her cousin through the Veil, she ought to have been out of the running for the inheritance, regardless of where she stands in the succession according to the tapestry. There are *laws* preventing one from being able to profit from a murder. In fact this is a solid tenet of British common law.

But, evidently my faith in the wizarding world's (or Rowling's) recognition of British common law (which long predates wizarding Seculsion) was misplaced, and we had to watch that utterly silly test of summoning Kreacher to determine whether, despite Sirius's will, the house had passed to Bellatrix. *If* that's what that performance was really about. I now suspect the whole performance was to get Harry to *accept* Kreacher. I suspected Kreacher had information that Harry needed. (And I was right. Although how Albus would have known about that is a continuing mystery, with a lame explanation.)

And, it would appear that after Sirius's arrest and imprisonment, his grandfather Arcturus had lost heart, and did not return to #12, after Walburga's death, remaining with his daughter until his own death in 1991.

So, we need to consider the possibility that while the tapes-



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try keeps track of the family's lines of descent, it does not necessarily follow the ownership of the property, which can be left outside the family by a formal will in the absence of a suitable male Black heir. The tapestry is only concerned with following the bloodlines, and/or the identity of the official Head of the Family. Those who are adjudged to have polluted the bloodlines (or to be in danger of doing so) are blasted off. The tapestry doesn't *want* to know about their descendants. Or, rather, the Head of the Family, or his deputy, who maintains that tapestry, doesn't want the tapestry to know about them.

And for that matter, as was pointed out to me by a correspondent, Orion and Walburga Black were never really the heads of the family anyway. Orion's father Arcturus, like Walburga's father Pollux, outlived them both. We keep overlooking this particular point because Sirius Black unaccountably fails to mention that both his grandfathers outlived his parents, and gives us no indication that the household at Grimmauld Place may have included grandparents as well as his parents and younger brother.

Indeed, by the time of his death, in 1991, Arcturus Black, even if he had agreed to his elder grandson's having been blasted off the family tapestry at the time, would have seen both the boy and his own eldest grand-niece consigned to Azkaban for life. He would also have known that the youngest of his cousin Pollux's granddaughters was married to another of the monster's followers, even though acquitted, and knew that his own family name would not long survive himself.

That being the case, there was little reason to formally settle what remained of the estate upon either a halfblood female or



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a Malfoy, and that was what his choices had narrowed down to, thanks to that so-called Dark Lord.



It also occurs to me that there is something else a bit off about the whole setup of the House in Grimmauld Place. We get very little indication of its age, style or whether it bears any underlying relationship to the houses around it. But from its description upon Harry's arrival it *sounds* like a classic tall, narrow, London "row house" from the 18th or 19th century.

Most of modern London didn't even physically *exist* before the 19th century.

There were any number pre-existing historical *villages*, however, which were swallowed up by Greater London over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. The House of Black could have originally been located in one of those. Islington or Highgate both seem likely and are frequently identified as the location of the house in fanfics.

But we do not actually know even its general location, thanks to the fact that Mad-Eye Moody's circuitous and evasive approach makes it very difficult to pin that location down. Furthermore Harry was more or less confined to quarters during the summer he stayed there. The house appears to be in one of the older districts of London, and it is in walking distance of an Underground Station. It appears to be in a rather *decrepit*, older district of London, at that; an area afflicted by such signs of blight as broken windows, dirty walls and uncollected rubbish.

(Which renders Bellatrix's grand contempt of the "Muggle



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dunghill" of the area around Spinner's End into a rather blatant case of Pot vs. Kettle.)

The point at which I am driving is that unless that house was merely overtaken by the City's growth, it must have come into the family's possession comparatively recently, for otherwise it would not have *existed* until comparatively recently. Ergo; Phineas Nigelus, or perhaps his father or grandfather, however "pure" his blood or exclusive his views, had manifestly purchased a Muggle leasehold (probably of the usual 99 years duration) for his family's primary London residence, and that the house itself is probably not significantly older than Severus Snape's equally Muggle-built piece of terraced mill worker's housing — although to be sure, the Black residence was originally much, much posher. But this is manifestly no "manor house" in Wiltshire.

Given what we now know of them, it also seems not out of the question that the Blacks may have magically fuzzed the records regarding the property to avoid needing to deal with the land lease (most London property is actually owned by members of the Muggle royalty or nobility, so that when you purchase a house, you purchase *only* the house, not the land) and have been ripping off the owner for generations.

So. For all that they make a big deal of their ability to trace their wizarding descent back to some time in the 13th century, they have been living in Muggle London for most of the last 100-200 years. Suggesting that they may be old blood. But, in wizarding terms, they are not necessarily "old money."

Or, more probably, that their fortunes have risen and fallen at any number of points along the way. To all appearances, the money currently appears to be in the process of running out



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again. Although when Sirius Black was sent to Azkaban, it was not quite gone yet.

Or, conversely, that Rowling just threw the whole milieu in as set-dressing, without the slightest consideration of what any of it *implied*.



On another issue related to timing: Sirius's statement, made at the point that we first learn of his connection to the three Black sisters, is that he had not seen his cousin Bellatrix from the time that he was Harry's age until she and her husband were brought into Azkaban.

At the time this statement was made Harry Potter had just turned 15 years old. Sirius Black was probably 15 years old at the end of his 4th year at Hogwarts. By that time, Cousin Bellatrix may have already been married to Rodolphus Lestrage. By the following summer, when he would have been 16, Sirius had already left home.

It was long my contention that it was the fallout from the werewolf caper, which I then believed to have taken place at the end of Sirius's 5th year, that provoked the final altercation which led Sirius Black to leave home at the age of 16, probably within a day or two of his arrival in London at the end of the Summer term.

I now think that it is more likely that the werewolf caper took place much earlier in the year, and had, indeed, been successfully hushed up.

Therefore, it was the disgracefully *public* performance which we witnessed in the Pensieve junket and which, with Minerva McGonagall in the equation, the families of the perpetrators



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would have been notified of, and that it was that which brought matters to a head.

Sirius would have had no reason or inclination to seek out any of his family after that date (July, 1976). Consequently, any statements regarding any of them made after this point come to us from at least one remove. Which throws a great deal of uncertainty upon such matters as the report of the death of Sirius's younger brother.

We know that the Black family was traditionally Dark Arts sympathetic. But by all accounts Sirius's claim was that his own immediate family were never Death Eaters. Nevertheless, Sirius certainly claims to have believed that his parents would have been proud of Regulus's decision to join Voldemort's organization before it was clear that Voldemort was prepared to prey on non-combatant purebloods as readily as anyone else.

But it should also be pointed out that Sirius Black seems to have done a lot of talking through his hat about things he did not really know anything about.

I think it is a good deal more likely that, if his father had still been alive, Regulus's new friends and his new tattoo would have provoked an explosion second only to the one that Sirius had provoked by the report of his engaging in a disgraceful, unprovoked public attack on another student. It would certainly not have been the first time that a teenager made a disastrously life-changing decision without consulting his parents. And this would have been the point that Reggie may have learned that he had bound himself irrevocably to following a halfblood.

Kreacher tells us nothing of this. But, then, he would protect his family's secrets.



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The probability is that the elder Blacks had never encountered Voldemort themselves. Or at any rate, certainly not as “Lord Voldemort.” Indeed, by the time of his return from his first exile, he might not have particularly *wished* to meet anyone who might have known him as Tom Riddle that he could not definitely and immediately draw under his influence. And he would probably have remembered that Walburga Black was a shrieking nuisance, and Orion was now married to her.

And Orion resisted being drawn in. At that point, it was early enough that such resistance was probably still possible. Tom had not yet devised a way to enslave his followers and set his mark upon them. Riddle might have therefore avoided those who withdrew, and later concentrated on enlisting their children.

The fact that Bellatrix boasts that Voldemort taught her the Dark Arts *himself*, strongly suggests that her own parents were not teaching them to her when she was an adolescent, no matter how much they might have favored their use themselves, or however much she might have whined or stormed that she wanted to learn them, *now*.

(These last statements have been rendered problematic since, by all indications, students are unofficially learning the Dark Arts at Hogwarts along with everything else, with no objections raised. Rowling clearly had no intention of ever clarifying what Dark magic supposedly is.)

Voldemort may have made the attempt to recruit a few somewhat older wizards into his Death Eaters, such as Karkaroff, who could be anything up to 100 when we first met him, but most of his initial followers seem to have been his own con-

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temporaries and most of his subsequent followers have been their descendants.



Which brings us to Regulus Black.

We now know the official story of Regulus Black, even though it doesn't add up to anything we had ever been told about him earlier. And I don't mean that in a nice way. But you have to admit that absolutely nothing stated in Kreacher's tale supports his brother's assertion that he was murdered by DEs.

We were told what purported to be a few facts about him earlier. But not a great many. Even fewer of these appear to hold up in the light of Kreacher's tale. We knew that he was younger than his brother Sirius, but until now, we did not know how much younger. The difference seems to be 3 years. We also *thought* we knew that he was murdered at some point in 1980. The date of his death was stated in OotP and having been recorded on the family's genealogical tapestry, and identified in the text as “some 15 years before” from the vantage point of August, 1995.

We now “know” that his death was in fact effectively suicide, and that it took place completely off everyone's radar. I still have a very hard time believing that Voldemort made a common practice of initiating schoolboys who were still living in dormitories into the ranks of his marked Death Eaters. I mean, why tag them with a summoning device when they can't even Apparate yet?

From Sirius's summary, Regulus was a “stupid idiot” who got in, got cold feet, and got killed for it. But then we already know that Sirius is not so hot at judging character, even if this

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is his own brother he's talking about, and now it sounds like he simply makes things up to suit himself! By the time we were given this information, Sirius was well beyond the point of trying to be fair-minded in any of his statements regarding the members of his own family. He had also had nothing to do with his family for something like 4 years before his brother's disappearance, and claims that he only found out what happened after his brother died. (How did he find out, exactly? Whatever he "discovered" seems to have been completely wrong.)

And Remus Lupin *backs him up* in this fantasy. "Regulus only evaded the DEs for about a week before they caught him." Well, according to Kreachur — who was *there* — no. He disappeared, the tapestry recorded his death, and no one ever knew anything of what had happened to him.

But Reggie does definitely seem to have signed on with Riddle. Tom Riddle has established a pattern of trying to make whoever he is attempting to influence believe that there is somehow a connection between himself and them. We've seen him try it with Harry. We learned that he surely did it with Barty Crouch Jr. We suspect he may have done it with Snape. All of which suggests an unprofitable, but irresistible side exploration of just who the Blacks were, particularly in relation to Tom Riddle.

We know that the Black Family can trace its descent back to the 13th century.

That's a rather long time, even among wizards.

If wizarding population reflects Muggle population, then even only 300 years ago when wizarding Seclusion was established the wizarding community was probably no more than a tenth of what it is now. 400 years earlier, that community

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would have been smaller yet.

The Blacks also seem to have become pureblood isolationists at a very early point indeed. Which gave them even fewer "acceptable" options for potential marriage partners within what was already quite a narrow range to select from. And within that narrow range of acceptable options, they were probably already related in some degree to many of the likely candidates. (Which probably explains the number of unmarried Blacks. There simply isn't a large enough pool of "eligible" connections.)

Including the Peverills?

Well, yes. *Perhaps*. Although the Peverills don't seem to have lasted anything like as long as the Blacks.

Especially since we have no way of knowing whether the Peverills were likely to be a part of that same narrow, pure-blood isolationist faction as early as the Blacks.

We only know that the Gaunts, who traced their descent from Slytherin also claimed descent from the Peverills. In fact, the Peverills sounded very much like they were the "high-water" mark of that family's former position of distinction and influence. Marvolo Gaunt was much quicker to flaunt his Peverill connections than his descent from Salazar Slytherin.

Who, when the ballots are all in, was only a schoolmaster, after all.

And we were also originally led to believe that the Peverills, like the Blacks, were armigers. That the ring's stone was supposedly engraved with a "coat-of-arms."

Post-DHs we know it was nothing of the sort. The stone was engraved with the sigil of the Deathly Hallows, and was

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reputed to have been a gift from Death himself. The Black family's coat of arms is more conventional, having, at some point, merely been granted, or permitted them through the conventional lines of governmental authority.

Well, you don't have to be titled in order to have an heraldic device recorded for your family. You just need to be successful at something. Or, at any rate that's been the case for some time now. Originally those devices were military insignia, used to mark one's position on a battlefield.

Until the 14th century or so, people more or less arbitrarily made up their own such devices, which would certainly have fallen within the time frame that the Blacks presumably acquired theirs. But once the Renaissance was stirring and everyone was obsessed by status, the Royal College of Heraldry started taking control of this process in order to protect the interests (and status) of those families whose devices were legitimately old, and really did trace back to a history of giving support to the crown in times of war. From that point on, a device was as much a matter of royal grant as a title would have been. In short, armigers may not always be titled, but just about all titled personages are armigers.

But such coats of arms have always been marks of *Muggle* distinction, awarded at the discretion of the (supposedly) Muggle ruler. Wizards, particularly wizards from the pureblood isolationist faction haven't been dealing with Muggles, or their governments any more than they could avoid for a long time, now.

From a meta standpoint the Peverill ring read like yet another traditional trapping that Rowling had tossed into the mix without much consideration for what it actually represented. Now,



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we supposedly know better. It was a legitimate magical artifact of uncertain provenance which at some — probably later — point in its history had been decorated with an exclusively wizarding symbol. A symbol which had at some point in time been taken up by a bunch of loons, which effectively disguised its authenticity.

Nevertheless, the Gaunts were stated (by Albus, so decide for yourself whether you can trust anything he tells you) to have had a pronounced taste for grandeur (which Riddle seems to have inherited) and even the possession of a purely Muggle coat-of-arms would have been a mark of distinction, and consequently worth flaunting.

A short-lived family of Real-World Peverills were said to have been descended from a bastard line attributed to William the Conqueror and granted lands and honors in Derbyshire (another possibility for the location of the Riddle house). Another set of Peverills was a Nottinghamshire family which appears to have survived for some time longer.

The Real-World John of Gaunt (actually Ghent) was one of the sons of Edward the 3rd. Indeed the son from whom the royal Lancastrian line descended; the line which usurped the throne of Richard II and produced Kings Henry IV, V, and VI. All of which came back to haunt them in the form of the evocatively named War of the Roses.

So, are the Blacks connected to the Gaunts?

Well, not closely. And certainly not recently. There are neither Gaunts nor Peverills on the section of the tapestry that we've seen (although there is a Potter). But the sketch we have only shows the last 5–6 generations of one branch of the family.



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Merely the last 150 or so of some 700 years. And we do not know for how long the Gaunts were in decline. Admittedly, given the tiny size of the wizarding community, there probably is a traceable connection to be found, if you go back far enough. Not that it would count for much by this time.

The fortunes of any family as old as the Blacks have probably risen and sunk any number of times over the centuries. There must have been a point or two that both the Blacks and the Gaunts (or the Peverills, or even the Slytherins) were at the same level at the same time and considered each other “eligible” connections. The Gaunt fortunes, acted Albus Dumbledore, ran out some generations upstream of Marvolo — who would have been born sometime in the latter half of the 19th century. From what we have in canon, his son and daughter were both born before 1910. A century or two earlier, around the time that Seclusion was imposed, the family may have been considered not merely “eligible” but “desirable” connections.

I suspect that an earlier portion of the Blacks’ genealogical tapestry might show such a connection. Which might explain why Riddle may have been interested in enthralling the Blacks and showed Bellatrix such marked attentions. These attentions were certainly not romantic. The lady already had a husband. Voldemort is her hero, not her lover, and she is his pet sycophant, not his mistress. Bellatrix was the eldest representative in her generation of a family whose pureblood magical ancestry was not that much less well established than his own. In fact it may very well be connected to his own. And *hadn’t* yet fallen into decline.

Tom spent a good deal of time at Hogwarts researching the

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wizarding “stud books” while he was trying to trace his own family. Once He managed to find the Gaunts, he very probably traced them until knew exactly who was related to who to a wider extent than most.

But none of the memories in the Riddle backstory that we saw openly mention a Black in association with young Tom Riddle. Nor do they mention a Malfoy. Still, that does not guarantee that such associations may not have been there.

And if the Black and the Gaunt families were not actually connected by blood, then they were connected by various other traditions, including the practice of marrying their cousins. Although, given the general interrelatedness of wizarding families, if you refuse to “marry out” with the incomers, then marrying one’s cousins seems to be all but unavoidable.



Before the release of HBP, in the essay regarding Sirius Black I had already alluded to the probability of a cousin marriage regarding the older Blacks, long before we ever saw that section of the family tapestry which conclusively established it. And, while the Gaunts certainly inbred themselves into a state of complete degeneracy, then the Blacks, if the conduct of the portrait of old Madam Black and Bellatrix’s (and even Sirius’s) general behavior are anything to go by, were no short distance down the same road.

The Blacks were certainly a far *handsomer* family than the Gaunts, and a number of them retained a fairly high degree of intelligence, but none of the ones we met seem to be exactly emotionally stable. (Although since the ones we’ve seen the

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most of were also addled by extended stays in Azkaban, it is difficult to make a definite statement on that issue.)

In fact, I'm half convinced that the whole introduction of the Gaunts into the narrative wasn't intended so much as a device to absolve the conduct of the elder Tom Riddle, or to stack the deck of inevitable monstrosity against the young Tom Marvolo Riddle, as to serve as a lens through which to examine not only the Blacks, but the rest of the whole pureblood extremist faction and their families.

In keeping with this, we have also been given some interesting suggestions posed by their names. On this subject we can't take much at face value, since we do not really know enough of wizarding conventions as regards the naming of their children to form any truly solid conclusions, but it still seems worth mentioning.

Families do appear to adopt certain naming styles. The Smiths appear to have adopted a tradition of giving their kids biblical-sounding names (Hepzibah, Zacharias) but we do not know that for sure. Those two names could be exceptions. Or a coincidence. They may not even be branches of the same family. There are a lot of Smiths, and they are not all related.

But we have noted that there is a pronounced tendency among wizards in general for botanical names, classical Latin and Greek names, or for names taken from various mythological pantheons. We have not, to this point, however, seem to have encountered anyone but people known to be connected to the Blacks who name their children after stars, or constellations of stars, in the sky — although this could just be yet another long-established wizarding tradition.



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If it is such a tradition however, it does not appear to be one which has been in broad use over the past 150 or 175 years among any other family which we have documentary evidence for. None of the names of the spouses of the last 6 generations of Black descendants appear to bear celestial names.

But, to our certain knowledge, about half of the members of the Black family that we have seen listed on that chart (and all of the men but Phineas Nigellus, his 2nd son and Marius the disowned Squib) *do* bear such names as: Sirius, Regulus, Alphard, and Arcturus, as well as Draco, Orion, and Cygnus (all constellations).

A great deal of effort has been expended to associate the name Rabastan (Bellatrix Lestrangle's brother-in-law) with Rastaban, a star also known as beta Draconis. I'm not altogether convinced by these efforts, but if this is the case, then it could indicate that Bellatrix and Rodolphus are another example of a marriage between cousins. Even if very distant ones. Bellatrix's husband is the only Lestrangle listed on that chart, which covers half a dozen generations.

But, the heavens help us, "Merope" is the name of one of the Pleiades. The group of stars referred to as the seven sisters, near the constellations of Taurus and Orion.

So which came first? Did a long ago Black marry into the Gaunts (or the Peverills), or a Peverill (or a Gaunt) marry into the Blacks and bring their naming customs with them? Or both? Or neither? And, for the third time, Echo answers us nothing.

"Morfin" otoh, when subjected to a Google search (back in the days that Google was still a viable search engine, rather than an ad listing) turned up the following, which seemed of interest:



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Surname:

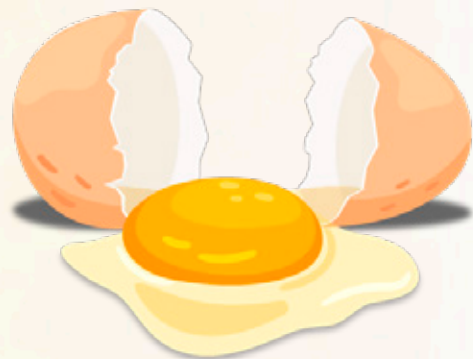
- 1 English and French: unexplained; possibly a variant of Morfey, an unflattering nickname meaning 'cursed', 'ill-omened', 'ill-fated', Medieval Latin malefatus. This surname is also established in Mexico.

Which offers yet another suggestive line of inquiry given the (perhaps quite spurious) similarities of Morfin/Morfey/malefatus/Malfoy (English *and* French). Which prompts one to take a second look at Voldemort's motivations in his entrusting of the Diary Horcrux to Lucius.

But to attempt to follow this line of reasoning any further is likely to be, as I said, unprofitable.

But we do now seem to be tripping over quite a number of very curious possibilities which Rowling turned loose when she chose to insert such an exaggeratedly grotesque element into the story as the House of Gaunt.

Until you take a closer look and realize that maybe it was not so exaggerated after all.



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Much of the following was explored over the course of a 4-way e-mail exchange with the LiveJournalists Professor_Mum, Swythyy, and beta-elf, over August and early September, 2007. The following has been reworked from my own contributions to this exchange. Most of it was in response from prompts made by the others, however.



Well. So. We now have the "official" Dumbledore backstory.

You will just have to excuse me for pointing out that I do not find the official Dumbledore backstory significantly more complete or any more convincing than the official Riddle backstory. Or, for that matter, the Potter backstory, or the Snape backstory. Maybe backstories just aren't Rowling's forte.

Or maybe she deliberately wants us to do the heavy lifting ourselves. I can live with that.

But in any case we've got some issues here. At least three major ones as far as I can make out.

First: there is the question of just what happened to Ariana.

Second: there is Albus's fatal brush with wizarding Supremacist politics.

And, third: where does Bathilda Bagshott fit into it. Because it is obvious that she does, but it is unclear as to where, or how (or why)



Until the first of September 2007 when Albus Dumbledore was featured as the Wizard of the Month on JK Rowling's



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old official website we also had the unanswered question of just what time frame all of this backstory was taking place in. Because nothing that Rowling showed us in DHs matched up with her claims, some years earlier, that Albus had been about 150 years old at the end of GoF. Everything she showed us was from the wrong period altogether.

Well, as Rowling finally 'fessed up, he wasn't any 150 years old, after all. He was 115. Although it came out to that because she flubbed the date of his death, which her site stated to have been in 1996. Er, sorry Jo. The tower tumble was in 1997. It took place in June, remember? Harry's 6th year only *began* in 1996.

We cannot be altogether certain just what the rationale was for changing these dates, but most fans attribute it to the otherwise implausible length of time before Albus could be shamed into finally confronting Gellert Grindelwald and taking him into custody. They could well be right. It would have been difficult to justify an ever-growing Dark rising in Eastern Europe that lasted from approximately 1860 to 1945 that no one seems to have ever had any cause to mention over the course of the series. And she was already stuck with 1945 as the year that Albus put a stop to it.

Although this particular muddle might explain those otherwise inexplicable comments in the first couple of books about Tom Riddle being "the most dangerous Dark wizard in a hundred years." A Gellert Grindelwald who launched his bid for power in the 1860s would certainly be 100 years earlier than a Tom Riddle who did the same in the 1960s.



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But until September 2007 we were flummoxed. We get a family portrait of the Dumbledores when Ariana was a baby "about the size of a loaf of bread." Their mother Kendra is described as wearing a high-necked silk gown. The two boys appear to be wearing what are unmistakably Fauntleroy suits. A classic late Victorian family portrait.

Well, okay. Get-ups resembling what are referred to as Fauntleroy suits had been worn by little boys with fanciful mothers for a good long while over the 19th century, but they are particularly associated with the 1880s, after Frances Hodgson Burnett wrote her tale of 7-year-old Cedric Errol, Little Lord Fauntleroy (serialized in *St Nicholas* magazine in 1885). And you would not have seen that specifically high-necked style of day dress much before the 1890s. Indeed, back in the 1840s the most distinguishing features of a woman's costume would have been the billowing full sleeves and the sloped shoulders. High-necked "Sunday best" day dresses only really became popular from the '70s on, cumulating in the whale-boned choker-style collars of the '90s and 1900s.

So, okay. We are told that the scandal over Percival's arrest and imprisonment was still fresh when Albus started Hogwarts, about a year after it took place. The scandal took place when Ariana was 6. Albus could not have been more than 5 years older than Ariana, and seems to have been more like 4. If Ariana was a baby in arms when high-necked day dresses and little boys' Fauntleroy suits were popular, that would have the photograph taken somewhere around 1885, give or take a bit. The Dumbledores also seem to have been fully conversant with Muggle fashion, apparently. But then if Kendra was indeed



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Muggle-born, this would hardly be surprising.

The only thing we have that would give us any kind of number to pin things to is the Weasley's Auntie Muriel, (aka "the Hag at the wedding" who claims to be 107. She will tell you so, in fact she already has. Repeatedly) listening at the door when her own mother and Bathilda Bagshott were discussing a glimpse that Bathilda had once got of Ariana and Kendra, and their mysterious deaths, which had taken place some time before. We do not know how old Muriel was when she was listening at that door. Presumably not over the age of 10, unless the conversation took place when she was home from Hogwarts during a term break.

If the conversation took place when she was 10, around 1900, and the photograph was taken in the mid-1880s, then Ariana, who died at the age of 14, would have been only recently dead. And Albus would have been no more than 18 at the time. And we have been told that he was still 17 when his mother was killed. (Evidently Albus, like Harry, had a summer birthday).

And NOTHING that we were told over the course of the book would give us any reason to question this speculation. It would have taken some 40 years before Grindelwald (who was about 16–17 when Ariana was killed) was enough of a problem on the continent that people were beginning to nag Albus to "do something" about it and another 5 before Albus was persuaded to comply with the general consensus that he was the best man for the job.

Which would make him about 64 at the time of their final duel, and 62 when we saw him in Tom Riddle's memory back in CoS. He would have been around 57 when he brought Tom his Hogwarts letter, and had just turned 100 when he left Harry



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on the Dursley's doorstep. None of which is implausible except for Rowling's completely unsupported interview comment that he was 150, made back during the 3-year summer.

So it was obvious that we needed to bag the "150 years old" along with the "epitome of goodness" thing even before September. Rowling may have meant it back when she said it, but she shot herself in the foot if she still meant it when she sat down and wrote the Weasley wedding.

Because Muriel clearly remembers Kendra Dumbledore. Calls her a terrifying old woman. (She probably chased all the neighbor kids away from the house so they wouldn't upset Ariana.) Even if Muriel was only 4 or 5 when she formed those memories and the eavesdropping was years later, her lifespan would have overlapped Kendra's, and Muriel is 107 in 1997.

Kendra died just when Albus finished Hogwarts. He might have even sat his NEWTs and left the school directly with Doge to set out on their Grand Tour before getting his results. He was almost immediately called home to deal with things, possibly even before Aberforth returned from Hogwarts. And it's pretty clear that Albus and Gellert were only friends for a matter of a couple of months over that same summer. Ariana most probably died at the end of the summer break, just before Aberforth was packed back off to Hogwarts.

Which would place Ariana's death in the summer of 1899. Muriel, who would have been born in 1890 would not yet have been at Hogwarts.

Muriel could have eavesdropped at any time over the following year. It was likely to have still been a talking point for some time afterwards. Indeed Bathilda, might not have been willing



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to say a great deal about it herself for a few months, given her great-nephew's presence at the time.



Which brings us back to Ariana.

As of the release of the film version of 'FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM' we can fairly safely conclude just what we are *supposed* to believe happened regarding Ariana. We all had something like a decade to try to figure it out ourselves before that, however.

A great many fans seem to have been determined to sexualize the attack and postulate that Ariana was gang-raped, and never got over the trauma. They are also determined to sexualize Aberforth and his goats. I am inclined to suspect that both of these issues are invitations to lead ourselves up the garden path.

In Aberforth's case, the manner in which Rowling answered a question posed by an 8-year-old during an appearance at Carnegie Hall in October 2007, in which she blatantly pretended that the answer she was giving an 8-year-old was not the answer she might have given an older questioner, contributed mightily to the general perception.

In point of fact I doubt that she would have answered the question in any way other than she did regardless of who asked it, but had the questioner been older, the joke would have been framed differently, by no doubt pointing out the presence of young children in the audience. While a joke of mocking the fact that it was a young child who was asking about Aberforth and his goats was in somewhat poor taste, the real joke seems more likely to have been upon the rest



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of the audience for being so sure that they already knew the answer. In point of fact, Rowling has never told us *anything* regarding 'Forth and his goats which would require us to regard it as the truth. (For the record I think Aberforth runs a nice little sideline of producing bezoars from his goats and may early on have botched an experimental charm to that end. Unless my postulation over in the Briar Patch regarding Aberforth and the goat is more to your taste.)

As for Ariana; I believe that the reasoning behind the usual attempt to explain her condition lies in the widespread belief that only a sexual attack would explain such an extreme traumatic reaction with such long-term effects.

It is my own suspicion that trying to blow up what we have been given into a rape scenario is a mistake. We have no evidence of a rape, no hint of a rape, and no reason to look for one. The kids who forced their way into the yard were children. Probably no older than Ariana's brothers.

And besides, you don't rape someone to stop them from performing magic. You hit them on the head.

And the fact that Ariana was never able to control her magic afterwards is a lot more suggestive to me of a brain trauma than an emotional one.

I have been assuming from the beginning that she suffered a head injury in the confrontation with those neighbor kids. After all, the ww already has a universal panacea for strictly emotional trauma, and it isn't the least bit hesitant to use it. Obliviate would have probably wiped the whole incident from her mind, and if the spell took more than just the incident, well, she was only six, and that's young enough to relearn a lot.



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Of course there is also the possibility that the Obliviate was botched. We've never heard that either Percival or Kendra had any training in medical magic. Bertha Jorkins showed long-term memory damage from a botched Obliviate inflicted by her employer. But she was still a witch and still performed magic. She even was still able to recognize Peter Pettigrew when she encountered him in Albania. A botched Obliviate alone would not explain Ariana's refusal to use her magic. Unless, perhaps, it was so thoroughly botched that she could no longer recognize that the magic was her own, and it terrified her.

But if there was an organic injury which made it impossible for Ariana to control her magic, that's another story.



Let's take another look at just what we have here. Aberforth states:

"When my sister was six years old, she was attacked, by three Muggle boys. They'd seen her doing magic, spying through the back garden hedge: She was a kid, she couldn't control it, no witch or wizard can at that age. What they saw, scared them, I expect. They forced their way through the hedge, and when she couldn't show them the trick, they got a bit carried away trying to stop the little freak doing it."

You "expect"?

And you just stood there and watched while three neighbor kids beat up your little sister? That really doesn't line up with anything we've ever been told about you, Aberforth.

You're busted, 'Forth. *You weren't there.* You'd slipped out through the hedge yourself and were off in a field butting heads with the goats or something. Maybe you were *supposed* to be



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there, keeping an eye on your sister, but you weren't.

And your story, as told, doesn't hang together or make much sense.

Did the Muggles hit her because she was doing magic and they were trying to make her stop, or because she couldn't do magic on their command? It isn't likely to have been both as you are trying to claim. Or was it because she told them that she couldn't teach them to do it too because they were Muggles, and they took it as an insult?

And if what they saw frightened them, why would they have forced their way into the yard to stop it? Wouldn't it have been more reasonable to expect them to have run away, and maybe spread a story which wouldn't have been believed?

I think that by the time you got home it was all over, and your father had already been hauled off to Azkaban.

So. Are you just relaying to us what your mother ("Secrets and lies, that's how we grew up,") told you, and randomly embroidering on it? Because it sounds like that to me.

And since Aberforth was only 7 or 8 at the time, himself, I doubt that Kendra went into detail. Ariana had been dead for nearly 100 years by the time we heard that story, and I wouldn't count upon even the most devoted brother remembering everything with perfect clarity by that time.



Y'know what this whole Dumbledore backstory is beginning to sound like to me? It begins to sound like a late iteration in a round of "Telephone"

I'm reminded of Tanith Lee's very first book, a juvie enti-



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tled 'THE DRAGON'S HOARD' (from 1974 or thereabouts). In it the two children of a royal family are lumbered with birthday curses by a witch, both of which are due to last for a full year, and since the curse on the Princess is likely to beggar the kingdom in that time, the Prince sets off (despite his own curse) to try to bring back a fortune to restore the exchequer when the year is over.

Along the way he joins a band of about 50 Princes and young Lords and other questers, who all set off together to win the Dragon's hoard.

In one of the little kingdoms where one of the secondary Princes joins up, the King makes an announcement that whoever finds the Hoard and secures it shall marry that kingdom's Princess (a hopelessly silly girl, with lapdogs, iirc)..

"But you haven't got to, if you'd rather not." Her brother whispers to the hero, "That's only father's idea. Pass it on."

So the message gets passed on until it reaches the last of them, a king's son from somewhere, named Silius, who pops up asking what; "Buttered on one toe, if you drove a nut. That's sunny for the side ear. Parsley scone," meant.



Which raises the whole issue of just how much of the public record has been altered to serve the family's determination to shield Ariana, and why.

We've got a 6-year old witch here, who has been attacked by three other children. How do you think she is going to react?

Why did Uncle Algie threaten to drop Neville off the Black-pool pier? Why did he dangle him out the window? Because he



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was trying to frighten some magic out of him, that's why. Harry ended up on top of the roof of the school kitchens when he was in a similar situation (Dudley's gang hadn't managed to get hold of him yet). I think we've got a much simpler explanation than an outraged father seeking revenge, right under our noses.

I think it was *Ariana* who injured the Muggles, in a violent burst of accidental magic. Percival (deliberately) took the blame.

In his case, the knowledge that he was innocent of the actual crime probably wasn't enough to save him from the Dementors. He also was not an Animagus and was not able to escape the Dementors effects by shifting into animal form as Sirius did.

And at any rate, the fact that Ariana unquestionably was the one to have inadvertently killed their mother would certainly support the possibility that she *could* have been the one to injure the Muggles who attacked her.



So let's try that reading on for size:

The Ministry would have been alerted almost at once, Mould-on-the-Wold is only a semi-wizarding village, and accidents do happen. The whole village would have been monitored for untoward magical outbursts, and certainly for anything like an attack on Muggles.

I think it was Percival who got to Ariana first, because he was closest — and it was probably more than just Ariana's screams that brought him on the run, the Muggles were screaming too.

But I don't think that Kendra and Albus were far away. For one thing, would Aurors have hauled Percival away and left Ariana in the house alone? Would they have left her there with-



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out even examining her and getting her story of what had happened? Especially if she had been injured. She would at least be assumed to have been frightened.

Albus (who Aberforth's account makes sound a hell of a lot like Percy Weasley) may have just been up in his room, reading. Kendra might have just been in the kitchen, up to her elbows in something. But Percival got there first.

I think Kendra scooped Ariana up and bundled her into the house and out of sight before the Ministry made its appearance.

Which now makes me wonder just how far we may be leading ourselves up the garden path. If the Muggle boys were on the Dumbledore property, having pushed through the hedge, wouldn't there have been a question raised of defense against trespassers? Even if the trespassers did turn out to only be children? Would that have really sent a householder to Azkaban? Or are we still missing something?



I think we may be.

Even the Ministry wouldn't haul a 6-year old off to Azkaban for a piece of accidental magic. Not even if it injured someone.

I *do* think the Ministry may have been in one of its Muggle-protective cycles around then, and demonizing wizards who attacked Muggles (particularly for no obvious cause — other than perhaps trespassing) may have been SOP. Such behavior would have rocked the boat and endangered secrecy, of course. And, for that matter, Aberforth brings up the point that Ariana would have been regarded as a security risk if anyone knew of her condition.



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Except that her "condition" presumably hadn't manifested yet. Not if the Muggles' attack is really what caused it.

So why did Percival sacrifice his life, liberty and sanity by leaping into the breach in his daughter's defense if she is unlikely to have been held responsible for her actions?

Ariana's brothers (who don't seem to have actually been on the spot at the time of the original attack) were certainly told *something*. Enough that it is clear that neither of them despised their father for his alleged crime, at least. And neither of them ever allowed any question to arise that it was anyone *other* than their father who had injured the Muggles. Certainly not Ariana herself. In fact, so long as Kendra was alive only the family's most intimate acquaintances (if any) were even aware of Ariana's existence.

But we cannot be sure just what or how much Ariana's brothers were actually told. Aberforth was aware of the fact that first the Muggles had hurt or frightened Ariana. But he doesn't make it a bit clear just how much time all of this attack, counter-attack, and arrest is supposed to have actually covered.

I am inclined to think it all took place right there in the Dumbledores' back garden, with the Ministry alerted all but immediately when the magical attack took place (much as when Harry blew up his Aunt Marge). And both of the brothers were pretty much sworn to secrecy on the matter. They seem not to have ever questioned that Ariana needed to be kept hidden afterwards, and no one seems to have questioned the reading that she would have ended up in the locked ward in St Mungos if anyone had ever gotten a good look at her.

But, in fact, from everything that anyone has ever had to say



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of the matter it sounds very much as if no qualified Healer or mediwitch ever saw Ariana. Not even in the immediate aftermath of the assault. The family was determined to cover up even the fact that there had *been* an assault.

Which, in a way, might tend to support the general determination to read the assault as a sexual assault. That does make it seem more believable that the family would attempt to hush the matter up, if there were perceived to be something shameful about the attack in itself. However the determined insistence in all accounts upon the youth of the Muggles who attacked Ariana would appear to discount the likelihood of the attack being anything of the sort. The matter still appears to have been a case of an assault made upon a child by three other children.

So just what were the Dumbledores all hiding?



It is fairly astonishing just what kids will accept as “normal” when they are young enough not to question their own family situations. But I will have to admit that I am not altogether convinced from Aberforth’s account that the attack really was the cause of Ariana’s condition. He claims that it was and we seem to be expected to draw that conclusion. Most readers do.

But given the ww’s tolerance for all but the most extreme of head cases, how can we be sure that the violent incident when she was six was the real cause of Ariana’s problems? Her own family seem to have been suspiciously quick to assume that the incident was going to have long-term effects, regardless of what they did in response to it.



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Maybe we are all looking in the wrong direction.

Aberforth Dumbledore’s existence was first introduced to us in GoF, along with the tale of his having been formally called to account for practicing inappropriate charms on a goat, and his brother Albus’s comment that he wasn’t sure that Aberforth knew how to read.

That was all the way back in the year 2000. Rather a lot of readers have since postulated various developmental and/or learning disabilities in connection with both of these matters. We have been shown nothing in canon that would absolutely contradict any of these postulations.

Somewhat more recently, on one of my listgroups there was a debate running off-and-on begining some months before DHs came out, as to whether Albus himself might have had Asperger’s syndrome.

Because, for all his cleverness, he certainly doesn’t seem to understand people’s feelings very well, or to really know how to relate to people, or to treat people appropriately, if it comes to that. And as pointed out by the “list mom” he seems completely careless of how his behavior comes across to other people, even when that carelessness clearly harms his own interests.

This discussion also finally spun off the subject of Albus to round up the possibility of ADHD, possibly with dyslexia, as being a factor for Aberforth.

Given that such conditions as ADHD, dyslexia, and Autism/Asperger’s tend to cluster and combine, and tend to run in families raises the question as to whether the encounter with the three Muggle neighbor kids had much of *anything* to do with Ariana’s condition.



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It wouldn't have helped. That's for damned sure. But it may have done no more than to aggravate an underlying condition. Maybe we have to finally question as to whether, whatever the problem was, if it might not have already been pre-existing.

The rest of the family seemed awfully certain that the girl would end up locked up in St Mungo's if anyone ever got a good look at her, didn't they? They certainly oughtn't to have thought that from any purely physical injury. And with two other head-cases of varying degrees sitting right there at the family table...

Well, now that the possibility of something "running in the family" has been brought up, maybe we ought to take another look at Ariana. *And* Kendra, *and* Percival, for that matter.

A few snippets from the Wikipedia entries on Autism and related pathologies:

Autism is one of the five autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). Of the other four autism spectrum disorders, Asperger's syndrome is closest to autism in signs and likely causes; Rett syndrome and childhood disintegrative disorder share several signs with autism but may have unrelated causes; finally, pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) is diagnosed when the criteria are not met for a more specific disorder. Unlike autism, Asperger's has no significant delay in language development.

ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorders) can sometimes be diagnosed by age 14 months, but a 2006 U.S. study found the average age of first evaluation by a qualified professional was 48 months and of formal ASD diagnosis was 61 months, reflecting an average 13-month delay, all far above recommendations.



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Early studies of twins estimated heritability to be more than 90%; in other words, that genetics explains more than 90% of autism cases. This may be an overestimate; new twin data and models with structural genetic variation are needed. When only one identical twin is autistic, the other often has learning or social disabilities. For adult siblings, the risk of having one or more features of the broader autism phenotype might be as high as 30%, much higher than the risk in controls. As late as the mid-1970s there was little evidence of a genetic role in autism; now it is thought to be one of the most heritable of all psychiatric conditions.

(And while we are at it; regarding Asperger's Syndrome:)

Named after the Austrian pediatrician Hans Asperger (1906–80), Asperger syndrome is a relatively new diagnosis in the field of autism. In 1944, Asperger described four children in his practice who had difficulty in integrating themselves socially. Although their intelligence appeared normal, the children lacked nonverbal communication skills, failed to demonstrate empathy with their peers, and were physically clumsy. Asperger called the condition "autistic psychopathy" and described it as primarily marked by social isolation. He called his young patients "little professors," and believed they would be capable of exceptional achievement and original thought later in life. His paper was published during wartime and in German, so it was not widely read elsewhere.

The lack of demonstrated empathy is possibly the most dysfunctional aspect of Asperger syndrome. Individuals with AS experience difficulties in basic elements of social



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interaction, which may include a failure to develop friendships or enjoy spontaneous interests or achievements with others, a lack of social or emotional reciprocity, and impaired nonverbal behaviors such as eye contact, facial expression, posture, and gesture.

Unlike those with autism, people with AS are not usually withdrawn around others; they approach others, even if awkwardly, for example by engaging in a one-sided, long-winded speech about an unusual topic while being oblivious to the listener's feelings or reactions, such as signs of boredom or wanting to leave. This social awkwardness has been called "active, but odd." This failure to react appropriately to social interaction may appear as disregard for other people's feelings, and may come across as insensitive. The cognitive ability of children with AS often lets them articulate social norms in a laboratory context, where they may be able to show a theoretical understanding of other people's emotions; however, they typically have difficulty acting on this knowledge in fluid real-life situations. People with AS may analyze and distill their observation of social interaction into rigid behavioral guidelines and apply these rules in awkward ways—such as forced eye contact—resulting in demeanor that appears rigid or socially naive. Childhood desires for companionship can be numbed through a history of failed social encounters.



What if Ariana was to some degree autistic?



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Because this whole discussion is raising the possibility that Ariana might have gone on to have had major problems even if that hedge had been impenetrable. Does what we have been told of her problems sound like (actually fairly severe) autism to you? It sounds like it might be to me.

And the family still cannot bear to admit that she was born that way?

Of course not! Blame the Muggle neighbor boys, who got into the garden and upset the apple cart!

But then blaming someone else for the fact that something has gone wrong with your (inadequate) security measures seems to be pretty standard operational procedure for the whole Dumbledore family, doesn't it? Even Aberforth's shifting of the responsibility for the final act of the tragedy onto Albus may not be unrelated to some unacknowledged feeling of guilt for having not been there when his sister was attacked in the first place.

And since such neurological conditions *do* run in families, maybe there is some additional contributing factor to account for the thoroughly *inappropriate* measures taken by Ariana's family to apply damage control. After all, the kids would probably have inherited whatever the problem actually was through one of their parents. One wonders whether Kendra or Percival might have had a sibling or an uncle locked up in the attic when they were growing up. The very *kind* of secrets and lies Kendra specialized in would certainly suggest that she may have grown up concealing something nasty in the family closet, herself. Something which in the 1890s would have been interpreted as insanity in the family.



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Which, once it occurs to you, points out just how hopelessly inept Kendra's actions appear to have been, in uprooting the family from Mould-on-the-Wold, where they were known, and had at least some degree of community support, and hauling them off to Godric's Hollow, and, finally, attempting to conceal even her daughter's existence.

From any practical point of view that was a *stupid* set of actions. It certainly did not improve her daughter's quality of life, and served only to isolate her sons.

People back in Mould-on-the-Wold remembered that Ariana existed, although no one remembered ever seeing the child do magic. Which isn't all that surprising. Most wizarding children are raised within a considerable degree of isolation and probably do not know very many people outside their immediate families until they get to Hogwarts. And the Dumbledores don't sound particularly gregarious. Mould-on-the-Wold may also be more in line with the Ottery St Catchpole model where the wizarding community lives out in the country some distance from both each other and their Muggle neighbors rather than that of Godric's Hollow where wizards and Muggles appear to live all mixed in together.

Godric's Hollow would appear to be the last place one would choose to take a child who it is necessary to sequester away from both Muggles and wizards.

Most people in Godric's Hollow didn't even know that Ariana existed until they brought her coffin out of the house for burial. I think Bathilda was the only one who ever caught a glimpse of her. And that was from peeking through yet another hedge.

But, knowing nothing of Kendra's own background, we

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cannot overlook the possibility that she had uprooted her family from her husband's part of the country and returned to what had been her own childhood home. Even though there appear to have been no remaining relatives of Kendra's for the children to have interacted with.



Added to which; regardless of whether or not Ariana's underlying problem may have been something that she had been born with, if that attack did involve anything like a head trauma, that could have added a whole new layer of complexity to the situation.

A bump on the head is not necessarily a minor matter. Those can cause long-range neurological effects.

Like seizure disorders.

Y'know, I don't even want to try to contemplate the possible result of magically generated (or enhanced) seizures.



The question of just what happened to Ariana is unlikely to get any further explanation than what we already have. And I think that a final answer on that subject is likely to remain inconclusive.

In the matter of Albus and his youthful entanglement with Supremacist politics we have rather more to work from.

Mind you, the whole political picture of the ww is hopelessly bollixed by Rowling's determination to claim that the political backdrop is whatever she wants it to be whenever she wants it to be, even if the various pictures are diametrically opposed

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to one another. I get the strong impression of a kid who likes to draw pictures of her characters, drawing them without any kind of background, because “that’s too hard” and she isn’t *interested* in the backgrounds. Thinking erroneously that she can say the background is whatever she feels like, to any specific picture without realizing that if the characters are all a part of one set, the backgrounds need to connect.

But the speed at which the Ministry was able to unilaterally disenfranchise a full quarter of the population without public outcry in the final volume of the series makes no sense whatsoever against the fact that we never got even the slightest hint that there was any legal impediment to Muggle-born participation in any level of wizarding society prior to about chapter 13 of DHs.



For that matter, this far downstream of the closing of canon, it becomes easier to just throw up one’s hands at any attempt to “read” the issue of British wizarding politics, and just conclude that for Albus it was always all about the Hallows.

It wasn’t just Supremacist politics that Albus got a thorough trouncing over at the end of his first summer out of Hogwarts. He and Gellert had gone thoroughly, completely, and utterly Hallows-mad over the course of that summer, and all of their hot air and blue-sky pie over eventually ruling the world was subordinate to what they were going to do with themselves after first going off together adventuring to find the cursed things.

I think in the aftermath of Ariana’s death and Aberforth’s repudiation it wasn’t just Gellert’s vision of ruling the world

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that Albus ended up taking a strong aversion to, but to the Hallows also.

I rather think that after that summer, he veered off from anything to do with the Hallows until 1945 and Gellert turned one of them over to him.

After which he suffered a major relapse.

Still, it would probably be a bad idea to just completely dismiss the political reading of the situation. So I will attempt to make some kind of headway with it.



As I have stated in the ‘Wizards and Muggles: Post-Seclusion’ essay, there are at least three clearly identifiable factions duking it out across the political landscape of the wizarding world by the end of the 20th century. Each of which is likely to have its own internal splinter groups.

I think that Swythyv’s “Merlinists” (members of the Order of Merlin) must be something more like an elite Order than an actual political faction. They are probably as old as the Isolationists, in fact may be older if they claim that Merlin himself founded their Brotherhood. But since they are older, they went through their “transformation” process earlier. Their natural descendants are the current day Inclusionists. Much as it appears that the Supremacists are winning the hearts and minds of the descendants of the Isolationists. The Inclusionists are what the original Merlinists became. Merlin, after all, worked out in the open and held down a Muggle government office. Or what effectively was indistinguishable from such.

But being openly proud of being a wizard from a family of

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wizards doesn't necessarily imply anything beyond a strong sense of family feeling, or a tendency to be rather full of yourself. For example: it is obvious that Arthur Weasley is the last wizard on earth to think Muggles only exist to be tormented by wizards, but there is no doubt in his mind whatsoever that he is superior to them.

Given the tacit Muggle-protective agenda built into the Order of Merlin (I am fully in agreement with Swythv on this point), Isolationism is likely to have always been founded on an abandonment of that particular responsibility. Since I suspect the worst of the early Isolationists had very good reason to fear or distrust Muggles, their attitude towards Muggles would have been much in tune with Hermione's comment that goblins don't *need* to be protected. And families like the Blacks may well have been inordinately proud of their wizarding lineage long before they fell into the Isolationist mindset. (And later walked right into a Supremacist trap.)

But, traditional as they may well be, the purely Isolationist faction is a dying breed. They are being whittled away by attrition.

Which may go some way towards the vulnerability of their young to get swept up in the oh-so-similar rhetoric of the Supremacists. At this point in time, both factions show a very real bias in favor of purebloods (the Supremacists actually less than the Isolationists, clearly) and both are determined to demonize Muggle-borns. For the Isolationists, the Muggle-born appear to be a legitimate threat. For the Supremacists they are a handy scapegoat.

At some future point in time, to the Supremacists merely having magic at all will undoubtedly be enough. But right now,

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attempting to whip up $\frac{3}{4}$ of the population against incomers will pay a greater dividend in pulling your following together. And will eliminate the sector of the population most likely to raise objections when the attention gets turned to subjugating the Muggle world outside.

Any remaining die-hard "original" Merlinist is a walking anachronism. Or a raging eccentric, much in the style of Xeno Lovegood. I do not know what "order" he identifies with in his quest for the Deathly Hallows, but it appears to be a part of a very old tradition.

The ruling branch of the Black family was another anachronism. Empty traditionalism is a good description of the Blacks. Very pure in their Isolationist rhetoric, and completely out of touch with the demands of the present day. Quite willing to blast anyone off the family tapestry who doesn't toe the party line. But never stopping to think of what any of it actually means in the long run. Clearly the adoption of Isolationist rhetoric by Supremacists has flown under their radar. Members of the family have been taking up Supremacist causes for generations without reprisal from the Head of the family.



The thing is, that wizards with Supremacist mindsets have certainly always been around, but they were more likely to be individual cases or very small groups before Seclusion was actually imposed. There must have always been the odd wizard here or there who thought that he had the right to rule everyone around him. But back then, apart from his own family or local area, the average wizard only knew about the wizards

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he had been at school with and that probably didn't encourage anyone to try to influence all of them to organize a takeover.

Once Seclusion was established, however, wizards were living in closer proximity to each other and had a clearer idea of who other wizards were.

And the (up to DHs) current official Inclusionist policy of tying to soft-pedal the dangers that Muggles represent — in order to soothe and placate the Isolationists — has made it all too easy to underestimate Muggles and hold them in contempt. Maybe a bit more attention ought really to be turned to the fact that the (apparently) last word in wizarding historical analysis seems to have come from Bathilda Bagshott, whose own family produced one of the most notorious wizarding Supremacists in the last century. The Inclusionists policy of placating the Isolationists has virtually encouraged the rise of the Supremacists.

And for their part, the Supremacists are not by any means yet what they will someday become. They are still a developing movement. Not an established one. They have yet to manage to legitimately put themselves fully in power. But they are not going to go away, and at some point they WILL legitimize themselves. And then there will be hell to pay.

And no one is doing anything to redirect this momentum. Grindelwald failed. I think that Supremacism went underground in eastern Europe by the end of WWII. Assuming that there even was a WWII in the Potterverse. There was a war in Eastern Europe, but we don't know that it compared with our WWII. We only know of a couple of DEs with names that hail from that region, and only one of those had definite ties there. Voldemort failed, and Supremacism is likely to go under-



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ground in Britain for a generation or so. But it will be back and it would be a good idea if the rising generations by then were getting some version of history more balanced than Bagshott's and that they are being taught by someone rather more qualified to bring it to life.

One wonders whether the history texts that preceded Bagshott's were just as distorted and contemptuous of their human heritage. Those would have been the ones that Albus learned from.

Or maybe Albus also learned history from one of Bathilda's earlier works. She was old enough to have written others.



And while on the subject of Albus: he was, oh but definitely brought up an Inclusionist. They were holding the flag at the time, and Kendra was allegedly Muggle-born. I don't recall off the top of my head if it was originally Bathilda or Muriel (or, hell, Rita) who volunteered the idea that she was Muggle-born and trying to deny it, but whoever it was was not paying her a compliment.

Albus got swept into an incipient Supremacist movement (via a personal attachment), right on the ground floor and was violently disabused from it before it actually got started. It all took no more than a couple of months. And even when Ariana died, on his side it was probably still nothing more than talk.

I think he just reverted to his original upbringing in the wake of that.

He got his nose thoroughly rubbed in the fact that the "greater good" he had been extrapolating with Gellert Grindelwald was



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not good, or, certainly not good *for him*. But I think that he never quite worked the issue through beyond point C to point D.

Once he realized that what he had wanted to do was wrong — and I'm not *altogether* sure he even *did* realize that, only that trying to do it with GG was a bad idea which would have never worked, he seems to have tried to climb up inside his head and never come out.

He lost his sister from getting mixed up with Gellert, and he effectively lost his brother as well, for a good many years. And, having had his confidence in his own judgment shaken, he backed off from ever really trying to accomplish *anything* — and excusing his abandonment of any kind of responsibility by telling himself that he wasn't really fit to hold power, since he wanted it too much.

Yet any power he was given he clutched to himself, and never learned to delegate, or even to designate a successor. Nor does he seem to have ever realized that his aversion to making an open bid for temporal power, did not mean that he had relinquished his ultima thule of there *being* a "greater good." He merely redefined it as the "status quo" of his childhood. Albus's inclusionary policies, I now think were not radical in the least. They were no more than the straightforward textbook definition of the openly stated Ministry policy, circa about 1900.



He did seem to realize that what he had been so smug about being qualified to do at 17 — i.e., to dictate how everyone else ought to live their lives — was false reasoning, and that he *wasn't* qualified to guide the masses for their own good. But he

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seems to have taken that realization as an excuse to opt out of the whole business of ever really connecting with anybody, or trying to make anything better for anyone.

And as he grew older, and people kept cumulatively handing him offices of authority, he showed no hesitation in falling right back into the habit of laying down the law as to how people were to conduct themselves.

The biggest mystery in the series now seems to be why he ever bothered to put himself out on little Remus Lupin's account in '71. Even though his security measures were grossly inadequate to the dangers inherent in the situation. Post-DHs the "experiment" certainly doesn't seem at all in character. (One now wonders whether the Lupins were friends of Flamel's, or at least known to him. I am in agreement with Swythiv that Flamel was probably one of the few people that could have convinced Albus to do anything he didn't initially want to.)

Tom Riddle deliberately mutilated his own soul in pursuit of a false agenda. Albus seems to have been determined to deny he had a heart. In the end, he was as clueless about how to treat people as Severus Snape seems to have been. He made a total fool of himself and he does not appear to have ever realized it. Not even when we finally met him in the purgatory of Harry's virtual King's Cross Station. (Which I don't think Albus is ever going to be able to leave, and he will probably be spending the rest of time there with the wailing remnant of Tom Riddle.)



So. Once we realize that Albus was never a visionary pioneer in wizard/Muggle relations, it becomes obvious that he has to

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have picked his stated views up somewhere. It seems likely that after he realized he had been conspiring with a kid who had Napoleonic ambitions (remember to fold Gellert's newspaper hat into a bicorn shape), he simply backpedaled and adopted the views under which he had been raised. The Ministry must have been in a particularly progressive and Muggle-protective cycle back around the turn of the 20th century.

Yet even when he had fallen under the influence of a charming boy with a Supremacist agenda he couldn't help but give the whole rhetoric an Inclusionist spin. "The Greater Good" is a very traditional justification for that kind of thing. Kipling was a little less vague in his terminology. He came right out and called it the "White Man's Burden." Oh, the responsibilities of the poor European! Forced, just positively *forced*, to rule those ignorant natives in less developed parts of the world, for their own good!

It's pure Colonialism, in all of it's self-interested, and self-absorbed glory.

And once you consider the date we are talking about, the summer of 1899, one can hardly wonder at it, can one? Even if Albus had been raised by Muggles he'd probably have spun it in *exactly* the same direction he did in order to make it sound palatable.

And some time later, by the time he decided to start putting it into action, Gellert remembered that. And when he did start his rise he used it. Albus was his best buddy for all of about 2 months when they were 16 and 17 respectively, and they never saw each other again until 1945, but Gellert incorporated Albus's spin on his goals for his public state-



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ments. Albus had unwittingly facilitated Grindelwald's rise to power. Small wonder he was so ashamed. ("If you can bear to hear the UNtruths you've spoken/twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools...")

But yes, to whichever of my correspondents pointed it out (probably Swythyv), Albus Dumbledore has been a lot more familiar with both of the most recent scenery-chewers than is altogether appropriate.

And his own past history with both of them probably paralyzed him to the point that he refused to take any responsibility for what was happening. *Both* times. He may have a public reputation for supporting second chances. But Tom Riddle was *his* second chance, and he bungled it.



What seems to have sent the balloon up in 1899, was Gellert throwing Crucio at Aberforth. Aberforth had raised a major stink about their plan to haul Ariana out of the home she was used to and to pack her off, willy-nilly across Europe, while Albus and Gellert became Masters of the Universe.

The Crutiatus didn't last long, Albus managed to put a stop to it, but the confrontation then turned into a 3-way magical brawl. Ariana tried to "help" her favorite brother, 'Forth. Neither Albus, Gellert or Aberforth knew which of their spells hit her.

(If any of them did. With the Obscural card now in play, her own magic may have just blown her up. Conveniently letting all three of the boys off the hook.)

One first supposes that whatever curses were being thrown by all three of them were potentially fatal if no one knew who



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actually killed Ariana. Unless something simply knocked her down and she died of that, which is certainly possible.

Even Gellert may have only been throwing Expelliarmus at her. Or something similar, since he knew she didn't own a wand (unless she had picked up Aberforth's). Although in the heat of the moment, and under magical attack, none of the participants may have been thinking clearly. But Expelliarmus is a useful and fairly common first reaction. What appears to be likely is that even Gellert didn't intend to *kill* her.

Gellert ran home to his aunt Batty, in deep distress, and begged to go home. She had arranged for a portkey and he'd made his escape before any questions could be asked. And Albus wasn't about to speak to anyone of what had really happened. Nor was Aberforth.



The main problem with Albus isn't that he was ever willfully evil, it's that he didn't really understand how to deal with people except within a fairly narrow range of behaviors.

Despite the character assassination to which he was subjected over the course of DHs, I still don't think that Albus qualifies as "intelligent evil," although he certainly did enough harm for some people to come to that conclusion. He was just thoroughly wrongheaded in his intentions to do well. For he did *intend* to do well. But he sure didn't seem to recognize what "doing well" is actually composed of.

He understood being admired for his wits and he felt he honestly deserved any acclaim he won by them, and he probably was not wrong — as far as that goes.



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He had a vague understanding that the whole family was responsible for Ariana's welfare, but Kendra had probably never enlisted Albus to help with Ariana. Aberforth had already volunteered for that duty. Which left Albus isolated and alone outside the little secret circle of three, even though he did know what it was about.

Unfortunately, Kendra died when Albus was barely finished with school. If Aberforth was 3 years behind Albus, he would have only just finished 4th year. He had not yet sat his OWLs and was not qualified for anything within their world. It is small wonder that someone who lived inside his head the way Albus did would not hear of Aberforth leaving school to take care of their sister, once he was titularly in charge of the family. Regardless of how lame his own notions of what the proper way of dealing with the situation might have been.

Despite being the one to contribute applying the concept of "The Greater Good" spin to a Supremacist movement, Albus was not the driver of Gellert's budding Supremacist rising. He was already out of the loop by then, and he was in essence, a dupe. His awakening although violent and quick, would have been on the menu soon enough in any case, quite possibly before Gellert actually started driving his bid for power anyway. I tend to doubt that Albus would have willingly been a party to burglarizing Gregorovitch's workroom and stealing the Elder Wand.

There has been a lot of foofaraugh across the internet over Rowling's posthumous "outing" of Albus Dumbledore as being gay, and her statement that he had in fact fallen into a violent infatuation with Gellert Grindelwald, but while this infor-



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mation certainly adds to the overall poignancy of the whole unhappy situation, it adds comparatively little to the narrative as it stands in the book. True, knowing the proper context of that particular overheated friendship, is of some value, but there is no reason to explore the matter further. The primary damage is not so much that he fancied himself in love with Gellert Grindelwald, but that he didn't realize that just because his friend was unquestionably bright, that he necessarily had a proper way of thinking.

One doesn't get the impression that Albus recognized the existence of any similar minds to his own at Hogwarts. There may really not have been any at that particular point in time. Consequently his whole experience of people outside his family circle were dim-bulb sycophants like Doge, or the eminent experts that he was in correspondence with. Who, however much they might regard him as brilliant or clever would naturally have regarded him as an untried youngster.

Gellert was the first clever clogs he had ever met who was his own age. And Gellert (who seems to have been every bit as handsome, reckless, and charismatic as Sirius Black — which when one stops and considers it, might have had some impact on Albus's willingness to believe Black to have betrayed the Potters) knew how to play the situation. Plus, they were both of them obsessed with the legend of the Deathly Hallows. Gellert tossed Albus an "idea" bone of what they would do with them if they had them, and Albus was after it like a puppy. I doubt the whole business of ruling the world for the "greater good" was ever altogether real to Albus. He was just sitting back with his wonderful new friend bullshitting, spinning the-



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ories and exploring bright gaudy possibilities exactly the same way all of us online are. He didn't realize that for Gellert it all was real, and that he intended to go out and do it.

Even the plan to drag Ariana across Europe, to Albus, was probably no more than a chance to finally take his delayed Grand Tour.

With a lovely side dish of going a-questing after the Deathly Hallows.



Grindelwald's actions and motives are more of a puzzle. Although not the ones he was propounding at 16, certainly. There was not much to choose between Gellert at 16 and, say, Lucius Malfoy. Or any of the other high-functioning DEs.

But we don't actually get told anything about that final face-off between him and Albus until we meet Albus in King's Cross. And Albus tells us there only that he won their duel. (Which one suspects Flamel, and probably the ICW, had shamed Albus into undertaking.)

Well, Albus was a very able wizard. But you would think that a rising Dark Lord with an invincible wand would be rather harder than that to defeat. If, that is, he decided to actually fight you.

I really rather suspect that if we had had access to the whole content of Rita Skeeter's unauthorized biography of Albus, Rowling's October 2007, announcements at Carnegie Hall wouldn't have come as any sort of a surprise. Conjured a white handkerchief and came quietly? Perhaps.

And while we are on the subject, it took the WW five years to convince Albus to undertake that meeting. How on earth is



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that supposed to fit into the picture of a global war that Rowling insists that Grindelwald's rising was? What on earth is Rowling thinking? That the whole WW and all the combined Ministries of Europe were united in begging one High School teacher to come and solve their Dark Lord problem for them?

Single-handedly?

I have stated in several places across this collection that Rowling's sketch of the Grindelwald "war" is as leaky as a sieve.

A "global" war, such as she has claimed that it was, is simply not resolved in a single one-on-one duel. The whole "Dark Lord Grindelwald" thread is another piece of underdeveloped nonsense from Rowling.

He allegedly raised a following, murdered people all across Eastern Europe, and built a prison for his enemies, and the Muggles of Europe didn't even notice?

And the wizards of Britain sighed, averted their eyes, and decided that it simply wasn't their problem? (A global war, except of course for Britain, evidently. Right.)

And just when is Albus supposed to have gone off to fight Gellert? Easter break? Or did he get to wait until summer after the Muggle war (assuming there was one) was already over? He was still holding down a day job in 1945, after all.

If we absolutely have to have some form of a Dark uprising headed by Gellert Grindelwald, what I suspect is that Gellert either had already overreached himself, or was on the brink of doing so.

For that matter, what I REALLY think is that Grindelwald's whole movement was probably a shambles by then, his supporters had abandoned him, and that it was only the fact that



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he was the current holder of the Deathstick that had kept himself from capture.

That's how Albus could justify his refusal to answer the call. That by that time Gellert was only one wizard, and that someone else could be the one to face him.

And did Gellert legitimately lose that duel, or did the wand turn against him, too? It's been observed to do that, you know. Chooses its owner in the middle of a duel, that is. Or, was it just that now the Muggle war was winding down, had Gellert realized that he had painted himself into a corner and getting clapped up in his own prison was the best of his options?



And then, there is the question of his Mark. Gellert was familiar with the sigil of the Deathly Hallows — which has been known for centuries — well before he was thrown out of Durmstrang. So we know that it already had significance to him before he ever set foot in Britain. Indeed, the Hallows were their initial common ground and the basis of his and Albus's *folie a deux*. That Ignotus Peverill is buried in the Godric's Hollow graveyard probably was not an irrelevance to either of them.

We do not know just when Gellert first heard the rumors spread by Gregorovitch, that he had acquired the Elder Wand. But it was soon enough after he ran away from the Dumbledores that he was still visibly young when he stole it. We do not know exactly when he launched his bid for power, either. But when he did, he adopted the sigil of the Deathly Hallows as his personal Mark. Which could have been in the nature of a boast to those who recognized it. And there would have been a lot of



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wizards who did.

But, at 17, Albus had also been using that mark. He had used it to substitute the 'A' of his own name in his correspondence with Gellert.

For that matter, was the reason that the WW was all united in insisting that Albus Dumbledore should be the one to face Grindelwald for five whole years, possibly because Grindelwald had already stated that they would take him in if, and *only* if, Albus Dumbledore was the one to do it?

And was Grindelwald's bid for power over the course of some 30–40 years never extended to Britain solely on his great-aunt Bathilda's account?

I'm not sure, but to me that doesn't necessarily add up to "unrequited"



Albus's Order of Merlin was almost certainly in recognition of having taken Grindelwald into custody. Some of his research might have merited it, but that really does seem to be the most likely achievement to have been awarded it.

He'd been so gun-shy after the Ariana debacle that he doesn't seem to have been willing to poke his nose outside a research lab or a classroom afterwards. Both of those being environments in which he knew he was fully in control.

I am wondering now, whether the whole PS/SS maneuver with the Philosopher's Stone wasn't Flamel's from the get-go. And Albus inherited the whole mission of trying to get Tom under control from him (and made a botch of that one, too).

His founding the OotP in the first place now also seems



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uncharacteristic for a wizard who seems to have been all too willing to sit on his rump and do nothing so long as no one challenged him on his own turf. I am more and more convinced that he only did it after having to listen to Alastor Moody grouching about obstructionism in The Ministry one time too many.

Either that, or Flamel gave him a nudge. Or Tom was stupid enough to do it, either when the Prophecy escaped or earlier. That's the best I can come up with. Rowling certainly doesn't appear to have thought the matter out very clearly. The Albus she presents in DHs would have done nothing of the kind. Too much like taking responsibility for other people's welfare, y'know?

And, yes, I do think Albus eventually felt some degree of affection for Harry, after the PS/SS debacle, although the emotion seems to have been primarily composed of sentiment, rather than *real* emotion (probably not a great deal of affection, either, although to him it would have *seemed* as if it was. He really does appear to have been emotionally stunted). But, no, it really didn't change the way he operated at all.

Albus did save Harry's butt a few times before the Ministry rescue, however. That's something Albus doesn't seem to have done for much of anyone else.

First he got Quirrell/Mort off of him after Harry had passed out, and then he blew away Crouch/Moody who was about to curse him. Sure, he was protecting his investment, but Harry didn't know that, and would certainly have seen no reason to take it as anything but a reason to trust Albus.

There was also his slowing Harry's fall back in PoA when the Dementors swarmed the Quidditch pitch. That counts too.



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But I can't off the top of my head think of anyone else Albus has ever been shown to have actively saved. Even if he did get Mundungus out of a tight spot once. (Probably more than once, considering Mundungus.)

He enabled Harry and Hermione to save Sirius and Buckbeak, but if I am right about his having seen Harry cast that Patronus by the lake from his window earlier in the evening, he must have known that the boy had already done so.

He made a half-arsed effort to see that Lupin was educated as a wizard. But he never did that for any other juvenile victim of lycanthropy. And we still don't know why he went to the trouble in Lupin's case (except probably to give PoA a backstory).

And, yes, one does have to admit that he did get Hagrid that job as assistant to the old groundskeeper Ogg. Not that it took a lot of effort on his part. The school and the Ministry couldn't leave an orphaned half-Giant wandering Britain at large, confiding in anyone who was kind to him. Much better to keep him under observation at Hogwarts away from where any Muggles would see him. And besides, groundskeeper is a job he could do, would even be good at, and would probably enjoy.

But the best Albus was willing to do for either James OR Sirius was just to tell them to stay inside where they were safe, and I no longer believe that he was ever the Head of any Hogwarts House.

In fact, given the acclaim he seems to have been basking in since his teens, if he had ever been a Head of any House the alumni would still be dining out on the strength of it. And we can also see now that he did not ever want that kind of respon-

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sibility. He'd failed at it by the age of 18, and never wanted to be stuck having to take that risk again.



He's nowhere near as hard a case as Tom Riddle. He wasn't altogether heartless, and he was capable of affection. Or at any rate, he recognized affection in others, sometimes, if it fitted his preconceptions of it. He may have envied it, and he never devalued it.

But he had walled himself off from it. After all, it hurt. He protected himself from such uncomfortable feelings, much in the way many fans seem to have attributed to Snape. (Who, by contrast, never really did that. Snape simply wasn't *offered* affection. Approval occasionally, yes, but never affection.)

Which may be the crux of the matter. People have trusted or admired Albus over a great many years. But I think that Harry may have been the only one to simply love him. And Albus had spent far too long trying to live without any kind of love at all.

And, really, Harry had been left with very few people to love, and you really do have to admit that, on an emotional level, Albus's debriefing when he confronted Harry in front of the Mirror of Erised was one of the very few things in a long life that Albus got exactly right.

Albus and Tom, oh but definitely, recognized one another as similar breeds of monster in that orphanage. And frightening Tom with a burning wardrobe ended up as a gauntlet thrown down between them.

And I still am convinced that Albus himself was a Ravenclaw. His failures are such *typical* Ravenclaw failures and you would

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think that there would be at least some remark made upon the fact that so many academic awards, prizes and acclaims were being garnered by anyone in either Gryffindor OR Slytherin. In Ravenclaw, Albus would have merely exceeded everyone's expectations, in a matter of degree rather than type. And Ravenclaws have no objection to grasping at power, after all.

Aberforth was in Gryffindor, however. Rather obviously. And probably Percival as well, considering. One doesn't really know about Kendra.



Which brings us finally to Bathilda Bagshott.

The puzzle behind door #3

Frankly I haven't a clue of what the Bagshott complication actually was. But the story turns into a complete mess any time she shows up in it.

She certainly wasn't initially a friend of the family. Kendra wouldn't let her set foot across the property line. And she seems to have spied on them through the hedge.

And yet she was engaged in a correspondence with Albus while he was at Hogwarts, i.e., over the same period of time.

One now wonders whether this wasn't a screw-up on Albus's part (an understandable one given his cluelessness). That he had not quite realized that engaging in a correspondence with someone who lived in the same village in which his own family had settled might be construed as an invitation for the woman to come sniffing around the family home. In any case she seems to have managed to get her foot in the door by the time of Kendra's death.



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And then there is the matter of what she had to say about the family. It really doesn't sound all that friendly. It is from Bathilda that we have the story of the child imprisoned in the house and hidden from the world. Although she seems later to have later been convinced by the family's insistence that the girl was "frail"

Muriel overheard a conversation between Bathilda and her own mother about Bathilda having caught a glimpse of Kendra and Ariana and concluded that the girl was a Squib.

It was also from the Weasley's Aunt Muriel that we get the information that Ariana had never been seen by any of the Healers at St Mungos. We do not know just where the tale that Kendra was Muggle-born and trying to deny it came from. But that tale is not exactly friendly, either.

HOWEVER: according to Rita Skeeter, we are left with the impression that Bathilda continued in the understanding that the Dumbledore girl was a Squib, even when Rita spoke with her once Bathilda was ancient and ga-ga, nearly a century after the whole tragedy had concluded.

Or was this just the spin that Rita chose to put on the matter?

Excuse me? Gellert Grindelwald was Bathilda's great-nephew. He was Albus's new best friend forever. In fact she is the one who probably introduced them since Gellert had already been expelled from Durmstrang and had been packed off to live with his aunt in Britain by the time Albus was called home to arrange for his mother's funeral.

And yet somehow Gellert's aunt, with whom he was living, never learned that the girl was a witch, unable to control her magic, and needed to be kept in seclusion for her own safety?



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Bathilda had no problem telling Rita about how the two boys had struck up that extraordinarily intimate friendship between Kendra's death Ariana's. That could certainly have been of not *that* much greater interest than the poor little witch who had to be handled with kid gloves. After all, Gellert had obviously been welcomed into the Dumbledore's home by Albus and knew all about it. Aberforth found him there by the time he got home from Hogwarts.

She also never wondered whether the timing of her nephew's sudden insistence upon going home and Ariana's death might be a bit of a coincidence?

That seems remarkably incurious coming from a celebrated historian.

So was Bathilda essentially just a nosy neighbor that Kendra avoided? Given the circumstances of his sister's death, Albus might have been just as likely to have energetically avoided the old bat afterwards. But, no, Elphias Doge claims she was a life-long friend of Albus's.

And, yet, there she was, having tea with the Potters while they were in hiding (although not yet under Fidelius). Blabbing away about Albus and Gellert's friendship some 80 years earlier. Excuse me?

Was Bathilda actually a member of the Order of the Phoenix?

Why? Of what possible use would Bathilda, whose discretion appears to have been on much the same level as Hagrid's have been to the Order? Or was she just keeping an eye on things with the Potters as Mrs Figg was later to do for Harry?

And were those rather alarming stories regarding young Albus and her great-nephew Gellert's friendship a contributing

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reason for why James Potter refused Albus's offer to be their Secret Keeper?



But, as I say, I am unconvinced that we really know all of what was relevant to the "official" Dumbledore backstory, and despite Rowling's delayed bombshells related to this matter, it is difficult to see what relevance any of it ever had to the problem of Tom Riddle.

Although it does, perhaps, shed some light on the extreme reluctance that Albus appears to have had to over *doing* anything about that problem.



Not as White as He's Painted

This is another one of the original essays in the collection. Its first iteration was a part of the first version of the essay collection, uploaded at the end of April 2003.

It's gone through rather a lot of iterations since then, and in the end, downstream of DHs, quite a lot of the original interpretations have been heavily modified. Or changed entirely.



With the release of DHs it seems that although few of the extrapolations herein were necessarily *wrong* — although a number of them weren't altogether on target— but that by the end of the series, it's clear that any motivations and intentions ascribed to Albus Dumbledore are ultimately a matter of the reader's personal choice. And there is a wide spectrum of possibilities to chose from. Which is not assisted by the fact that over the period that this essay was developed we were still being widely misled by Rowling's determination to present Albus Dumbledore as the epitome of "all that was good."

He still isn't actually evil. But he's turned out to be a conceited, self-righteous, and self-indulgent old hypocrite. And, if anything, he's an even bigger coward than Horace Slughorn. (Who at least doesn't pretend to be anything else.)

And it looks like he really *doesn't* learn from his mistakes. Because he keeps making the same ones over and over.

Where Severus Snape fell in with a bad lot and, in attempting to curry favor, made a horrendous mistake that ended in the death of someone he deeply cared about (even if she no longer cared about him), and then spent the following 16–17



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years, i.e., the rest of his life, actively attempting to make at least some kind of amends, penitently taking direction from two masters who had both welshed on their promises to spare, or to protect her, Albus Dumbledore got swept up into bad philosophy under a bad influence — which he actively supported and advanced — even to the point of trying to take control of the whole budding movement — ending in the death of someone for whom he was responsible (whether he deeply loved her or not. He may claim to value the *concept* of love, but he doesn't seem to be very familiar with how the actual thing itself works), and spent the following 98 years taking direction from no one, declining to take personal responsibility for other people's welfare, and attempting to do nothing at all for fear of doing something *else* wrong.

And the fact that, on his side, all their grand plans to rule the world were probably nothing more than hot air and blue-sky pie doesn't really let him off the hook. He saw his former collaborator go off and try to make it all real, and did *nothing*.

Still, I may be out of step with a lot of the revisionist views in that I still do not absolutely loathe Albus, but I've no longer got much respect for the man, and, indeed, have come to the conclusion that the whole whoop-de-do over his "great wisdom" is as bogus as Tom Riddle's grandiose Muggle-style title. If anything, the most accurate label for Albus Dumbledore' behavior that I can think of, is something more along the lines of; "willful incompetence."

Yes, yes, I'm sure that young Albus was once an academic and magical prodigy, but how often does the ability to dazzle a standardized testing procedure translate to anything like an



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intelligence that's fit for daily use? The kind of brilliance that excels in classrooms and fails at life is legendary. (And Rowling herself really doesn't much seem to value actual *intelligence* in this story arc at all. The narrative's whole outlook is about as anti-intellectual as you can get. Whether this is pandering to those "reluctant readers" that everyone made such an issue over when the series launched, is something I'll leave you to decide.)

Plus, of course, Rowling's eventual deconstruction of Albus Dumbledore was vastly in excess of the requirements, which made her ultimate flip-flop of turning around and giving Albus a pass *anyway* all the more insulting to the reader. But that doesn't mean that some level of deconstruction wasn't necessary. It was. When dealing with the classic "mentor" figure of a coming-of-age adventure tale, such a deconstruction always is.

I'm inclined to think that what really needed deconstruction here wasn't Albus's *intentions* — which Rowling was determined to distract us with. It was his *judgment*. Looked at in retrospect we can all see that Albus's track record is an absolute compendium of bad decisions, and wrong conclusions, going just about all the way back to the minute he left school. If not before.

Something that *isn't* so obvious to the reader is that by the time Harry started Hogwarts Albus's glowing reputation was already very much in decline. But this certainly turned out to be the case. By 1991 I think most of the wizarding public's veneration had dwindled to lip-service and only the fact that he was patronizing Fudge (and that Fudge allowed himself to be patronized) kept him in the game. His greatest fans had always been the people who had been dazzled by him when he was the



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shining new star, and how many of those were left?

Other supporters were the near-contemporaries who were used to living in his shadow, and those ranks were being thinned out by attrition as well. He had somehow quite failed to enlist more than a handful of followers from any of the generations of students who had known him only as Headmaster, and only a handful more who were of an age for him to have once taught. He'd been isolating himself at Hogwarts for so long that he didn't even realize that he was tottering on the brink of irrelevance.

Rita Skeeter called him out as an "obsolete dingbat." Rita really isn't stupid. She turns out to have been very much on the nose.

But, really, downstream of the closing of canon, a lot of readers now are measuring Albus against Tom, and, I admit, the comparison is not without some justification. But I really do think the more relevant comparison is probably Slughorn. He and Albus are a matched pair of vain old popinjays who are both convinced that they know what is best for everyone else. But where it is blindingly obvious that Sluggo is weak, often foolish, and faintly ridiculous, far too many people still take Albus at his own estimation. Both of that pair are rather clever fools, but the reader somehow keeps looking past the obvious in Albus's case, possibly because he does such a nice star turn at self-depreciation, which passes for modesty.



Albus ultimately has probably done far more damage to the wizarding world overall than Horace has, even if he did so inadvertently. Even when you factor in Horace's unfortunate dis-



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cussion with Tom Riddle that Harry had to pry out of him, and even though Albus clearly exerts himself far less on his favorites' behalf than Horace does.

I also suspect Horace has a clearer view of how the ww really works and a much longer list of past protégés who are willing enough to keep in touch and to let him pull their strings for the benefit of his current crop of up-and-comers. Albus, on the other hand, tends to back losers who will never outgrow his “assistance,” or have any influence to “pass on,” and sooner or later the people in charge figure that out. Being one of Albus's favorites is probably not a high recommendation. Given a choice in the matter, I think I'd invest in a stock of candied pineapple.

But no, having fancied himself in love with Gellert Grindelwald by the age of 17 is neither a convincing explanation for Albus's failings of character, nor relevant to the situation at hand. It's a complete non-sequitur and an unnecessary distraction. And it's totally out of scale.

Imho, the series would have played better if Albus had indeed been the charming and well-intentioned eccentric he appeared to be, and turned out to be acknowledged to have made a whole series of *really bad* decisions. What was necessary to the story arc was for the protagonist to discover that his mentor had *limits*, and that blindly following his advice would not solve the problem. It wasn't necessary for Albus to turn out to be knowingly selfish/blind/feeble/manipulative/evil. All that was necessary was for him to be proved *wrong* in some relevant and fundamental issue. An unwise crush on dashing young Gellert Grindelwald 100 years earlier was neither relevant nor fundamental.



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Well, given that, for years, we were expected to accept that Dumbledore was the epitome of goodness, like just about everyone else I may have given him a bit too much credit. But I hadn't completely missed the hints that were actually there.

The following first examines (in probably more detail than absolutely necessary) the kind of things that drew the most attention from the readers of the series, circa, around GoF. We effectively had a different, and more cohesive series to explore back then, and far fewer of the kind of things that have since turned out to have been nothing more than set-dressing, or the sort of fundamentally irrelevant “use once and discard” plot tokens which Rowling has since deployed, setting them very much in the readers' cross-hairs to attract and hold our attention in case they should turn out to be of major importance later.

More recent exploration also introduces a couple of reinterpretations, and a re-examination some of the unsupported assumptions that we were encouraged to form over the first half of the series. It also seems to be well past time to take a closer look at some of the never-explained information that we were given to juggle, as well.



By the end of HBP, my general reading of the matter was that if Dumbledore's defeat of the Dark wizard Grindelwald had not been something already in his job description — and I couldn't see any way in which it could have been — then it was almost certain to have been a fluke. A notable accomplishment, yes, no question about that, but not one which grew naturally out of his own interests and existing body of work. The same



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cannot be said for the other two signal achievements listed on that chocolate frog card.

Those achievements are the discovery (or publication) of 12 uses for dragons' blood and his Alchemical research in partnership with the unquestionably great Nicholas Flamel. Neither of these sound like the sort of thing in which one distinguishes oneself by accident.

Over the course of the series we were handed more than one clue which should cause any reader to suspect that Albus Dumbledore was, at the very least, one of the leading authorities on blood magic in Great Britain, if not all Europe, or, if you are inclined to hyperbola, the entire wizarding world. He produced a body of research work on dragon's blood, still in use today. The "Ancient Magic" he invoked as a protection for Harry was dependent upon Harry being in the company of his mother's "blood" kin. And that gleam in the eye when he learned that Voldemort had used blood taken by force from Harry to facilitate his return strongly suggests that he knew something about the use of an enemy's blood that Voldemort had not considered — and it was something that was probably not to Voldemort's advantage.

Nor, I gather, did Nicholas Flamel engage in collaborations with just anybody.

Ergo: we may tentatively conclude that Dumbledore's personal interests may lie more in the field of Alchemy than in general Transfiguration, despite the fact that he spent much of his prime teaching Transfiguration to the Hogwarts student body. After all, we have never been given any indication that the Hogwarts curriculum includes classes in Alchemy.



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Alchemy, and... Potions? Where, apart from the study of Alchemy itself, does one most expect to be using dragons' blood? (Even given that one of those uses is allegedly as an oven cleaner.) Not in pure Transfiguration, certainly. It really ought to be noted that even though he takes care to put Harry on his guard about Slughorn's probable desire to "collect" him, Dumbledore introduces Horace Slughorn, a legitimately skilled brewer of Potions to Harry, not merely as a colleague, but as a friend.



Another matter which evidently needs to be drawn to the attention of the reader and so far as I have seen has not often been, is the fact that the largest part of the information we have regarding Headmaster Dumbledore's background is the information printed on his chocolate frog card. And that information is in serious need of re-evaluation.

By all indications, the information on that card is considerably out of date.

What is more, the information on that card is egregiously misleading.

Consider; the three signal achievements noted on that card are; one professional association, one research-related high point, and the defeat of one Dark wizard back in 1945. Plus the puffery which notes that in some people's opinion he is "the greatest wizard of modern times."

So what were his public efforts, if any, during VoldWar I, chopped liver?

Particularly given that VoldWar I lasted something close to 20 years.



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His supposed efforts that (according to fanon) a significant faction of the Wizengamot presumably wanted to appoint him Minister of Magic over don't even rate a mention?

Post-HBP we realize that we have been assuming that it was Dumbledore's efforts during VoldWar I that had something to do with Dumbledore's broad popularity and the desire of a grateful nation to make him Minister for Magic, on little or no actual textual support.

It now turns out that Dumbledore had already been offered, and had refused the Post of Minister for Magic three times before VoldWar I even properly got started. Indeed he had been offered, and refused that post three times while he was still serving as a member of the Hogwarts faculty. Before he was even appointed Headmaster.

There is absolutely no direct mention of his rôle — *any* rôle — during VoldWar I on that chocolate frog card. Which strongly suggests that the chocolate frog cards, once issued, are never updated by their publisher, and/or that Dumbledore's chocolate frog card has been in circulation since before Voldemort's first rise ever started making waves..

Or, just possibly, that He-Who-We-Do-Not-Mention is not even mentioned in the accolades accorded to the people who worked to defeat him, either. For example: why isn't there a card for Lily Potter?

That Dumbledore's card identifies him as Hogwarts's current Headmaster would give us the earliest probable date of issue as having been some time around 1957, the year that Minerva McGonagall came on staff as Transfigurations mistress, making a strong inference that Headmaster Dippet had either died or

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retired during, or by the end of, the Autumn term of 1956.

But, in fact, we do not know this to be the case, either. The fact that Albus was once and Minerva is now the Transfigurations instructor of the school does not establish that Minerva directly replaced Dumbledore in the position. Indeed, the only real calculation point we have to pin Albus's ascension to Headmaster to is that it took place roughly some 10 years after Tom Riddle's first disappearance from wizarding Britain. And we have no solid data to establish that date, either. All we know of it is that Tom was still visibly young when he absconded after murdering Madam Hepzibah Smith and stealing at least two of her treasures. Ergo; he was probably not above 25. But beyond that we cannot say.



This calls for a reality check.

The whole point of the Famous Wizard trading cards — from the point of view of the people who publish them — is to keep people buying them. In order to keep people buying them, you have to keep issuing new ones. Of pretty much anybody that you can justify basing a card upon.

In as small a community as wizarding Britain, the Headmaster of the only magical training school is automatically an official on a high enough level to justify the issuing of a card in his name. Regardless of how humdrum a life he may have led, he is still a "public figure."

Hold that thought. It is part of the shell game that seems to be being played here.

To be the "defeater of the Dark wizard Grindelwald" twelve

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years or so earlier, in itself, apparently, was not sufficient reason to issue a card in Albus Dumbledore's name, or the bloody card would have been issued back in 1945 or 1946. (Assuming that Famous Wizard trading cards existed back then. It is entirely possible that they are a more recent innovation.)

Or possibly, that there *was* one, and that version of the card is now highly collectible since it does *not* identify him as Headmaster. The card Harry got had been updated after Dumbledore was so appointed.

And, if you are a publisher of Famous Wizard Trading Cards, what is your target audience? Who are the capsule blurbs on those cards written for? Who are they designed to impress? Who do the blurbs need to connect with?

Adolescent boys.

Or, adolescents anyway.

And — a reality check here — just who is this particular card about? What is his day job?

He's the Headmaster of their school.

Oh that's going to impress a lot of 12-year-olds.

And, while we're at it, just how much is his also being the junior partner to Nicholas Flamel or having discovered 12 uses for dragon's blood going to impress them? Will that make their little hearts go pit-a-pat? Hardly.

But defeating a Dark wizard? Oh yeah, the kiddies can really get behind that one!

Never mind that this "defeat of the Dark wizard Grindelwald" might have been something more akin to a barroom brawl (in the Hog's Head, yet, for all we knew at that point!) than any sort of an official battle. Dumbledore was a teacher in



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a school in 1945, for heaven's sake, not off blipping around the continent in the middle of a hypothetical Muggle war like some kind of wizarding Hiram Holiday. And by the time the school broke up for the summer in 1945, any Muggle war on the continent (or at least *our* Muggle war on the continent) was over.

Despite Rowling's comments in the joint interview of 2005; that Grindelwald was indeed connected to a wartime situation in the mid 1940s (despite the utter refusal of such a statement to make any kind of plausible sense inside of canon as she shows it), in the absence of further information, what seemed just as likely was that the whole Grindelwald distraction was intended to be a "meta" trick. The "defeat of the Dark wizard Grindelwald" was designed to associate and conflate Albus Wulfric Percival Brian Dumbledore with the hero Beowulf. He who settled the Grendels, after which adventure he was given the rule of the land, and ruled it well, and was much beloved.

Er... well, *not*, actually.



We finally got a bit of hope in that July 2005 interview that we might eventually learn at least something more regarding Grindelwald than we had up to that date.

It was far and beyond time that we ought to if it *mattered* to any significant degree. Which by that time I suspected that it probably didn't, really. But it would be nice to get it sorted and out of the way.

(ETA: it turned out to have absolutely *nothing* to do with the problem presented by Tom Riddle. But it made a masterful distraction to facilitate stringing out the central plot's general



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inaction over the course of the endless camping trip from Hell, and get us through Tonks's pregnancy.)

By that time, I was inclined to believe that much of Dumbledore's continued pleasure in that card may well have been precisely because so it tickled him to see himself painted as the sort of dashing "action hero" that he so manifestly was *not*. In fact, I *still* think so.

As to the people who considered him possibly the greatest wizard of modern times; at first I also rather thought that evaluation was more likely to be a perception of greatness in the manner of a Winston Churchill, or at the very least, as an Albert Einstein or a Stephen Hawking. This is not a distinction that is necessarily a quality accessible to the perceptions of 12-year-old boys. For that matter, the fact that he had already been offered the post Minister of Magic three times before he was even appointed Headmaster, tends to suggest to me that his backers had always been people like Griselda Marchbanks who had encountered him around 1899, and had been singing his praises ever since. His run-in with Grindelwald had precious little to do with it.

Regardless, it seems transparently evident that the puffery on that card, namely the assertion that Dumbledore "is believed by many people to be the greatest wizard in modern times", is certainly not based upon his role in VoldWar I. Indeed, in light of the revelations of DHs we can no longer be sure he even played a public role in VoldWar I.



Which is just as well. Because Albus Dumbledore turns out



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to have been a piss-poor excuse for a war leader.

We can readily accept that during VoldWar I Albus Dumbledore, as Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot (which he probably was by that time) might have been an inspirational figure, but in that go-round it was the Ministry that was calling the shots. Dumbledore was not running the show himself.

Or was he? Hold that thought, too.

If you look back over his track record, I mean really *look*, you can easily see a whole string of misunderstandings and poor decisions. The man is a scholar not a General.



In fact, for an example: Let's go back to that whole moldy fig of a Prophecy. There, at the height of Voldemort's first rise to power, Albus Dumbledore is the inadvertent recipient of what appears to be a bona fide Prophecy which very much implies that the person with the power to destroy the Dark Lord is a child yet unborn.

Okay. Think about that for a moment. A child yet unborn. What is the WW supposed to do then, hunker down and try to stick it out until that child grows up?

Well, yes, apparently, according to Albus Dumbledore. That's *exactly* what they are supposed to do. This is a war leader?

Never mind that the established policy of the Ministry is to suppress Prophecies.

Even dismissing the gaudy invitation to ill-considered actions that a Prophecy represents, you can do better than *that*.

Like reflect that even though the Prophecy claims that the foretold child is the "one with the power" it never claims he is



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the ONLY one with the power. (Particularly not if “the power” is just the ability to form *basic human attachments*; which is the drum that Albus was pounding all through the series.)

Come on here! There have got to be more ways to limit the damage potential of a terrorist group than to concentrate all your efforts on assassinating their leader!



For what it's worth, we were also handed a clue in OotP that it is all too likely that Voldemort fears Dumbledore, not for his power as a wizard — considerable as that may be — but for what Dumbledore knows about the background of one Tom Riddle.

So why wasn't that knowledge made public so it could do damage to Riddle rather than just giving Riddle another good reason to try to neutralize Dumbledore and keep the information from escaping?

Most of Voldemort's followers apparently do not know — or at any rate do not admit — that their leader is a literal halfblood. His potential recruits (considering the demographic that he's deliberately targeting for recruitment) certainly do not know this. And it would *matter* to them! Why the hell didn't Dumbledore go public with this information a decade ago? Longer. Just whose agenda was being advanced by all this secrecy?

Why the *hell* was Albus so determined to keep all of Tom's secrets for him?

Every DE still alive and walking free — apart from Snape, Karkaroff, and Crouch Jr, witnessed the effect of Tom and



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Harry attempting to use brother wands against one another. Now that Harry's version of the event has been made public and has made the leap from the QUIBBLER to the PROPHET, why wasn't there a follow-up article featuring an interview with an expert witness (and conspicuously neutral source) such as Mr Ollivander describing and explaining the phenomenon that Harry has reported and — given that Ollivander remembers every wand he has ever sold, describing those two wands and what is known of their known original owners? Thereby revealing just whose wand the Dark Lord must have been using? And then follow up that article with one examining just who and what this Tom Riddle, ex-Head Boy of Hogwarts came from, and just under what circumstances Tom Riddle supposedly disappeared from the wizarding world some 40 years or so earlier?

Is that why Mr Ollivander has so conveniently *disappeared*?

Well, that particular possibility for getting the news out was foreclosed upon by the opening of HBP, when Mr Ollivander, and his stock had been taken out of the equation. We thought his disappearance might be voluntary at the time, but we couldn't be sure. Maybe the QUIBBLER ought to have followed the matter up a bit earlier. There were 3–4 months between the QUIBBLER running the original interview that Harry gave Rita and Ollivander's disappearance.

And for that matter, I'll be returning to that question of what was Albus doing back when Tom Riddle disappeared from the wizarding world some 40 years earlier, too.



Voldemort's current followers are stuck. They signed a con-



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tract with this particular devil and cannot get out of it. But there are only a few dozen of them, and a strong indication that their Dark Lord is a Muggle-raised halfblood could have certainly slowed down his recruiting drive!

But, if the conditions required to produce that particular variety of sociopath in the Potterverse are such as described in the article; 'The Pachyderm in the Parlor', then we may conceivably have another issue interfering with getting that particular message out. If the requirements for producing that kind of a sociopath are as described, then although the wizarding world is able to turn out, or generate any number of maladjusted wizards, that *kind* of a wizarding sociopath would be very uncommon — *inside* the wizarding world. Any such sociopathic wizard would almost have to have been raised *outside* the wizarding world. By Muggles.

And since we were originally led to believe that Voldemort is apparently not the first Dark Lord candidate that the wizarding world has had to deal with. (There were allusions in the first couple of books to another about a century earlier.) If any of the previous Dark Lord candidates were *also* known to be Muggle-raised outsiders, the implications of the news that "Lord Voldemort" is yet *another* Muggle-raised outsider might just be a can of worms that Dumbledore was reluctant to open.

What I suspect, however, is that Dumbledore was seriously out of his depth.



Nor, by the end of HBP, was I the only one to think so. And I am not talking about those fans who were now convinced that



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Dumbledore is *eeeeeeevil*.

I think the old man was simply getting past it.

And that he made another one of his "huge mistakes."

We had yet another go-round on the semi-perennial Evil!Dumbledore debate over on WIKtT (this was now over a dozen years ago). I'd noticed that this particular debate had shifted its emphasis from the original, rather crude "gleam=evil" reading based on Harry's maybe-observation in Goblet to a sleeker, updated "Manipulative Bastard" model who uses children to do his dirty work.

It's a more sophisticated reading certainly, and allows for a great many more additional supportive examples, such as an open forum for the long-standing irritation at Dumbledore's tactlessly public humiliation of the entire Slytherin House by awarding points to Harry and his friends at the last minute — actually AT the leaving feast — at the end of PS/SS, rather than awarding them quietly the day after HRH had stormed the Labyrinth, and handing the Gryffs the House Cup through conventional channels.

Of course, if he had done that, Gryffindor probably wouldn't have taken the Cup after all. Either a Slytherin would have managed to earn his House some extra points or someone, possibly, but not necessarily Snape, would have managed to deduct one from Gryffindor, putting them behind again.

By this time it is rather too easy to make a very convincing argument for Evil!Dumbledore. But I didn't, at that point, fully support Manipulative Bastard!Dumbledore any more than I did the cruder, Evil!Dumbledore iteration which had been circulating since GoF. However, I definitely did not still see Dumbledore



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as having been either all-wise or all-powerful.

Or all-truthful, either. We were all being misled by the Harry filter again.

Which is something that we are going to have to go on dealing with. Up to some point in Book 5, according to the Harry filter, Dumbledore could do no wrong — just as Snape could do nothing right. Once Harry hit the very worst stage of adolescence in Book 5, I suspected that at least for the first half of Book 6, Dumbledore would probably not manage to do anything right either.

It turns out that in this I was mistaken. Apparently we're now all supposed to believe that the problem throughout Book 5 is that I probably was correct in my suspicion that most of our episodes of CAPSLOCKS! Harry was the result of having Voldemort waltzing in and out of his head, at will. (Which says something very unflattering regarding Voldemort's emotional maturity, too.) Now that Voldemort has walled off the psychic "leakage" from his end Harry seems to be back to being a reasonable extrapolation of his GoF self, and Dumbledore is once again his hero.

As for the main arguments that the Evil!Dumbledore proponents generally field regarding the chinks in Dumbledore's shining armor; well, yes. I rather suspected that those flaws are really there. And that they were probably even there with JKR's full knowledge and intent. She hadn't pulled many punches with the rest of the cast's human flaws and character weaknesses, had she? Why should we expect Dumbledore to remain exempt?

But up to the end of OotP we hadn't ever officially looked

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at this head-on, because up to that point, Dumbledore was Harry's "hero." Moreover, until HBP, Dumbledore had been a rather distant figure. If Harry had been sitting in a classroom in front of him two days a week over the previous five years we might have gotten a slightly different view of him by then. And, now that Harry was actually allegedly learning something from Dumbledore, we were bound to get a different perspective.

And in HBP, Dumbledore, frankly, came across as a self-congratulatory show-off with a strong trace of the narcissist about him. And a fine turn at faux modesty.

Nevertheless, he arguably still counted as a "Great Man" even if he was a great deal too complacent about his greatness. Basically he was still possible to read as a man of reasonably good character who is overlooking important details, failing to keep all of his stories straight, and all the balls in the air at the same time. The house at No. 12 Grimmauld Place isn't the only secret Dumbledore was keeping. And he didn't trust most of them to Harry.



But, before we get any farther away from the issue; back to that track record:

Three schoolboys (and possibly a girl) hoodwinked the Headmaster about their Animagi status and he didn't find out about it until one of the group 'fessed up nearly 20 years later. (He may not have ever known about Rita at all, unless Hermione, or someone else, finally got around to telling him about her.)

He really believed, or chose to believe, that Sirius Black was the Potter's secret keeper who had betrayed them, despite the

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long-term, virtually “foster-brother” relationship between Sirius and James. Despite the fact that he knows that Voldemort is a master Legilimens who could possibly have extracted that information by force, or stealth. And, apparently, once Sirius had been arrested for murdering Peter Pettigrew and a dozen Muggles, he **didn't even try** to question Sirius afterward to find out WHY he had so suddenly betrayed his friends.

Imperius *is* presumably a thing, you know.

Did he simply decide that Sirius was “one of the Blacks” and had reverted to type? Did Snape have some influence there that we have not yet heard about? Did Peter Pettigrew hedge his bets by firing off a lying Patronus message that “All is lost! Black has betrayed us!” before staging his own “murder” and slipping off the board? Did Albus regard Sirius's status as Harry's godfather an unwanted complication and attempt to limit Black's opportunities for interference? Or, more to the point, did Albus simply *dislike* Sirius Black enough not to care whether or not he was actually guilty? It's possible. Black certainly had given him cause.

What is more, even after he learned differently at the end of PoA, in the following month or two, when Albus must have been working in close consultation with Barty Crouch Sr over reviving the TriWizard Tournament, he never once thought to comment; “By the way, in the brief period that I had Black in custody, I discovered a disturbing possibility that Sirius Black may not have been the Potter's Secret Keeper as I had originally been informed. What steps were taken to verify that it was Black's wand which caused the explosion that killed all of those people?”

I mean, it's all very well to claim that no one would believe a



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couple of 13-year-olds and a werewolf, but really, as the Chief Warlock of the blooming Wizengamot, that is a reasonable question for him to have raised. Dumbledore is also a Legilimens after all, and Black had been in his custody. He could reasonably have implied that he had discovered the Black/Pettigrew switch himself. In fact, given the rapidity with which he turned up in the hospital wing after questioning Black all the indications are that he *did* discover it himself. Why not at least bring the subject up if he believes Black now? (And in strict accuracy, Hermione was 14 by that time. Closing on 15.)

I have begun to suspect that Albus probably *had* at least broached the subject, not with Crouch, but with Fudge, who Albus was still in the habit of regarding as an ally at that point. The rapidity of the Ministry's turn-about from blanketing Black's suspected whereabouts in Dementors to putting the hunt for him in the hands of a single Auror, to be conducted in the course of his other work, as well as the rapidity with which Sirius was exonerated after he was safely dead, now looks just a bit suspicious. I certainly don't recall anyone catching sight of Pettigrew in the raid on the DoM to have raised the obvious questions in the right offices.

But Fudge, who I suspect had already been gotten to by Lucius Malfoy, and who was steadily having his confidence in Albus chipped away by Dolores Umbridge, refused to comply fully. He willingly withdrew the Dementors — particularly in view of the public relations nightmare that had been narrowly averted when they gratuitously attacked Harry Potter, but he flatly refused to call off the hunt for Black on Albus's say-so. And Albus did not press the issue. Or, evidently raise the



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matter with Crouch, who was no longer associated with the DMLE by that time, and, admittedly, whose interference there might have been unwelcome.



So. Albus has done nothing to undermine Voldemort's position *vis-à-vis* any of his potential followers (and why not? Voldemort would do it to him — and has!).

He publicly humiliates a quarter of his own School at a leaving feast.

And that's only the beginning. Looked at critically his actions and apparent beliefs turns up a long-standing string of blind spots, misunderstandings and examples of just plain bad judgment.

Yet he clearly appears to *mean* well. But he is simply not, or is no longer, up to the magnitude of the job at hand. No single human being could be. But he doesn't share information and he doesn't seem to know how to delegate authority. He may be a splendidly inspirational figure, but he is not a war leader. (McGonagall probably beats him regularly at Wizard's Chess.)



But he is another kind of leader. And that is something the information on Hogwarts' stationery's letterhead told us all the way back before we even managed to escape from Privet Drive (or ever saw that chocolate frog card), and it blew right past us.

Albus Dumbledore turns out to have been one of the very biggest (non-chocolate!) frogs in the very small puddle which is the British wizarding world. And from what we saw in GoF and continued to see in OotP it is clear that the British



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wizarding world is hopelessly corrupt. And it has continued to be so. On. His. Watch.

Dumbledore has never been a visionary outsider attempting to redress wrongs. He is the quintessential insider with his own clique of devoted followers, and he's had decades to work with them, from the inside of the system. And this is the result. One seriously has to wonder what kind of a state the place would have gotten itself into if Dumbledore hadn't been around, and whether or not it would have been even worse.

Dumbledore's position is another one of the areas where Rowling appears to have totally messed up the balance. She loaded him up with far too many honors without highlighting his corresponding accountability for the state of Things As They Are.

ETA: well, insofar as that observation I was right. But it is now clear that Rowling had, in fact, messed up the balance quite deliberately. It also appears that Albus seems to have felt that symbolically refusing the post of Minister for Magic let him permanently off the hook over any suggestions of misuse of power or position, for he certainly had no hesitation about collecting every *other* honor and high office that was on offer, and hoarding the power therein.

Rowling has also tilted the balance into complete improbability when she has Dumbledore stating in HBP that Tom Riddle is possibly the "most dangerous Dark wizard of all time." Unless Albus was indulging in deliberate hyperbole, if Riddle is the worst problem the wizarding world has ever faced then they have got off lightly. There is far less to Tom Riddle than anyone is willing to admit. It's just so much easier to blame him for everything that's wrong, and to pretend that lets everyone else off the hook.



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The letterhead of Harry's Hogwarts letter states that Albus Dumbledore is not only the current Headmaster of Hogwarts, but also the Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederacy of Wizards, AND the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot.

Excuse me, but the Wizengamot appears to be the Ultimate Wizarding Governing Body of all Great Britain and Ireland!

The Minister for Magic, by contrast, is merely an appointive office. He isn't even elected. He's appointed, and it's the Wizengamot who appoints him. He can't legislate anything without first getting the Wizengamot's approval. And Dumbledore *headed* the Wizengamot. I would not be astonished to learn that the International Confederacy of Wizards is the same thing on an international level. And Dumbledore also seems to have headed *that*. AND he oversees the training of every wizarding child in his own national constituency as the Headmaster of the only magical training institution in that particular wizarding nation!

The post of Minister for Magic might be a more *public* office. But insofar as power goes, if anything, it would have been a step down. And would have required a great deal more of his time and attention, too.

As I state above: according to what little internal canonical evidence we have available, Dumbledore had become Headmaster by some point between 1957–1963. We do not know how long it took him to pull off his hat trick and accrue the other two honors as well. I am assuming that it is unlikely that the Chief Warlock or Supreme Mugwump would have been holding down a day job as mere faculty in a boarding school, but I could be wrong. He was certainly already on the Wizengamot



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when he was no more than Deputy Head. And possibly even before he started teaching, decades earlier.

We don't, after all, know who the Dumbledores were. They could have had an hereditary seat. (It's probably more likely to be fanon than canon, but there is a strong, pervading impression that many of the 50 seats of the Wizengamot are held by the Heads of various families.)

On consideration, with that kind of a resumé It is small wonder that the publishers issued him a chocolate frog card. He virtually owned wizarding Britain. It is small wonder that there were people who regard him as "the greatest wizard in modern times." And it is small wonder that as late as 1990 there was still at least one faction that seemed to think that the office of Minister for Magic would be an appropriate next step for him to take.

There is not a chance in Hades that he would have taken it. Even if he hadn't been essentially gun-shy regarding that specific honor. After all, Dumbledore knew that Harry Potter would be arriving at Hogwarts with the new students of '91. And it is clear that Dumbledore had every intention of overseeing as much of Harry Potter's training and development as humanly possible. Or, rather, his lack of training.

But, really, what are the odds of anyone managing to juggle that particular combination of offices, for decades, without dropping the ball? And yet he seems to have held onto all of these honors right up to the opening of OotP rather than groom appropriate successors for any of them. The wizarding world is a small puddle, true, but is this kind of doubling up of authority really in its best interests?



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Nor, despite his posturing, am I fully convinced that the Headmaster was omniscient in the least. Or even that he was authentically "wise." He was allegedly a clever man, and he had access to several excellent information networks. And he knew how to use them. But they could not tell him everything, and much of his "wisdom" could just as easily be the side effect of a very long life, a good memory, and the ability to at least pretend to learn from experience (his own and that of other people). This is certainly wisdom of a sort, but it is a sort that any intelligent person can put together if he pays attention and has over 100 years in which to do so. It is not some astonishing ghod-touched inborn quality.



Dumbledore is generally agreed to have been intelligent, at least. He was undoubtedly brilliant in his own field. There is enough evidence to support that conclusion. But he was not brilliant overall. And he made a great many more mistakes than the ones he admitted to.

Mind you, I did still tend to mock a lot of the "Evil!Dumbledore" scenarios that litter the online community (although some of them really do manage to make a very convincing argument). However, Rowling did steadily continue claim in interviews — before she got so cagey about turning loose any information at all — that Dumbledore was "all that was good". So I really didn't think we were likely to get any real (or lasting) surprises on that head. Although I suspected that we had some kind of a monumental one waiting in the wings for the grand conclusion of Book 7. (I could wish that the one we got had at



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least been relevant.)

The Manipulative!Dumbledore readings were a much fairer cop, but even those generally implied a far greater degree of conscious intent to do harm than I thought the situation really warranted.

Imho, Albus Dumbledore was an old man with a BAD case of hubris.

This is a man of long (if mostly theoretical) experience who has chosen to surround himself with schoolchildren, and other people half his age, or less, and he has done so for generations. He'd fallen into the habit of being convinced that he always knows better than anyone else does, and that he was the proper person to tell everyone what they ought to be doing, because he was so much smarter than them. Nobody among his own followers (with the likely exception of his own brother) had challenged him in decades. Of course he fell into the trap of believing that he is the font of all wisdom. *Of course* he kept all the reins in his own hands.

And when you come right down to it, what I suspect is that the operative term for Albus Dumbledore was, was not "evil" or even "manipulative", but all too often, and with progressively greater frequency, simply, "wrong."

A post on the Lj of the user "sister magpie" has another take on this. It is a fine examination of the kind of emotional failures a well-intentioned but isolated old man can make.

<http://sistermagpie.livejournal.com/124077.html>

In my own reading, Albus Dumbledore may have once been an authentically "Great Man" who finally overreached himself, and had only in his last year begun to truly realize just how



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badly. And he was honest enough to be aware that the whole sorry situation was directly attributable to his actions, or inactions, where Riddle was concerned.

I suspect that Albus Dumbledore honestly believed that Tom Riddle constituted one of the worst of his "huge mistakes." He's not wrong, either. He seriously dropped the ball there.

My take on the matter is that Dumbledore's greatest flaw has nothing to do with trying to see the best in people. It is that he invariably refused to take action until it was virtually always too late. He sits back, he observes, he analyses the events and is all-too-sure of his *understanding* of what is going on (often wrongly), but he does bugger-all about dealing with it.

And shirks any kind of responsibility for doing so.

Are we *really* sure that Albus Dumbledore was a Gryffindor? These are all classic Ravenclaw failures.

The very last thing Albus is prone to is Gryffindor-style, rash, unconsidered action. (Except when the author forces it on him, offstage, to move the plot forward.) Left to himself, he is every bit as much of an "armchair expert" as his friend Slughorn.

And he has been letting things fall through the cracks for decades. Important things. In fact, matters of life and death. And time was running out for him to put things right. It is just not possible to read his actions, from his first appearance in HBP on the Dursleys' doorstep in chapter 3, as anything other than part of an extended process of "putting his affairs in order".

By that time Albus Dumbledore knew that he was dying. And time was running out.



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Actually. When it comes right down to it. I'd say that Albus had completely lost the plot.

And not just over his last year alive, either.

In fact, properly speaking, he'd had a cheap and gaudy temptation to simply *abandon* the plot waved under his crooked nose — and he snatched it up, and never once looked back.

From that point on, Albus Dumbledore made an absolute parade of his own weakness of character by spending the rest of his life, keeping secrets, misleading his own allies, and all but losing the damned war for them, by trying to bring a *Prophecy* to conclusion.



He also makes snap judgments about people. I rather think that by the time he left Tom with his Hogwarts letter and his stipend from the Governors' fund for indigent students, he had already made up his mind as to *exactly* what kind of a child Tom Riddle was going to be, and had already started compiling a mental list of things to support that reading of his character.

Not that he appears to have ever taken any action on the strength of it. Not even to give anyone else on the staff a possible heads-up to watch for potential trouble from that direction.

In this, however, I may be failing to give the old man due credit. Slughorn tells us, a scant five years later that the topic of Horcruxes is *banned* at Hogwarts and all references to it have been purged from the Library. We are given no indication of just when this purge was undertaken, but we are told that it was Albus Dumbledore who was particularly fierce in the initiating of it. Nor does Slughorn state that it was *only* the subject of Horcruxes which had been purged.



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It occurs to me to wonder whether that purge might have included any unsavory practice which depended upon *possession* which in my reading of the subject, is a *fundamental*, inherent component of the creation of Horcruxes.

So, maybe Albus *did* actually make at least a token effort toward limiting potential damage, after having just delivered a Hogwarts letter to a child who boasted about an ability which sounded all-too-much like a skill in *possessing* animals.

Admittedly, the caliber of security he accomplished by his efforts was on about the same level as planting an animate tree on top of the entrance of a tunnel leading to a shack harboring a werewolf, but then, it's Albus.

I am also very much inclined to suspect that, from that day on Albus thoroughly resented the very fact of Tom Riddle's existence. All the more because the kid had somehow managed to get under his skin to the point that he lost his temper and set fire to the furniture.

I really don't think that it suits Albus Dumbledore's preferred image of himself to reflect that he's the kind of person who can be goaded into a pissing contest with an 11-year-old.

Even if he did "win."

From the readers' PoV, this tendency to do nothing was further compounded in the earliest books by his appearing to be determined to always catch wrong-doers In The Act in front of witnesses. I don't think we'd ever seen him take action unless he had someone in tow to back up his version of events. I think the only action we had ever seen him take on the grounds of "suspicion" only, was to stake-out the room where the Mirror of Erised had been set up in order to intercept Harry, figure



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out what he was made of, and give him the information he would need in order to be able to retrieve the Stone from the Mirror after the shouting was over. And since I'm sure he stage managed that whole little exercise for exactly that purpose it hardly counts.

Like far too many other people he expects the small problems to solve themselves, and when he miscalculates he has to scramble to play catch-up. Tom Riddle was one of his worst miscalculations..

In his defense; Dumbledore had undoubtedly seen any number of young bullies over his career as a schoolmaster. He may not approve of bullies, but he takes them in his stride, probably considers them a fact of life, and he knows that many, if not most of them will eventually outgrow it (James? Sirius? Er, no, *not* Sirius). Or if they don't precisely outgrow it, they manage to carve lives out for themselves where bullying is not the central motivation (Fred & George Weasley?). And he also is aware that it's all a matter of chance and a matter of degree. Severus Snape came up to school with an impressive collection of fully-functional homemade hexes and no social skills, and ended up being picked on. He could just have as easily turned out to be the biggest bully on the playground.

Yes, Albus claims to have seen all the warning signs with Tom. But the fact remains that the version of the official Riddle backstory he shows Harry was a far-from-objective version that he pieced together with 20/20 hindsight long after most of the events it depicted. In Real Time, it appears to have been only after clear evidence of what Tom had been up to was forced on him that Albus realized that Tom was a problem that absolutely



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was not going to solve itself.

Which left him scrambling to catch up.

At which he failed.



If he even moved that quickly in the first place.

Once forced into it, he probably was on the job before the trail got too much colder. But it was already too late.

We've got a choice of events which might have brought Tom's doings to Albus's attention. These days, my own preferred reading is that what kicked off the whole business was that he interviewed Morfin Gaunt in Azkaban at some point in the late '40s in the course of trying to do follow up on some of Gellert's attempts to trace the Stone and the Cloak. This resulted in uncovering that suppressed memory of Morfin's visit from his long-lost nephew which had taken place in the summer of '42.

I did use to have earlier theories of what got the ball rolling, but most of those have been abandoned in light of the current one. I've been given convincing reason to re-evaluate rather a lot of my earliest extrapolations regarding Albus Dumbledore and the official Riddle backstory. And a lot of the reasoning I had been following no longer still makes sense once a couple of additional bits of data that I'd been overlooking get added in.

This examination spun off from the correspondence which resulted in my suspicion that the Order of the Phoenix was pulled together to give Alastor Moody something useful to do with himself instead of butting heads with everyone in the Ministry.



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I'd also realized that since HBP, we've all been encouraged to form a number of assumptions about that pensieve presentation which I now feel may be unwarranted.

Albus's version of the Official Riddle Backstory was presented to Harry Potter over the course of his 6th year at Hogwarts.

The first thing that needs to be asked is; what was Albus's purpose in that?

The most obvious answer might be that he wanted to familiarize Harry with his enemy and his enemy's aims. But, as it was presented, it doesn't really support that particular goal, does it? We get absolutely no clue as to why Tom Riddle decided he needed to be immortal, or why he needed to rule the Wizarding World — other than that it was there. Nor do we get any kind of hint as to what his aims actually *are*. And it probably wouldn't have mattered if that presentation had given us some hints, for, by the time his followers had overthrown the Ministry, he showed no interest in putting in the effort of ruling *anybody* other than them — and with an iron hand, at that.

Tom clearly thought he had better things to do than hang around and rule Wizarding Britain. Like run about Europe hunting for fabulous legendary unbeatable wands.

None of which had remotely *anything* to do with Albus's presentation of the life and times of Tom Marvolo Riddle. Which, frankly, once considered comes across as a blatant piece of propaganda. Indeed, propaganda that's about as subtle as some of the films released under the Nazi government to justify their invasion of Poland.

And, now that we've come this far, let's also ask; where and

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how did Albus get the components of that presentation? And what do those components tell us, behind the scenes, regarding Albus?

Like, for example; why did he even *have* those stored memories? Where did he get them? Apart from the tampered-with memory from Horace Slughorn, all of those memories dated from the mid-1920s to... the early-'60s at the latest. Albus certainly hadn't gone out and collected them with the intention of someday showing them to Harry Potter. So what had he intended them *for*. What had he originally been trying to DO with them?

I'm now pretty certain that when he started out, he was trying to build a case against Riddle to present to Wizengamot. And he wasn't doing it any time recently.



If Albus was agitating for Morfin Gaunt's release at some point after 1945 because he realized that Morfin had probably not been the person who murdered the Riddles, then I suspect that he was trying to be damned sure that he had an alternative "second murderer" to present to the Wizengamot. With a case that would hold up in court.

He probably wasn't Chief Warlock at that point, but the Wizengamot would certainly have given a hearing to the "Defeater of Grindelwald." After all, *someone* had murdered those Muggles, in their own home, with AKs. We're talking about a *murder* investigation. Convincing the Wizengamot that they'd imprisoned the wrong man will go much more smoothly if you can present convincing evidence that someone else is the *right* man.



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I think that Albus's goal was to pack Tom Riddle off to Azkaban, for provable crimes, and throw away the key, where he would no longer be a danger to anyone else.

And all I can say is that Albus was no Perry Mason, either.

The murder of Hepzibah Smith right on top of this turned his potential case into being against not merely a parricide, but possibly against a dangerous serial killer.

Yes, I think there were enough hints and suggestions inherent in that presentation, not to mention in his "leading of the witnesses" (i.e., us) to put together a trail of suspicion that *sort of* hangs together, but it is lacking in anything that constitutes the kind of proof that would stand up in court. His addition of the Bob Ogden memory, and his own recollections of giving Tom his Hogwarts letter, or Tom showing up to apply for the DADA position were probably not a part of the original case. If they had been, it would have been a bit more convincing. But *those* memories hadn't anything to do with the murder of the Riddles.

And by the time he had collected his data Tom had boogied off to Albania and was out of his reach.

Because, unfortunately for Albus, Tom got out of Dodge right about then and wasn't seen in Britain for a decade. I think Albus knew very well that he wasn't likely to be able to convince the British Wizengamot to send anyone off to try to chase Tom Riddle across Europe. And by the time Riddle did come back he'd adopted a different name and persona, and didn't physically even look altogether like the same person.

If Albus was ever going to present a case against Tom Riddle to the Wizengamot, the time he ought to have presented it would have been either to make a valiant attempt to get him tried *in*



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absentia, while he was out of the country, and to get him established as a “person of interest” to the DMLE, if he ever returned to Britain, or to attempt to do it when Tom first returned.

And if he had done it then, he should have added provable evidence that this so-called “Lord Voldemort” was actually Tom Marvolo Riddle, and that Tom Marvolo Riddle was an imposter, a con man, and a murder suspect, who had changed his name and identity in order to evade persecution for his suspected crimes. And Rowling has never offered up any decent excuse for why Albus didn't at least publicly make it known to the wizarding public that their “Lord Voldemort” was nothing of the sort.

I mean, really, I cannot for the life of me think of any convincing reason for why an Albus who supposedly knows the truth of the Riddle Massacre, as well as the murder of Hepzibah Smith, should have sat on his hands to watch Tom Riddle puff himself up into an avowed enemy of the State. There is no statute of limitations on the crime of murder.

Or maybe Albus recognized that his case just *wasn't* good enough, and he didn't dare to risk his reputation on it, in case he failed. Because if he failed, he'd be a laughingstock.

But in any case, *this* was the point that the entire conflict between Albus Dumbledore and Tom Riddle went unmistakably, irrevocably, and irredeemably pear-shaped. From that point on, it was Tom Riddle calling all the shots.

From a thoroughly “meta” standpoint, I'm now wondering whether Rowling didn't patch together her official Riddle backstory on the spur of the moment as she was patching the rest of HBP together without bothering to link it into the main narrative at all. Ghod knows nothing we were supposedly told

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about him in that book lined up with anything we'd been given to understand about Tom Riddle through the first five books. Or in the seventh, either.



So what do I think happened?

Okay, taking it from the top; let's go back to 1945, and Albus, who now has possession of the Elder Wand, as well as all of Gellert's notes from his own search for the other two Hallows. None of the leads that Gellert had followed up on panned out, but there were probably any number that his agents had not considered worth making the effort on. We don't know how many. But one of them was of an alleged “Peverill ring” owned by a fellow named Marvolo Gaunt.

Nothing about Marvelo Gaunt was credible enough to lead Gellert's agent to attempt to press the issue when the original offer to buy his ring was refused. But it was left in the notes as a dangling thread, and Albus felt it worth at least checking out.

Now, something which *might* be relevant to further hypothesis, is just how much credibility one is willing to place in that codswallop from Pottermore about the “Sacred 28” pureblood lineages. This is definitely not book canon, but I've tripped over it far too often in fanfic for it to be likely to have been the invention of one isolated fanfic author. So Pottermore is a likely point of origin. It's not mandatory, but accepting it could prove useful. I personally think it's codswallop, but I'll leave the final decision up to you.

However, if there is any grounds to it at all, then the Gaunts would certainly have been listed among that 28. Gellert kept

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his ambitions away from Britain, so we don't know how much he knows about British pureblood lineages. Albus, who, as I say, was probably already a member of the Wizengamot, might be a fair degree more conversant with that information.

If so, Albus might have felt it a good idea to check out the Gaunt's ring out on those grounds alone, even if the family had fallen into obscurity.

Well, by then the only surviving Gaunt was Morfin, who was in Azkaban. So Albus would have needed to get some background on whatever information was relevant to Morfin Gaunt. Which, I suspect is what led him to the Ogden memory. Which requires some sort of translation from Parseltongue to properly access.

The Ogden memory would have probably made him very interested indeed. That Marvolo claimed to own a ring that had belonged to the Peverills, was one thing, such an artifact could just be any random piece of Hallows Quester's rubbish from the past five centuries. However, the fellow was also claiming to be descended from Salazar Slytherin, and he and his whole family were all Parselmouths, which made that claim look a good deal more likely than not. Given that Salazar Slytherin pre-dated the Peverills by at least a couple of centuries, if Marvolo was being truthful about that, he might very well be being truthful about the other, as well.

A further point of interest was the name of the Muggle that Morfin was being arrested for magically attacking, in violation of the Statute of Secrecy. And the kicker may well have been the glimpse that Albus got of that older Tom Riddle and his girlfriend Cecelia. The Tom Riddle that Albus had recently

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thought he'd seen the last of at Hogwarts is said to have closely resembled his father.

By this time Albus is well aware that Morfin is in Azkaban for having murdered that very same Muggle, Tom Riddle, along with the man's parents. And he very likely remembers that at around that time, a Hogwarts student of the same name, and much the same appearance, who Albus also knows had once claimed to be a Parselmouth, was flashing around a ring with the symbol of the Hallows on it. His friend Slughorn may have mentioned as much. Albus may have thought little of it at the time. There is probably a fair lot of "Hallows Quester's" rubbish circulating about.

Now, none of this is conclusive evidence that the ring in question ever actually *had* anything to do with the Peverills. But it's ticking off enough boxes to make it more than worth investigating further.

So, okay, he needs to speak with Morfin, and find out how the ring got into the hands of Tom Riddle. It would be far too much of a stretch at this point to assume that we are dealing with two different rings.

Well, we presumably were shown the result of that interview, and the next thing we know, Albus is attempting to get Morfin out of Azkaban.



Okay, now you can raise the question of; why? Well that much is fairly easy once you give it a bit of thought. Albus may be perfectly willing to treat rules as something that apply to other people. Particularly in his later years. But he does prefer

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to have his own actions at least look legal and above-board. Besides, if Morfin *didn't* kill the Riddles, then he ought not to be in Azkaban for it.

For that matter, if Tom stole the ring from Morfin, then the stolen property ought to be recovered and returned to its rightful owner.

Who would then be just terribly *obliged* to Albus. Much as Hagrid is. And for much the same kind of reasons.

And for that matter, after robbing the man, and setting him up for a life in Azkaban, Morfin has no convincing obligation to leave what little estate he possesses to Tom Riddle. He also is probably well aware that he hasn't long to live. He may very well agree to Albus's offer to be the executor of that estate, and may even decide to leave the ring to Albus directly.

If Morfin's health had held out a bit longer it might very well have happened that way. Although, by that time, the ring had all but certainly already become the Ring, and by the time Tom had skipped the country, it was probably already buried in the Gaunt ruin and cursed to Hell and back.



We've also tumbled into the trap of assuming that all of that presentation apart from the Ogden memory had been painstakingly collected by Albus, himself. I now think that this assumption is incorrect. We've evidently been keeping company with the long-lost Weasley cousin (who was actually a Prewett) that was discarded from the story when it became evident that as a First year raised outside the Wizarding World, she would have had no access to the information that she had been intended to



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deliver to the trio.

So who did collect and provide Albus's body of evidence?

Well I rather think we might have just stumbled over the source of that long-standing association/friendship between Albus Dumbledore and Alistor Moody.

When we first encountered the official Riddle backstory, we just assumed that probably everything but the Ogden memory — which Albus tells us right up front was from someone else — were from Albus's own investigations. However. Like I say; Albus had a day job somewhere else entirely. And in fact, at that point in time, unless all of those investigations were taking place during term breaks, Albus would have been in a classroom teaching most days of the week, not running about London, or wherever Madam Smith lived, investigating murders, or the movements of a random shop assistant.

Somebody collected those memories, and they did it for a reason. And once that's pointed out, there is Moody, right on the spot to have been *professionally* investigating suspicious deaths and missing property. He certainly could have collected that evidence in the course of those investigations. And he probably made copies of things that Albus had already expressed an interest in. Such as anything to do with one Tom Riddle.

I would say that the Hepzibah memory was taken at the time, directly from Hokey during the initial investigation. And no, indeed, we went into that memory and didn't see anyone else present at that point, but Hokey herself, Madam Smith, and Tom Riddle.

And rather suspicious it looked, too. But the fact that it took place two days before the Lady's death probably discouraged



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any determined follow-up. Although it might have prompted that interview with Burke that we saw, regarding where the locket had come from.

I rather think that Tom had basically “hit and run” and had already fled abroad by the time Madam Smith’s death was being investigated. Which might not have been immediate. The lady was elderly, and it might have taken a few hours after the authorities were informed of her death before anyone thought to check for poison. Given that Tom was only known to have visited the house a couple of days earlier, they might have wanted to ask him about whether the lady had seemed well and in good spirits at that point, since I get a distinct impression that the DMLE isn’t going to be all that enthused about taking the word of a House Elf. However, if they had interviewed Tom, we might have seen the results of that interview as well, and we didn’t (although if Tom were especially plausible, Albus may have decided to suppress it, since that would interfere with the conclusions he wanted Harry to draw. Like most of Rowling’s explanations, there is less to it than first appears.)

I suspect that, by that point, Morfin Gaunt might have already died in Azkaban. But if collecting evidence for Morfin’s retrial is where Albus and Moody first started coordinating things between themselves, Moody would have pricked up his ears at the name of Hepzibah’s last known visitor. And would have trotted off to fill Albus in on any progress the investigation was making.

We know nothing about what kind of family the Moodys were. But I get the impression that if Alastor Moody decided to make a career out of hunting Dark wizards, he’d take care

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to learn everything about Dark wizards that he possibly could. And I’m pretty sure that it would include at least an overview of curse-laying, curse-breaking, and cursed objects.

I also think that it is entirely possible that Moody might have already concluded that the young Tom Riddle *may* have created a Horcrux. And that he may have very well raised this possibility to Albus. If Albus had indeed made his effort to conceal the existence of Horcruxes and how they are created *because* of his interview with that very disturbing child in the orphanage, he would have had no difficulty accepting that possibility. For that matter, it may very well have been Moody that set Albus onto the track which ultimately led him to figuring out that, yes, Horcruxes, *plural*, were their problem.

I mean, c’mon, if he was already suspecting the nature of the Harrycrux as early as November 1981, he had to have known that there was more than one of them.

As to the provenance of the individual memories in that presentation; while Albus admits that the Bob Ogden memory came from someone else, and he actually appears in two of the others, he never comes out and tells us the provenance of any of the other memories that comprise the “official Tom Riddle backstory,” does he?

Do we actually see Albus in any of those memories, apart from the Hogwarts letter one, and the one where Tom came to ask for the DADA position? I think that once Albus started agitating for a retrial for Morfin, and Moody was, at least hypothetically on board with the likelihood that the actual murderer in the Riddle case was Tom Riddle, I think we could make a fairly good case for most of the rest of the memories in that series,

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certainly the Burke memory, and the one from Hepzibah's Elf, Hokey, as having been collected by Moody in the course of his official investigation of the murder of Hepzibah Smith.

Not, of course, that Albus was going to tell Harry that. Or tell the world that, either. After all, people in general seem to have an unaccountable degree of difficulty taking poor Alastor at his word. Somehow, people don't find him to be altogether credible. Much better to present the information oneself, without telling them where it came from.

The Burke memory, unlike the others, is tightly edited to limit the number of distractions. In that one, we do not even enter the Pensieve, but have the memory rise and play out independently, so we cannot even see where it takes place, let alone who else may have been present. We do not even know whether the interrogation took place in B&B, or in the DMLE. And you will notice that there is also no clue given as to just what question Burke was actually answering, since we never heard that, and have no info regarding who was asking it.

But I think we can safely conclude that at some point before very far into the inquiry, Moody had turned up to ask Burke questions about where Madam Smith's missing property had come from. The cup had been in the Smith family for quite a while. But the locket had come from the same shop as the sales assistant who had recently been at the house.

Bob Ogden's memory of his own run-in with the Gaunt family was from a good 20 years earlier by the time Albus turned up to ask about the Gaunts. We don't know how old he was or how actively he was still in the field investigating. He could very well have deputized a young Moody to help chase



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this wild goose of Albus's in re-investigating the evidence from the Riddle Massacre, in hopes of finding something other than a conversation in Parseltongue to base a retrial on. Or possibly to find if there was any additional information about sightings of that dark-haired teenaged boy which the Muggles had learned of at the time, that caused them to think twice about assuming that Frank Bryce must have had something to do with the deaths. The Aurors from the DMLE might have missed that information at the time, having simply zeroed in on Gaunt, who actually confessed to having killed the Riddles.

Moody certainly seems to have been old enough to have worked with Albus in the mid-'40s at any rate. Albus clearly considered Moody to be useful, and if Moody was young when he first started actually working with Albus (rather than just sitting in Albus's classroom), it's all the more likely that he would have felt honored and impressed enough by the "Defeater of Grendlewald" to follow Albus's lead without raising questions.

But then, we've got something like a 50-year span of time for whatever their association was based on to have formed, so we can't make any definite statements regarding it.

Actually, referring back to my hypothesis that Moody might have already been aware of Horcruxes, having learned about them over the course of his training, Tom's "elegantly wasted" appearance during Hokey's memory might have been what raised suspicions as to what might have caused such an effect in so young a wizard.

Moody might have raised the possibility at some point. If he already knew about Morfin's maundering on about having lost his father's ring, and had been told anything about Tom's ten-



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dencies to take trophies. Trophies were certainly a potential factor in connection with the Smith murder. By all accounts, Moody was a very effective investigator. And he all but certainly had completed his education before any ban on the subject was instigated at Hogwarts. He might have leapt to the conclusion that Tom may have created one.

I'm inclined to doubt that he would have leapt to the conclusion that he might have made additional ones from the artifacts he'd stolen from Hepzibah Smith. Even Albus might not have assumed that, at the time. Or not until Tom returned and asked for the DADA post. By that time his appearance would have probably raised any number of suspicions, particularly if the suggestion of a possible Horcrux was already in the equation.

As to Moody knowing about Horcruxes, that's sufficiently off-canon that we can pretty much roll our own. First, although Slughorn is telling Tom Riddle that the subject is banned at Hogwarts in what appears to be 1943, we don't have any information as to just when that ban was instituted. Plus, Albus wasn't the influential figure in wizarding society in '43 that he became after '45. He may very well have pressured Dippet into banning the subject, and removing the information from the Hogwarts library. But he was completely unlikely to have any influence on what was being taught elsewhere, like, oh, say, the Auror's training program, or Gringotts. And he certainly had no influence on private families' libraries.



As to the Smith murder; there are a couple of mildly confusing issues related to the account of Madam Smith's death

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as Albus presents it. One is that the visit that Tom paid her took place a full couple of days before she was found dead. The other is that acto Albus, Hokey remembered stirring something into Madam Smith's cocoa that wasn't sugar. We didn't see that happen in anybody's memory. We were just told it. Presumably Albus was also just told it. It may well be true, but it is a classic example of hearsay evidence.

The other question is whether or not Madam Smith's death was indeed the basis for the Cup Horcrux. Rowling claimed that it was, although that was interview information. In this case, I find it easier to believe Rowling than to believe that Tom killed Madam Smith, stole the cup, and then later killed some random, unnamed other person in order to turn it into a Horcrux.

But if Tom used Madam Smith's death to create the Cup as a Horcrux, then he had to have been there, in the house, that very evening. Rowling may try to claim that he created the Harrycrux by accident, but the Cup was no accident, and I flatly do not believe that you can create a Horcrux remotely, over a long distance (or by accident).

We are given to understand that Tom tampered with Morfin's memory, first suppressing the memory of his meeting with his nephew, and then overlaying it with a copy of his own memory of crossing the valley and murdering the Riddles. He was 15 at the time, so it may have been a fairly crude cut-and-paste job, which may explain why Albus was so easily able to undo it. But by the time of Madam Smith's murder, Tom was probably rather better at such things. And he wasn't working in the spur of the moment. He had given himself a couple of days to draft out a plan.

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Madam Smith's murder appears to have been built to the same basic template as the Riddles'. Tom was there at the house. Once Madam Smith had dismissed Hokey for the night, Tom possessed her, forced her to drink the poisoned cocoa, and waited while she died to make his Horcrux.

At some point during the evening, he caught Hokey unaware and stunned her. Then either erased, or suppressed her memory of his arrival and overlaid it with his memory of stirring the poison into the cocoa. He left the older memory of his earlier visit alone. That visit had taken place a couple of days earlier, and anyone else might have been to the house between those visits and been told of it.

Then he took the Cup and the Slytherin locket (and probably whatever loose cash or untracable valuables were available), and left, erasing any other indication of his presence. If he had missed any traces, his visit a couple of days earlier would have accounted for it.

We don't know how well memory tampering works on House Elves, but Hokey did not remember Tom visiting on the night that her Mistress died. And she did apparently remember something about the poisoned cocoa. (Although, if the poison was actually in the sugar bowl, that might have confused the issue.) And given that Albus was aware of the method used in framing Morfin, one now wonders why he did not attempt to discover whether Hokey's memory had been similarly tampered with.

Unless, of course, the whole business went down while he was tied up in his classroom at Hogwarts, and by the time he learned of any of it, it was all too late.



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How I think the investigation of Madam Smith's death may have gone (there is plenty of wiggle-room) is that in the morning Hokey found her mistress dead in the sitting room.

She was elderly, but she wasn't ill, so, being a sudden death, it was reported. I don't know if the Ministry or DMLE have the equivalent of a Coroner, but given that the office of the Coroner dates to well before the date of Wizarding Seclusion, I would suspect that they might. So, somebody from that office would have been sent to investigate and determine the cause of death, which was accomplished fairly quickly, i.e., within the same day, and was discovered to be poison.

We don't know how late in the day this was determined, but Madam Smith doesn't seem to have been a sufficiently public figure for there to have been any urgency about the death. Originally.

We don't know how long it took for the missing artifacts to be discovered, either. That would have raised a lot of new questions, and probably a great deal of outcry, uproar, and accusations within the family, since I don't think anybody is likely to have believed that a devoted House Elf would have murdered her long-time Mistress in order to rob her.

There would certainly have been a full investigation. And there certainly would have been some attention paid to whether the missing artifacts had turned up anywhere obvious, like B&B, and Burke was certainly questioned about the locket at least, since Hepzibah had acquired that from Burke at some point within the past 20 years or so. I suspect that the investigation eventually petered out, with a handy scapegoat,



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but without truly satisfactory results, and may be in a cold case file somewhere in the DMLE. But either Moody, or someone in the DMLE appears to have known of Albus's interest regarding a certain Tom Riddle, and brought it to his attention, or Albus would not have had those memories in his collection.

Which now leads me more and more to draw the conclusion that Morfin had probably survived his 2nd stint in Azkaban until very near to the time that Hepzibah Smith was murdered. And, if Tom had friends working in the Ministry who might have passed the word that Albus Dumbledore was trying to get Morfin Gaunt a retrial, that might have prompted him to seek Madam Smith out and collect his heirloom locket before leaving the country.

We don't know just how long ago Hepzibah purchased the locket. It could have been anything up to 20 years earlier. But I am reasonably certain that Tom had already found a notation of that purchase in the shop's records. He may have been waiting for Madam Smith to come back in order to strike up an association. But if he was planning to leave the country at that point, he might have decided to advance his interests by contacting her claiming it was on behalf of B&B on some pretext. Chiefly, no doubt, to discover whether she still had the locket, and whether it was still in her possession, rather than in a Gringotts vault. And if so, he intended to make sure to get it from her, one way or another, before leaving Britain. Not least because he had no idea how long he would be gone, and the woman was old enough to die in the meantime, and her collection to be broken up among her heirs and the locket might end up anywhere.

He never anticipated finding the Cup as well, since that had

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been in the Smith family long enough to have not been in any dealer's records.

Stealing his uncle's ring, on the other hand, had been pure trophy taking. Now that Tom knew about his parents, and in particular knew that his deadbeat father lived in luxury right across the valley and had abandoned him without a backwards glance, Morfin was already being set up to take the fall for murdering the Riddles. The ring would be of no use to him in Azkaban. It might have been an ugly old thing, but it was about the only thing in that hovel with any intrinsic value. And Tom did like to take trophies to remind him of his victories.

There is some confusion as to just how much credibility we ought to put upon Albus's claim that Tom specifically wanted artifacts connected with the Founders for his Horcruxes. Despite the fact that in the end it appears to have worked out that way. But from all indications, Tom's first preference was for artifacts specifically connected to *himself*. He had, indeed, managed to get Helena Ravenclaw's story of what had actually happened to the Lost Diadem of Rowena Ravenclaw out of her. But I'm no longer convinced that did so with any long-term goal in mind. I rather suspect that his doing so was more a case of just wanting to discover other people's *secrets*.

I also rather think that it was only when Hepzibah waved the cup of Helga Hufflepuff under his nose, at a point that he was *already* was determined to get out of Britain for some time, that he decided to make Albania and finding the Lost Diadem his next goal. He would probably have taken it as a "sign"



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Rowling did tell us at one point that Albus, although not a Parselmouth himself, could understand the language when it was spoken by a human. She later reversed herself and claimed that it wasn't a language that could be learned. But, since that makes complete nonsense of the way she uses it in canon, I think that statement can be safely dispensed with. It's a language. When it's audible, it can probably be decrypted by some form of translation spell. Otherwise I cannot see any reason why Albus would be trying to build any kind of a trail of evidence on memories of conversations which were conducted entirely in Parseltongue, which he would be unable to understand.

Another pure speculation is that Albus's chiding Tom about rumors of Tom's activities that had reached the school, and that he should be sorry to believe half of them, was very likely as close to a declaration that Albus would be watching Tom's activities henceforth, as Albus was capable of making.

After all, we have never been told of *any* suspicious activities in which Tom had been engaged *since* his return to Britain, and that, consequently, by such "rumors" Albus may well have been referring to both the Riddle Massacre, and the death of Madam Smith.

Although, if Tom had already been publicly running some form of "Lord Voldemort" hoax and making a mockery of the pillars of British wizarding society by that time, Albus could have been referring to that.

And then he goes on to out Aberforth as being one of his informants. WTF?* You don't give away your sources of information to an all-but-declared enemy!

Apparently, any time you put Tom and Albus in a room

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together, Albus is probably going to lose control of the situation and do something inadvisable. Even if he does appear to come out of the confrontation with the upper hand.

(* It was stupidly and clumsily handled, but the real person who was being informed of Aberforth's presence and connection with Albus was the reader. Doing so in Tom's presence, however was very much an authorial *faux pas*.)



Plus, it has finally sunk in that my use of the term "hubris" to describe Albus's faults was absolutely, unmistakably, *literally* spot-on.

We are dealing with a veritable Greek tragedy here. In the full-bore Classical tradition. And this is not just a thin overlay of the problem, either. It underlies *everything*.

This Greek tragedy enactment goes all the way to the bone. It took me months after finally concluding that Albus must have turned that Prophecy loose deliberately, before the inherent classical tragedy underlying the series began to surface. And I really have no excuse not to have seen it earlier.

ETA: Rowling will probably never admit that Albus Dumbledore turned the Prophecy loose deliberately. But, quite frankly, she's lied to us before. And everything in the whole progression of this story from the point that the Prophecy got loose supports my contention that he did indeed do *exactly* that.

I mean, come on, we are dealing with the fallout from a *Prophecy*, here! How many Greek tragedies can you say that about? (Clue: just about all of the best-known ones.)

The central figures of Greek myths almost universally set the

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wheels of their own destruction in motion by first getting above themselves and attracting the attention of the Gods, and then trying to evade a fate foretold. Riddle's actions are a perfect example of this particular road to ruin. *And so are Albus's.*

It is abundantly clear that Albus *also* finally came to grief by trying to use a Prophecy to take down an enemy and to manipulate the fate of how everything was going to play out. This was unworthy. It was a betrayal of everything he had ever claimed to stand for. And when it didn't go as he expected it to, he gradually found himself forced to comply with it *anyway*. (Yes indeed, cross that river and destroy a great empire. We're not going to tell you that the empire you destroy will be your own.)

Upon consideration, I think I may be way off-base in my statement above that it was only in the last year of his life that he began to realize how badly he had mismanaged things. He may well have been quite consciously dodging that particular bullet for the whole previous wizarding generation. That final year was just the year when all those chickens finally came flapping home to roost.

And, let me say, chickens in flight are not a *bit* graceful.

I'll provisionally cut him some slack in that he may have originally hoped to spook Riddle into doing something so reckless that they could have shut him down before he could get at the child who was foretold in it. Possibly before the kid was even born. But even if Albus did never study Divination, as he claims, he really ought to have known better. Prophecies just don't work like that.

The prophecy demons must really have caught Albus at his very weakest and most vulnerable point in order to have duped



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him so thoroughly. Because Albus clearly knows exactly what a Prophecy is worth. They are *all* lies. He *knows* that they are spontaneous eruptions of Dark magic, which will turn on you if you try to do *anything* to direct them. Not merely turn on the person you direct them *at*, they will turn on *you*. And he went and did it *anyway*.

For years, Albus was believed by many to be the greatest wizard of modern times. And we can now recognize that he was conceited enough to not-so-secretly agree with them.

Such people attract the attention of the Prophecy demons. Particularly once they start believing their own publicity. Being the "greatest wizard" probably includes being a master of Dark magic as well as the more "domesticated" sort. But even so, to believe that he could direct the outcome of something like a Prophecy was an unmistakably, classic piece of hubris.

Right off the top, he lied to himself. He convinced himself that he could deploy the Prophecy, carefully edited, and scam Riddle into setting up his own destruction. That particular gamble may be paying off in the long run, but the cost is far higher than Albus ever anticipated, and much of the price is of a kind he was not really willing to pay. And any opportunity of being able to tweak the timing absolutely did not happen.

Which is not surprising. The *target* of that Prophecy was never Tom Riddle.

Albus was the target. He should have *known* that.

By deploying that Prophecy he also *created* the whole unnecessary complication of the Harrycrux — which was *not* a part of the solution, and which now had to be dealt with *as well as* the rest of the Horcruxes.



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He also does not seem to have realized that he trapped himself just as surely as he trapped Riddle, until after the wheels were already in motion; forcing himself into a perfectly odious line of action that was not really in his nature (and required him to *take responsibility* for things, *and* other people's welfare — at which he had signally failed before). However much he tried to shirk it or palm it off on others.

First off, he felt he couldn't just stand back and let it all happen without him. That's not the way an Albus Dumbledore operates. Not if he intended to remain on top of matters. And certainly not if he wanted to know who the foretold child was (assuming there even was such a child), to provide the child with some sort of concealment until Albus deemed it time to unleash him, and to oversee his training. In short, he had to break a lifelong habit and *get involved*. (Which you will notice he did as remotely as possible.)

So, first he founded the Order of the Phoenix** and staffed it with some of his most trusted associates and everyone he could find who had managed to “defy” the Dark Lord the requisite three times. Believing that then he could back off, and they could all watch each other's backs, under his occasional direction.

**Rowling implies not, and I've since re-thought his reason for doing so, as well. But I'll leave this iteration of the matter here for consideration. I still believe that it reads plausibly for Albus to have only formed the Order after he put the edited Prophecy in play. Otherwise we are left with no earthly reason — apart from contempt for any and all legitimate authorities — nearly all of which he was *already* in a position to oversee and direct — for why he would have done so.



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Conversely there is that unworthy possibility that he formed the Order just in time to invite James Potter and his associates into it as soon as they finished school, knowing that James was a Peverill descendant, in order to continue to “cultivate” him. Frankly, that reading would be far more plausible in one of the more sophisticated Evil!Albus interpretations.

But he doesn't seem to have told them what the Order was really *for*. The Order don't seem to have been told there even was a Prophecy. (Or not until Year 5, when they were guarding the record of it, at which point any of the halfway intelligent of them might have figured that much out.) They just knew that they needed to protect each other, particularly the children. I suspect that it was only Albus (and just possibly Snape — who was not in the Order, and, at a stretch, Aberforth, who was) who knew why.

Then he started having to treat people — people that he knew personally — as pieces on a game board, while waiting for the child to be born.

The chain of actions he now found himself engaged in must have gone completely against the grain. And Riddle wasn't taking the bait and putting himself at risk. Instead, he had escalated this war, and everyone else was now at even *greater* risk.

And, conversely, once Albus realized that he now had to oversee the Prophecy as it played out (which could have been as quickly as ten minutes after he let Snape get away without obliterating it from him), he finally realized that the first phase of it, and the whole point of turning it loose in order to create some super-special, mystic hero, was for the kid to be put into a position to be “marked” by the enemy, so he would be quali-



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fied to solve their Dark Lord problem for them. That must have really made Albus's day.

He is a very detached old gent, but I really did not think that he was quite as hard-hearted or cold-blooded as Rowling retroactively portrayed him in DHs, and the people he actually knew were usually real to him, not just animate chessmen. His response was to try to forestall the inevitable. By the time Harry and Neville were born, he was totally at cross-purposes with himself.

And then Sirius Black waded in and made a pig's breakfast of Albus's carefully laid plans (for the *second* time!) and Albus ended up with his future hero marked after all — losing the kid's parents in the process. Now he had a disembodied enemy who wasn't dead, and he had to take responsibility for the kid and his welfare. (No no *nonono*...)

He distanced himself by laying a blood protection on the kid and dumping him on his mother's sister (despite Minerva's account of just what kind of people the Dursleys were), setting Arabella Figg within range to keep watch, and never showing his face in the vicinity again.

All a basic course of action this is the kind of calculating behavior you would expect from a Rufus Scrimgeour. Fortunately (or unfortunately) Albus Dumbledore is no Rufus Scrimgeour. Our Rufus would have started training Harry as soon as his magic became trainable and would have thrown him at Tom at the earliest possible opportunity. Preferably before Tom managed to make a physical return to the wizarding world at all. (Which wouldn't have answered, either.)

But not Albus. Pro-active problem solving is just not in his

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wheelhouse.

And all of Albus's disassociating himself turned out to be for nothing once Harry finally showed up in person, looking like a scrawny little underdog. If Albus's track record with Hagrid (and Snape? And possible others?) was anything to go by, Albus Dumbledore may have had a soft spot for underdogs. And then Harry completely won his heart by unnecessarily plunging into the labyrinth to "save" the Philosopher's Stone.

From that point there was no looking back. From that point, everything was for Harry.



To the exclusion of just about everybody else. Even to the exclusion of any kind of common sense. After they all (except the Flamels) managed to survive the adventure of the Philosopher's Stone, we listened to Albus strenuously attempting to convince himself that their Dark Lord problem had effectively already been solved. That they could just keep blocking Tom's return attempts until he never managed to return. That was his story to Harry anyway. I wonder which of them he was trying to convince?

It was only as the casualty count began to rise, and ended up including students in his care, which at the end of OotP finally forced him to return to Plan A. It was only by sheer blind luck that none of those kids at the DoM with Harry had managed to get themselves killed.

Harry's raid on the DoM appeared to have finally taught Albus a long-needed lesson. Leaving the boy untrained and uninformed was just too dangerous. It might be possible to

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keep blocking Voldemort. But it was not possible to keep blocking both Voldemort *and* Harry, together.



HE had set this in motion. He had no excuse. He got the hero he had been asking for. And, as he had admitted all the way back in PS/SS, humans have a knack for wanting exactly what is worst for them. The boy needed to be given his mission and turned loose to attempt it.

And NONE of this was ever necessary. You do not need to "create" a super-special, mystic hero to take out a handful of Horcruxes. You need a bunch of volunteers who are willing to commit to what they know may be a suicide mission. You need to share information, and you need to develop some confidence and faith in the followers you've already got.

And he'd have had volunteers. Even Reggie Black was willing to take a shot at it, and he was playing on the other team!

How many lives have been lost due to Albus having put all his eggs in the Harry Potter basket? I made it at 11 by the end of HBP, not counting **any** of the Order members from the first war, apart from James, Lily, and Sirius. And Albus, himself.

On the other hand, Lily Potter bought him nearly 14 years of peace.

Which he *wasted*.



It's been pointed out to me that if the above is the case, then Albus's statement in HBP, chapter 23 about the significance of the Prophecy to Voldemort and Harry being voluntary on their



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parts comes across as both dishonest and hypocritical.

I'm not convinced it proves anything of the sort. You have to consider that Albus may be playing the "sadder but wiser" card by the time that conversation took place. And he may believe he has a very good reason to still not be completely forthcoming with Harry yet. He had been worn down by over 20 years of opposition to Riddle before the Prophecy demons threw temptation in his path. And I still think he succumbed in a moment of weakness.

By the end of OotP, however, Albus had obviously got a clue. That tear that Harry didn't notice signified something. We can't be altogether certain of what, but it may be more than just the avowed emotional mistake of getting too attached to Harry and letting things fall through the cracks elsewhere.

But I very much doubt that tear was on Sirius Black's account.

I am suddenly flashing on Patricia McKillup's 'A RIDDLE OF STARS' trilogy wherein the Land Ruler of the whole world, [spoiler]

...who has been living in hiding for generations and masquerading as his own servant, states to the young hero who he has been putting through all sorts of appalling situations, that he had never dared to hope that he would be given an heir that he could love.

[end spoiler]

At that point in the story arc Albus Dumbledore had just gotten it hammered home that he had created this appointed hero for a purpose, and that purpose made it a hopeless mistake to grow too fond of the boy, because; 1. he could lose him., and; 2. he *had* to risk him, and; 3. ultimately, when the boy learns the truth, he will know that it was Albus who first



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betrayed him by turning loose that edited Prophecy. (Which, imho, would have played as a far better reveal than the weaseling cop-out of a distraction over a teenaged crush on Gellert Grindelwald that Rowling finally gave us.)

I really do believe that the statement he made about being so much smarter than most people that his mistakes were correspondingly huger than theirs, too, was an acknowledgment that he finally realizes that HE set them all on their current path, and that it had been a mistake from the beginning.

And they cannot bail, because Voldemort isn't going to turn loose of his end of the rope.

And, I really do wonder whether what the green potion showed him was, in detail, every single result of turning loose that Prophecy, with the full cost in human lives.



One Good Slytherin

Well the fans had all been clamoring for "one good Slytherin" since about Book 2, hadn't they? It looks like Rowling finally listened to them.

Of course if we had wanted one whom everyone would universally *like* we should have said so.

And we'd still be waiting for him, too. Or her.

But, for the record: I *do* like Slughorn. I like him very much.

Possibly all the more so in that I don't have to deal with him. I suspect that would get very old, very fast. He is an unconscionable bore.

But at the end of the day he does appear to be our token "one good Slytherin." Or at any rate, the only one still standing.



The View from the Back Seat:

Even before DHs came out I very much doubted that we would get another "good Slytherin." Although at the end of the series one *could* try to make a case for the "official version" of Regulus Black. Even if what we've been told regarding Regulus Black never quite manages to add up.

Of course, this all comes with the usual rider that by the end of HBP, I was thoroughly convinced that Snape was a White Hat. But that doesn't mean I necessarily thought that Snape was ever going to "make friends with the children," any more than the blackbeetles in the cupboard back in E. Nesbit's stories ever did, and for very much the same reason. The children wouldn't.

But I will also happily go on record as stating that I think Horace Slughorn is a *very* good Slytherin. And not the least because he is so demonstrably a good *Slytherin*.

It should be transparently clear that until Tom Riddle showed up and set his stamp on Slytherin House, Horace Slughorn



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was a shining example of what, in the general purview of the wizarding world, was one of the most recognizable “types” that “a Slytherin” could be.

And a society, particularly such a society as the wizarding world has been set up as — which we all know runs solidly on a principle of “Old-Boys’ Club” cronyism and by means of myriad interlocking patronage networks — needs a few Horace Slughorns to keep the wheels greased, the machinery moving smoothly, and to make sure that the System serves everyone, not just those in the drivers’ seat.

Gryffindor House produces Leaders, Lieutenants, and Lone Operators.

Slytherin House traditionally produces Politicians, Power Brokers, and Publicists.

And a functioning society needs all of them.

Of course the Leaders and the Politicians both tend to be vying for the same constituency, so there is a considerable potential for rivalry there. And it sometimes gets a bit heated.

It is also abundantly clear that while officially Horace was at Hogwarts to teach the subject of Potions, he made it his personal mission to teach the students — or, rather, those students that he judged to be best placed to actually *use* the skill — how the System *worked*. And, incidentally, how to work the System.



But of course Tom Riddle didn’t care about any of that.

Tom Riddle landed in Slytherin quite legitimately. He was more than clever enough for Ravenclaw, but Ravenclaw is all about cleverness for its own sake. Tom regarded it as a tool.

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Ambition is what Tom Riddle was all about. There really wasn’t anywhere else for the Hat to have put him.

It is quite obvious now that Tom waltzed in, managed to enthrall all of his classmates, most of the staff and stole poor Sluggy’s House right out from under him. And Sluggy didn’t even realize it. Lily Evans was probably quite truthfully one of Slughorn’s favorite students of all time. But thirty years earlier, so was Tom Riddle.

Or he *had* been until Tom frightened Sluggy out of his wits by discussing the merits of creating seven Horcruxes. I rather suspect that Slughorn’s partiality for Tom cooled rapidly after that.

And Albus may well have noticed as much, and later started asking uncomfortable questions.

Although possibly not until very much later, I have begun to think.

How long was it, I wonder, before Slughorn began to suspect what (or who) Tom had become? Was that when he started fostering the careers of Muggle-borns and children from other Houses? For he had certainly been doing so for some time by the time of his retirement.

I’ll also admit that I feel distinctly sorry for Slughorn, as I do not exactly feel sorry for Cornelius Fudge — another wrong man in the wrong place at the wrong time. Slughorn is a reasonably clever, competent wizard, and although vain, and not without a great deal of silliness, he is not just a bumbling fool. But he is essentially a trusting soul and his trust has been cruelly abused.

I will also admit that I am frankly offended by the fanon response which is determined to read Slughorn as a slimy old



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pedophile. Even though I have to admit that Rowling's presentation would certainly give one some excuse for drawing that conclusion. But as of HBP Albus suddenly started "reading" as a pedophile too, or at least a "groomer" and I don't know that she really intended that. (Fenrir Greyback, on the other hand...)

But, to me, if anything, Sluggy is more on the order of a very big, rather clever baby.

For all that Albus was careful to put Harry on his guard against Slughorn's anticipated attempt to "collect" him (which could just as easily have been intended as a blanket explanation for Slughorn's manner which was calculated to keep Harry from taking the man in even greater dislike than he did — or conversely, as an attempt to keep Harry's loyalty firmly attached to himself) he introduced Slughorn not only as a colleague, but as a friend.

And I didn't really think he was lying. Or not altogether.

Albus clearly thought highly enough of Slughorn to be prepared to leave the Slytherins in his hands again, because he already knew that by the end of Harry's 6th year neither he nor Severus Snape were likely to still be in the school.

Indeed, giving it some thought, I rather suspect that Snape and Albus may very well have discussed what could possibly be done to lessen the damage to the House once the DEs had overthrown the government. As well as who they could safely put in charge of Slytherin House that Tom Riddle would not immediately replace with someone of his own choosing. Slughorn was by far their best option.

And when you stop and think about it, Horace and Albus had a lot of common ground. Their association also went back

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a long way. We can take it as a given that Albus knew exactly what Horace Slughorn was. And he seems to have been willing to trust him with a quarter of the school.

Horace seems to have trusted Albus, too. According to his story, about five minutes after he learned that Albus Dumbledore was convinced that Lord Voldemort had returned — Horace bolted into hiding. He left his comfortable home (and you know that whatever place Horace had settled into would have been *very* comfortable) and claims to have spent the following year dodging anticipated Death Eaters, squatting in vacant Muggle houses, never staying anywhere longer than a week. Despite the Ministry's denials, despite the Prophet's smear campaign, despite the fact that it was a full year before there was the slightest evidence that Albus was right. If Albus Dumbledore believed that Lord Voldemort was back, then that was more than good enough for Horace Slughorn.

And unless that entire scenario was a another staged performance, that whole business might be a clue to a few other things in addition.



Which rather brings up the question of why Horace should have been so very frightened by the possibility that Voldemort was back. I suspect that we may be being badly served by the Harry filter again. Tom may (almost certainly does) hold Slughorn in contempt, but he had benefited to at least some degree from the man's patronage, and would probably be willing to allow it to continue at Hogwarts, rather than being redeployed elsewhere. Hold that thought.

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Harry Potter, after all, still knows zip about the wizarding world. Until midway through the series, all he had ever seen of it was Hogwarts and its environs, the main shopping district in London, and one wizarding household. One might try to make an argument about the World Cup campgrounds, but while that was a fine panoply of local color and exotic details, it isn't the best example of a functioning society as a whole.

And even though Harry had spent part of each of the last three summers in the Weasleys' company, and despite the fact that Arthur Weasley works for the government, Harry has no clear idea of how wizarding society actually works. He is still of an age to be viewing everything through a heavy lens of playground ethics and schoolboy pecking orders. And even those only as they are played out inside of Gryffindor House.

Not necessarily the best example of how a whole society operates or is maintained.

Harry Potter had certainly never heard of Horace Slughorn. Not one moment before Albus introduced them. But that isn't to say that nobody else had.



From a meta standpoint Sluggo is really a marvelous piece of work. He is the missing piece to so many puzzles, and offers such a perfect subject for games of "compare and contrast" vis-a-vis the other characters we've met in the course of the series, (Fudge, Riddle, Dumbledore, Snape, Pettigrew, even Dudley). And he is also a perfect confirmation of so many of the convictions that a reader will have developed by the time Sluggo made his entrance regarding the way things work in



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the wizarding world.

He certainly serves as the absolute, quintessential example of the person who, given a choice, will most typically do what is easy rather than what is right.

He is a shining, larger-than-life portrait of both the traditional faults and the traditional virtues of Slytherin House.

He is a virtual demonstration of the besetting failure of the whole wizarding world at large; in that here is a man with what is clearly intended to be represented as a basically sound moral compass, and Not A Clue regarding any kind of functioning ethics. Morals without ethics are practically the motto of the whole bedamned wizarding culture.

And yet (unlike Ginny Weasley Mark II) he does not read as something that was assembled from a checklist. He reads as very human. And very flawed.

Still, many fans look at his blatant favoritism, despite his, supposedly neutral, position as a teacher, turn up their noses in disapproval, and ask "but is he really a *good* man?" To these I have to answer; Yes.

Yes, Horace Slughorn is a good man. In fact he is a very good one. More to my point, he is a *kind* man.

But he is a *weak* man. Very much so.

And is it really fair to blame a character for not being strong?

The observers are correct; Slughorn is vain, he is boastful, he is indolent and extravagantly self-indulgent, and I agree, he is a shameless opportunist, too. He is glib, facile, a flatterer, openly manipulative, and, yes, despite his denials, he *is* prejudiced (although rather less so, I think, than Hagrid). But he is not an incorrigible bigot. He doesn't deny excellence when it



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calls attention to itself, regardless of who possesses it. Indeed, he actively goes looking for it, and is happy to promote it once he finds it. And he is not mean-spirited. He is not a liar. And if his values are shallow, they are still the preeminent values of his whole society.

And over the entire course of HBP we did not see one act of malice from the man.

We did not even see an act of petty spite.

No. That particular apple may not have fallen far from the tree, but he is NOT a rotten apple.

The worst that can be held against him is that he may be a bit too quick and too willing to dismiss those he judges to be apparently “ordinary” from his considerations.

He does (on stage) arbitrarily choose to overlook people that we have been accustomed to thinking well of. They didn’t make the cut to be invited into the Slug Club.

But, really, can you honestly suppose that either Ron Weasley or Neville Longbottom had the social *nous* to have actually benefited from an inclusion in Sluggo’s little band of favorites at the age of 16? The ballots aren’t in on Neville — who has a good deal more social maturity than either Ron or Harry (or Hermione, truth to tell) but Ron certainly hadn’t. And being included or not would make no difference whatsoever to Luna.



But Slughorn is essentially a timid soul. And it is not just physical timidity.

With all of his gifts, and his skills, you would think that if he had ever possessed even a scrap of courage he would have been off

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to scale the heights himself, to one day finish up as the *eminence grise* of some highly exclusive sector of wizarding society. He has the skills to do it, and he knew how to pull the right strings — as well as *which* are the right strings to pull. But, instead, he settled into Hogwarts, much like Albus, to spend the prime of his life attempting to impress an endless parade of schoolchildren.

We were originally led to believe that Albus had gone out into the world after Hogwarts and done something with himself before returning. But that turns out not to be the case at all. The post-DHs official timeline simply does not allow for it. He could have even returned to Hogwarts and been teaching within 10–15 years after the point that Aberforth left school forever (probably soon after sitting his OWLs in 1900. I don’t see ‘Forth choosing to stick around to cram for the NEWTs). I rather get the impression that Slughorn also started teaching as quite a young man. Indeed, one is tempted to conclude that the day he took his first dose of Felix Felicis potion, which he tells us was at the age of 24, was the day he had his job interview — possibly with Headmaster Black.

And while Albus may prefer to use different methods, himself; he was more than content to sit back and let Horace do his thing for decades. For he recognized that Horace was serving a legitimate need. Albus, after all, was also a product of the wizarding world as it is.

I also tend to think that Slughorn is probably a more inspiring teacher to a wider range of students than Severus Snape. Even if he does use an inferior textbook, and tends to overlook the students that he regards as commonplace. I suspect Slughorn may have chosen Borage over Jigger for its clarity in presen-



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tation, despite the plodding mediocrity of the recommended methods. And I suspect that he has probably always encouraged the student's attempts to *improve* on those methods.

Snape is clearly able to *challenge* his students, and there are students who respond well to a challenge, but he does not inspire them. Damocles Belby, the developer of the wolfsbane potion was one of Sluggy's pets, and I suspect he may not be the only one of such to have made a significant contribution to the ongoing technology of Potions research. How many ground-breaking Potions researchers do you expect can be traced back to Snape's tenure at Hogwarts?

A few, undoubtedly. But how many did he scare off?

What is more, Slughorn takes the trouble to establish that he appreciates innovation more than he demands a rigorous adherence to a strict protocol, and he sends the students a loud and clear message attesting to that fact. His students were getting perpetual reinforcement of the message that Slughorn considers innovation a Good Thing.

Snape tells them what to do, puts the directions on the board and starts prowling through the lab to catch anyone doing it dangerously wrong.

And Slughorn's pep talks weren't just for the purposes of flattery to Harry Potter, either. Ginny Weasley was invited into the Slug Club solely on the grounds of one chance-observed clever hex. At that point Slughorn knew nothing of more Ginny Weasley than that she was very pretty. He hadn't encountered a Weasley since Arthur and his brothers finished school. And he had no particular memories of Arthur. Arthur wasn't one of his protégés. Slughorn simply admires cleverness, and he loves



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novelty. Bat-Bogies! Oooh, shiny!

And, of course, *pretty*. Sluggy does have a tremendous appreciation of pretty. Quite innocently, I imagine, or Albus would have been aware of it. And if it had been anything other than innocent I doubt that he would have tolerated it in his school. As he did, for well over 20 years.

Indeed, given that Albus would have been perfectly capable of calling Headmaster Dippet (or Headmaster Phineas Nigellus Black)'s attention to anything over the line in the conduct of a colleague, simply for the manner in which it would have reflected upon the School, I think we would be safe in assuming that Albus tolerated Slughorn's open appreciation of pretty for anything up to 60 years, or longer. Molly tells us that Albus and Horace both started teaching at about the same time.

Not that we can really count on that piece of information. That would have been decades before Molly was born. But her aunt Muriel would have not been shy in volunteering information regarding any of the Dumbledores — who she remembers perfectly well from her own childhood in Godric's Hollow. And I doubt that all of that information (or, indeed, any of it) would have been complementary.

Snape also comes off the worse in a comparison of their respective performances as Head of House, despite Slytherin's seven-year winning streak with the House Cup and the Quidditch Cup during Snape's tenure. In a perfect world, Snape would have gone straight from Hogwarts into the R&D division of St. Mungo's. By the time Harry started Hogwarts he would be in charge of a half the wards on the Curse damage floor, and he might well have been running the whole place by the time



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he was 60. His portrait eventually would fit right in with the those of his bloody-minded peers on the central staircase. He would not be stuck off in a school dealing with dunderheads. Or at least not underage dunderheads.



Which brings us back to the sticky issue of the Slug Club.

A lot of readers really, really dislike like the whole concept of the Slug Club. It just plain gets up their noses. And they are absolutely right that a blatant little “elitist” clique like the Slug Club ought to have no appropriate place in a truly just and virtuous society.

But since when is the wizarding world one of those?

Hermione may have downplayed it to the boys, but I think that she was very chuffed indeed to be invited into the Slug Club. And Sluggy was happy to have her, for her own sake, not merely as a favor and a possible inducement to attracting Harry Potter. He recognizes drive when he sees it, and Hermione has that in spades.

She is also far from the first clever and talented “outsider” to have been adopted by Horace Slughorn and ultimately helped along the way to finding her own comfortable niche in the Old-Boy’s (and Old-Girl’s) Club of wizarding Britain. Slughorn *looks* for such promising youngsters from obscure backgrounds to speed along their way.

And all he really asks is that they not forget him, and do the same for someone else, someday. Sometimes at his request..

And for those who sniff and mutter yes, but that for every clever Muggle-born or known halfblood that Horace ever

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adopted, there were probably a dozen high-status brats with nothing to recommend them but their family names, I answer; yes. That is the whole point of the Slug Club. Those overprivileged little puppies are the kids who really *need* that Club. And throughout Snape’s term in the office *they haven’t been getting it*.

Which has only served to make the inequalities of the wizarding world *worse*.

Who else is going to teach those little “scions” the responsibilities that their place in the pecking order entails. Their families? They are only with their families for a couple of months of the year. You don’t turn out any kind of a viable future “ruling class” without giving it a solid grounding in the duties of their high position, as well as the benefits.

The “System” only continues to work as long as the bulk of society supports it. And it will only do that as long as those at the top keep giving enough back to those who let them direct it, for the masses to be willing to let them keep doing it! And the Slug Club, and its judicious sprinkling of talented incomers are the way Slughorn shows them *how it’s done*.

Those interlocking patronage networks that run the wizarding world are there for a purpose. He is demonstrating that purpose. Teaching the children in entitled positions to recognize merit when they see it, and showing them how to cultivate it, how to manipulate the System and — even if rather crudely — something of what the rewards are.

It’s called *noblesse oblige*. “Passing the torch” and explaining this has probably always traditionally been one of the unwritten duties of a Head of House. *Any* House, but particularly of the

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Head of Slytherin House. But one sees very little of that sort of thing from the Heads of the other three Houses by the time we reach Harry's day. McGonagall certainly can't be bothered. She has too much on her plate already.

In short, this is a duty in which Severus Snape (*and* the other Heads of Houses) have been conspicuously derelict. It's small wonder the chasm built into wizarding society is only getting wider. The younger members of the "ruling class" aren't holding up their end.

But then Snape is hardly qualified, is he? And I rather doubt that there has ever been a whole lot of *noblesse* "obliging" him. Although one of the Malfoys probably got him his job. "Officially," that is. Lucius was one of Sluggo's favorites, after all. And Lucius seems to have been an apt student, in that much at least. And I do not get the impression that Albus was ever any help at all.

And then Snape was further hampered by his duties as a spy, and the necessity of publicly favoring or appearing to favor the children of Death Eaters to maintain their families' trust and good will.

For the talented outsiders, Sluggo's attention — for the lucky few who catch his attention — can make all the difference in the world to their futures. And it is a bargain at the price. Even if the old bore sometimes has perfectly appalling judgment of just what qualities truly merit cultivation.

Although he really ought not to be blamed too harshly for being taken in by a dirty dish like Tom Riddle. He was certainly not the only one to have been taken in by that nasty little piece of work. But it has to be admitted that Riddle seems to have

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learned an awful lot of very dangerous tricks from Slughorn.

And Sluggo really ought to have turned that memory over to Albus as soon as Albus asked for it. It doesn't matter how ashamed of it he is. He is clever enough to have known what was at stake.



But then that's the real issue, isn't it?

Horace Slughorn is rather more than just a timid soul, isn't he? He is in fact, an abject coward.

And by the time we met him he may very well have had good reason to be.

Let's take another look at the facts, shall we? Or what we have been *told* are the facts. Five minutes after he learned that Albus Dumbledore believed that Lord Voldemort had returned — he went into hiding. As stated above — unless that whole setup was another piece of performance art produced by the Albus and Horace Show specifically to impress Harry — he claims he abandoned his home and spent the following year dodging anticipated Death Eaters, squatting in Muggle houses, never staying anywhere longer than a week. Despite the Ministry's denials, despite the PROPHECY's smear campaign, despite all lack of any evidence.

Now let's also remember that Slughorn can never really have looked like a good prospect for legitimate recruitment by Lord Voldemort. Right off the top: he's a member of an older generation. Riddle didn't recruit the older generation. He never sent out lures to anyone who was significantly older than himself. And certainly not to Slughorn, with, by the time he retired,

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30+ years of openly cultivating talented Muggle-borns and half-bloods behind him. We don't know how long Slughorn was actually at Hogwarts, even if he did start about the same time as Albus, since we don't know how long Albus was an instructor before he became Headmaster, but Slughorn was certainly there in Riddle's day by the late '30s, and he was still there in Lily's day in the mid-'70s. We assume that he was there right up to the point that Snape took over in '81.

But Horace does seem to have been from the same pureblood, "insider" sector of society that produced most of Voldemort's original followers. Slughorn knew Abraxus Malfoy. He remained a friend of Theodore Nott's father, who was a former student — although he doesn't seem to have *known* that his friend Nott became a Death Eater. Nott's arrest in Year 5 wasn't brought to Slughorn's attention until he started talking to students on the Hogwarts Express in the year he returned to teach. And by that time he'd supposedly been in hiding for a year.

And despite his waffling over the possibility that to return to the school would be tantamount to a declaration of allegiance to the Order of the Phoenix (pretty good supporting evidence for my contention that in its original iteration the Order had NOT been any kind of a "secret society," btw) he made a point of conspicuously avoiding all known Death Eaters' kids once he got there.

But, back in the day, he hadn't avoided them. He had taught every one of them. And they all knew him.

I repeat: Horace Slughorn personally taught every single British Death Eater that Tom Riddle ever enlisted. And they all knew where to find him. And they would have had no difficulty

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approaching him.

Slughorn is an affable, and even a highly competent wizard, for all his weakness of character. And he really does have excellent contacts. And he has a habit of boasting about how useful he can be to people. That's just asking for it, isn't it?

He could have announced his retirement as early as the end of June of 1981 (although it is more likely that he did so during the summer). This was at the very height of Voldemort's first rise. And there is some reason to suspect that he may have been encouraged, or even asked to make way for Severus Snape, in order to avoid putting Snape into the DADA position. Voldemort did not fall until the end of October, four months later. And it would have taken several months more to round up all of his followers that were ultimately identified.

And it would take even longer to sort out the volunteers from those who were coerced or magically constrained. Malfoy and Avery managed to get off on Imperius defenses, which we know in their cases was completely bogus.

But in most cases it probably wasn't.

The false Professor Moody told us very clearly that the Imperius Curse had given the Ministry a lot of trouble once upon a time.

And if the Death Eaters' tactics were anything then like they are now, we have seen that they have no compunction about creating Imperiused puppets. A lot of them.

I have a terrible suspicion that one of those puppets may have been Horace Slughorn.



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Or, perhaps not. Slughorn only left the protections of Hogwarts School some five months before Riddle's first defeat. By the final five months of Voldemort's first rise violence was more the order of the day than subversion. Horace, accustomed to being safe in Hogwarts for over 40 years probably didn't find wartime wizarding Britain at all to his taste. He may have decided it was a good time to take his own long delayed "grand tour" on the continent for the duration. Or perhaps to take a second one.

But once Voldemort had been conclusively defeated, he came back. What, *precisely*, did he come back to?

By this time we've probably learned not to take anything we ever heard from Sirius Black without a hefty amount of salt. But, still, the sort of erosion of trust or confidence in either the government or one's own friends and family that he described to us early in OotP is the kind of thing that would not make restoration of either function or trust a simple matter.

I do think that Horace could have had a lot of input on putting the WW back together after Tom's first defeat.

And he was in an excellent position to have been doing so, as well. He had only just retired that June. I suspect that after the whole cumulative build-up of; "who can you trust" over the previous decade, there would have been a serious dearth of morale on the part of a populace which was now faced with the cost of VWI and probably wondering whether this really qualified as a victory.

Fortune had just handed Horace the apotheosis of his life's work. What better operator could there have been than Horace for pulling strings, and throwing get-togethers where people

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could discuss what needed to be done about things, introducing people to people who could actually *help* matters, and generally networking his heart out.

And, what's more, having been tucked away from Voldemort's influence at Hogwarts for some 40 years, people might be more inclined to *trust* him.

An uproar on the scale that Rowling, and most fans have tried to paint VoldWar I leaves major scars, and yet a mere decade later Harry steps into a cozy, comfortable, apparently untroubled WW where everything is business as usual. (Basically the Shire, with magic.) I rather think that this cozy little society probably owed a *lot* to Horace's networking skills.

I dare say that, even without holding any official "office" in it, Horace had been quite a prominent figure in society during that decade — which isn't the kind of thing that Harry Potter, off on the sidelines in Little Whinging would have been in a position to hear word one about.

And he wouldn't have heard anything about Slughorn from the Weasleys. Arthur wasn't the head of a Ministry Department in those days. Whatever his function had been back then, his *job* had probably not been endangered by the war. Whatever Slughorn was doing did not benefit the Weasleys directly.

But Horace had at least some 40 years worth of students that he had helped along, and was able to serve as a go-between — or at the very least make wherever he happened to have set up housekeeping become a general meeting point for an exchange of the WW's movers and shakers to use as a clearing house of offerings and favors.

Which means Horace probably had a lot of *very good rea-*

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sons for ducking and covering as soon as Albus started saying that Voldemort was back. Even if Horace hadn't been one of Tom's Imperiused tools first time round, he was in very real danger of being conscripted this time.

Admittedly, one might reasonably level a fair amount of criticism at the fact that the society that Horace built was, in just about every possible respect, the same society that the WW had been cultivating for as long as anyone could remember. With all the same underlying inequities, and its status all-too-aggressively quo. It was in no definition of the terms an "improved" or "progressive" society.

Horace may appreciate innovation in Potions or Charms, but he himself is not a particularly imaginative man. He helped to put a society back together that operated in a manner that he was used to. One which obeyed the rules that he knew. Everything was restored, but nothing was *fixed*.

Consequently it was way too easy for other people to co-opt the System, or to hijack the rules. You'll notice that everything fell apart almost as soon as any pressure was brought to bear on the weak points.

But that's not necessarily Horace's fault. And you will notice that 19 years after Voldemort's final defeat, Harry's verdict regarding what is all-too-*obviously* just yet another iteration built off of what was essentially 'Horace Slughorn's template of a "proper" wizarding world' is; "all is well."



Which brings me to the so-called Battle of Hogwarts and the end of the series. Which invites a bit of digression.

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Rowling seriously let us all down on the issue of House unity. After flirting with the whole business, and even having the Sorting Hat claiming to be unsure as to whether the whole Sorting process was really the right thing to do, she blew us a collective raspberry and had Minerva order the whole of Slytherin House out of the castle before the final battle started.

And in that miserable excuse for an epilogue Rowling strongly implies that the whole business of Sorting the students is still triumphantly "business as usual" (even though the Hat was allegedly set afire and no one took the time to put it out) and that, furthermore, 19 years later Slytherin is still designated the house of "*teh eeeevil*".

We plowed through 4000 pages to validate *that*?

Why raise the issue if you have no intention of dealing with it? Or at least to come out and admit that you are not going to deal with it. And possibly to offer a reason *why* you are not going to deal with it? Otherwise you are deliberately leading people on.

I don't think even Rowling's youngest readers wanted to be palmed off with that.

Tom claimed in full sight of the audience that the Slytherins all left the castle and joined him. Of course he was claiming that to taunt Lucius Malfoy and only doing it to say that all of them *but Draco* had checked in, so I doubt it's a good idea to take even a word of that piece of grandstanding seriously. Frankly, the way Rowling set the whole situation up there was no way that Tom would have even known that the castle was even being evacuated, unless he had a clever little silver monitoring device like one of the ones in Dumbledore's office.

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Which I suppose is possible. All he had to do would have been to order Snape to give him one. Snape could have hardly refused to do it. Snape certainly hadn't been the one to tell Riddle that the students were being evacuated. He was "driven out" before the evacuation was even discussed, or the decision to make a stand against Riddle was even formalized. And the Carrows were captured and immobilized in the Ravenclaw tower. So how does Tom supposedly know this?

And at that it doesn't explain how the Slyths could have got from the Hog's Head and into the forest without setting off the caterwauling curfew alarm that was imposed over the whole village at sunset. You cannot Apparate without a clear destination, and the Forest had remained off-limits even during Snape's term as Headmaster.

Of course Tom also claims that Snape agreed that there were other, more worthy, fish in the sea when he turned up late to the muster in the graveyard at Little Hangleton and was questioned about his prior devotion to Lily Potter.

And I don't believe a word of that, either. I'm just SO convinced that the first thing that Snape would have found himself needing to justify after his tardy appearance when summoned, was his love life — *not!*

I say that *that* whole speech was a classic "Yo mama!" taunt to Harry Potter, and probably something our Tom just fired off extemporaneously.

(I don't believe that Lily wore army boots, either.)



The fact is that by the end of the story, anything we hear

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from Tom Riddle, under any circumstances, should probably be taken with a heaping teaspoon of salt. Tom just plain LIES.

But it does raise the issue of what did happen to the Slytherins. And, for that matter, what happened to *all* of the underage students who were evacuated from the castle. Rowling doesn't seem to give a damn. She certainly doesn't seem to have spared a thought for the logistics of the situation.

Post-release she has tried to claim that she showed the Slyths returning to the castle with the villagers in the morning. But until a new edition of DHs comes out with that added, that is another baldfaced lie. She wrote nothing of the sort into the story. In fact she quite clearly wrote that Slughorn and Charlie Weasley returned at the head of a party of all the friends and family of all the students who had stayed at the castle to fight — along with the villagers of Hogsmeade. Nothing whatsoever was said about the rest of the Slytherins.

Since *all* the Slytherins had been ejected from the castle before the fight started, that sounds like not a one of the Slyths returned but Slughorn — unless of course they had family members in another House who stayed, in which case they effectively came back incognito.

But then, the whole account of that stupid Battle of Hogwarts was haphazardly written and hopelessly disorganized. (And, I say, FAKE!)

It was strongly implied that the Muggle-born students had not been permitted back at all that year, and yet Minerva was heard to be chivying one of the Creevy brothers (who had been established as Muggle-borns since CoS — although Rowling might very well decide to claim that it's only their father who

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is a Muggle any time she takes it into her head to do so, or is challenged) out of the castle with the underage students. This would probably be Dennis, the younger brother. Since Colin, at the end of his 6th year was probably already of age. He turned up, and was noted as having been killed in the fight.

A few others, like Luna Lovegood and Ginny had already either been taken hostage by DEs or had gone into hiding. But that still leaves anything from 200–450 students (depending upon whether or not you accept Rowling's population numbers or more rational ones) in residence by the day of the battle.

Even if the whole of the Gryffindor 7th year and half of the Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws stayed on to fight, that still only comes to about 20–40 students. (Rowling did tell us that she created 40 students in Harry's year, and we've met most of them. And it never sounded like Ginny's class was any larger.)

Since it was the last term of the school year all but those 6th year students who had birthdays during summer break would have probably been of age also. Perhaps another 10–15 of those stayed as well. Bringing us up to maybe 40–60 students who stayed. There are some dozen or so staff (not counting Snape and the Carrows) and there were maybe another dozen ex-DA members and a couple of dozen Order members who also showed up. That comes to roughly 80–100 or so defenders, with a death count of 50 only four of whom seem to have been named.

Right. I'm not sure I believe Rowling's numbers. I never feel like I can believe Rowling's numbers. Especially since so far as we were told, only Tom and Bellatrix appear to have been killed on the attackers' side.

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But that still leaves all of the students from years 1–5 who needed to be evacuated, none of whom could Apparate. That's anything from 150–350 students. And I don't think they could all fit in the Hog's Head. And, as I say, it was already established that there was a caterwauling curfew in the village, set to go off if anyone stepped outside any building before dawn. So what were they supposed to do. Huddle there like sardines (with the goats) until whoever won the battle decided to deal with them?

Somebody needed to get those children away to safety. And somebody needed to organize it. I really don't get any impression that there were any pre-existing evacuation plans in place before they actually had to do it.

So I have my own ideas of what the Slytherins might have been doing that night. It's optional, but it's one that isn't directly contradicted by anything in the text.

But first: if the Slytherins had just left through the tunnel and gone off to join the DEs in the forest don't you think they would have told someone what was up, and Tom would have sent someone to the Hog's Head to close down the escape and cut off the arrival of the castle's defenders? Or to take the children hostage? We would have had the Battle of the Hog's Head, with the younger students right in the middle of it. And we got absolutely nothing of the sort. Tom and his followers don't seem to have had a clue. And no one, it seems, who

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could have given them one.

Which still leaves the question of how the Slytherin students could have got from the Hog's Head to the DE encampments (which they knew were *where?*) without setting off the curfew alarm.

I think it is much easier to believe that Tom was simply lying. The only Slytherin students who we know took part in the battle seem to have been Draco and his goons, and they merely snuck back into the castle through the same tunnel. Assuming that they ever left in the first place.

The only adult who seems to have stayed on site at the Hog's Head was Slughorn. Everyone else over the age of 17 was moving in the other direction; Order members Apparating directly into the bar to get into the castle to join the defenders, as well as underage students evacuated on Minerva's orders. It must have been like Grand Central Station in there. Even Aberforth didn't stay at the pub. He showed up at the castle along with the rest of the Order.

Sluggy and the Slytherins, however, were the first group out though the tunnel, followed by the first through fifth years of the other three Houses (plus any 6th and 7th years who didn't stay to fight).

I tend to doubt that it was left up to Aberforth to figure out what was to be done with them. And Sluggy, as the only teacher available had the authority to take charge.

Sluggy had a crew of perhaps 30–50 students from all four Houses who were old enough to have Apparition licenses (or at least the training) and up to 300 children who needed to be taken out of the way, to someplace safe. (It is *not safe* to

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be crowded into a place where people are blindly Apparating in. Not safe At All.) I think that Slughorn's crew spent the rest of the night moving the younger students away from the Hog's Head, even if only as far as the Three Broomsticks, and its Floo. And, incidentally spreading the word that the castle was under attack. Only those students whose parents could be expected to already be on the battlefield, or who were Apparating in to take the tunnel to the castle were left to stay overnight in the Hog's Head. It is probably big enough to house that many. And someone needed to organize that, too.

And in the morning, once the curfew went off-line, Sluggy (in his green silk pajamas) roused out the villagers, and led them back to the castle, along with Charlie Weasley, to finally duel with Tom.

We saw him do it.



And now let's take a closer look at some of the other events of the series while factoring in some possibilities entailed by Slughorn's possible involvement.

In common with most wizards, Slughorn consistently demonstrates that he is deficient in common sense. As stated above, in HBP he waffled over returning to the school for fear that to do so would be tantamount to making a statement of alliance with the Order of the Phoenix. (It would not have.) And yet, once he got there he took care to snub every known Death Eater's child in the place. Now, what kind of a statement was that?

Even better; once he returned to Hogwarts and was "safe" what does he do but spend the whole year inviting his former

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pets back onto campus for “little Friday night suppers” and Christmas parties? Despite the fact that he does not know where any of their real loyalties may lie, and the PROPHET sends out daily reports of the actions of people put under Imperius. What on earth was the silly man *thinking*?

Clearly, his trust in Albus Dumbledore, and Dumbledore’s protection, was boundless.

And in such a story as we thought we had, one in which the plot is *not* almost totally driven by coincidence, I thought that there was at least some plausibility to the theory that Horace could have taken a hand in a conspiracy to orchestrate the death of Albus Dumbledore. Even if that death was real, it certainly wasn’t random. And, most unlike the deaths of Cedric Diggory and Sirius Black, it was not arbitrary. That death was designed to serve a purpose.

At the very least, someone in the school had to have had been involved in the aftermath. Neither Albus nor Severus Snape were going to be in a position to cover the wrap-up stage of the proceedings. Minerva was in no one’s confidence, and Hagrid cannot not have been expected to do it all alone.

There was more than one early theory out there which posulated Slughorn’s involvement in the [faked] death of Albus Dumbledore. One of these can be found in the book which a number of other online theorists and I collaborated, along with John Granger, over the summer of 2006; ‘WHO KILLED ALBUS DUMBLEDORE?’ (Zossima Press, 2006)

I will have to say that I think that some of the extraneous material which had been unearthed in support of the theory is delightful. One follows the careers of a pair of historical stage

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magicians by the names of Horace Goldin and The Great Albini. These men were peers and rivals, and at some point in his career, Goldin even appeared on stage with a pet tigress named Lily.

Indeed, the historical material is so delightful that I think that if Rowling was aware of it she might have rolled it into her story just for the sheer fun of it, even if it doesn’t mean anything.

However, it has since been proven beyond a doubt that even though we may still be confident that Albus’s death was “staged,” it was definitely not faked.

Which does not eliminate the possibility of additional conspirators or “stage managers” being involved in the matter.

Someone a little more subtle than Hagrid might have been brought in to assist this “Dumbledore’s Men” production to make sure that everything went as planned.

For example, given the potential for Albus’s full control of the timing of the events of that evening (gone into in the paired essays entitled ‘Exeunt Albus’), isn’t it a little late in the proceedings to be leaving the issue of actually getting the (false) Horcrux into Harry’s hands altogether to *chance*?

What was the point of retrieving it from the Cave? To leave it in Albus’s pocket for Hagrid or Minerva to find? Hardly.

Hagrid probably couldn’t have managed something that was quite so finicking a detail, requiring deft spellwork. Hagrid is not even a qualified wizard, and his magic is unreliable. Horace could have easily managed that part of the business. And I also think that any hypothetical co-conspirator was not Minerva, who was not reported as being among the crowd at the foot of the tower (in all fairness, neither was Slughorn, but he was somewhere in the vicinity, or he would not have known of

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Albus's death in order to have already informed the Ministry of the situation, as he reported when we next saw him). Minerva is an obvious suspect for having had a part to play at some point in the evening's events, but not that part. And she's not any kind of an actress. Her response to learning of Dumbledore's death would have been hard to fake. She nearly fainted. Had she been at the foot of the tower with the crowd, she would have already known that he was dead.

So. If there was an additional party involved in the conspiracy, it would have probably been someone who would not be expected to be running around the corridors battling DEs, and generally getting underfoot, but someone conveniently off the radar making sure that everything stayed properly coordinated, and performing the necessary stage direction and props management to make sure that the scene was properly set.

Well, Sluggy is certainly experienced at that. Death scenes to order on a two-minute warning in chapter 4 of HBP.



And, after all, do we know for a certainty that Albus did *not* stroll down to Slughorn's office with a bottle of oak matured mead the evening after he had finally viewed Slughorn's memory of that interview with Riddle, and assured his old friend Horace that, yes, a great deal of damage had been done by that conversation, but he was hardly the first person to have been hoodwinked by Riddle?

And might have suggested also that there was a chance that they could finally put some of it right, perhaps? And that there was a very necessary part that Slughorn could help them with,



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a perfectly *safe* part, but very, very important?

I don't think we do know otherwise. For that matter, silly as Slughorn can sometimes be, he is not really stupid. And he won't have forgotten that the poisoned mead had been purchased as a gift for Dumbledore, and stated as such. He probably already realized that someone was trying to kill the Headmaster.

We know that a Protean charm will work between Hogsmeade and Hogwarts. Draco and Rosemerta had been communicating that way since at least the first Hogsmeade weekend. Do we know that Albus did not tip Slughorn off that they were on their way back after Harry went running off for help when he staged his second collapse in Hogsmeade?

Well, we know that he didn't get the chance to do anything so complex at that point. Rosemerta was under instructions to be on the watch and point out the Dark mark, to draw Albus back to the school. But Harry did hear Albus muttering on the flight back. Taking down the extra protections around the perimeter accounts for it. But we don't know that was *all* he was doing.

Well, hey. Albus can perform magic nonverbally. Even just activating the charm to make the target coin warm up could be enough of a signal to alert Slughorn, or any other co-conspirators.

Once Slughorn got out of the castle and saw the Dark mark in the sky, he would have been in no hurry to go back inside. He would have seen Albus and Harry fly to the tower and might have summoned Albus's fallen wand, cast a cushioning charm, or otherwise softened Albus's landing, the fall definitely appeared to have been slowed by *somebody*. Sluggy might have had a nasty shock when he found that Albus was actually dead.



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But he already has his directions, so Sluggo gets to work.

First; banish the cushioning charms, make sure his old friend's robes were decently covering his old skinny legs. Get the Horcrux out of his pocket. Albus only filled him in briefly, Horace wouldn't have known it was a fake.

Then Slughorn lingers about disguised as a bush or something until Snape chivvies his party of invaders off the grounds and the defenders and Hufflepuffs follow them out of the castle. Then he mingles with the crowd (and just what called that crowd away to go and look at the base of the tower while Hagrid's hut was blazing merrily away in plain sight? Wouldn't you have expected them to first go and assist Hagrid?). Then to conjure the locket into place to make sure the still shocked Harry actually kneels on it, so he can't miss it, and hover in the background until Ginny takes Harry away and Hagrid takes charge of the body. Then Sluggo can go off to notify the Ministry.

Well, it does work. Even if Rowling doesn't appear to intend to go anywhere near it. I'm not prepared to bet the farm on it, either. But it is a possibility which I think I'll keep in mind.

It certainly works better than the roughed-in chain of coincidences Rowling gave us.



And, besides, Slughorn's specialty suggests that his help was already deployed in a different field altogether, a good deal earlier in the year. Indeed, in the previous year, too.

Rowling's shakiness regarding anything to do with numbers is famous. And passing it off as "Oh. Maths" is begging the question. Indeed Rowling's showcased ability to bollix anything that

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deals with numbers is absolutely notorious. Almost suspiciously so, although the reader will just have to forgive me if I decline to follow that particular line of inquiry.

But, the fact remains that she does keep *giving* us numbers and she doesn't always botch them. And sometimes they mean something.

We just cannot ever be sure of when.

Rowling tossed us yet another irrational numerical clue in HBP. And this one is connected to Slughorn. We still do not have any clear idea regarding its relevant context. But it was so obviously flagged as a clue that it stands to reason that it was probably supposed to mean something. Even if Rowling dropped it later and never used it for anything.

Horace Slughorn had allegedly been in hiding for a year by the time Albus and Harry caught up to him and talked him into returning to Hogwarts. By his own account, he had been out of touch, and on the move pretty much ever since Albus had made his announcement that Voldemort had returned. He claims that he had stayed no longer than a week in any one place before moving on.

About six weeks later, in his first Potions class he has a selection of complex advanced, potions set up as samples for the edification of his 6th-year NEWT-Level class. We had already encountered some of these over the course of the series, some of them more than once.

Veritaserum, Polyjuice, Amortensia, and Felix Felicis.

At the end of the series we still know nothing about the brewing of Amortensia. But we have known since CoS that Polyjuice needs three weeks to stew. Towards the end of OotP Snape

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stated that Veritaserum takes a month.

And when, after learning of its properties, Ron comments that brewing up a batch of Felix Felicis might be a good idea, Harry discovers and relays the information that Felix Felicis requires a full six months to brew.

Six months?

Slughorn had a finished batch of it in his first class of the year.

If that was a fresh batch, he must have started it no later than the previous March.

Why?

On the face of it, the answer seems fairly obvious. A man in hiding might reasonably want to stack the deck in his own favor, despite the fact that the stuff is highly toxic in large quantities. But he admits to having only taken the stuff twice in his life, and both times decades ago.

But then he also tells us that Felix is “desperately” tricky to make, and disastrous to get wrong. I doubt that such a delicate potion would improve by being packed up and relocated on a weekly basis during the brewing stage.

So where did he brew it? *Was* it even brewed fresh for that year, or was this the end of an older batch, decanted for a classroom demonstration? The fact that he is able to state with confidence that this batch was done correctly suggests as much. We can't know for sure without having some idea of its shelf life. That batch could have been made years ago..

What he had in the classroom was a very *small* batch of the stuff. Given Slughorn's general tendency for avariciousness, a controlled substance which probably would fetch a very pretty penny would be a very valuable thing to keep around. Particu-



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larly if you are on the move, and may need to raise money in a hurry, cut, and run. Maybe what he had in the classroom was the last of a batch brewed a couple of years earlier. But we cannot count on that. So what are our options? (The safest option of course is simply to say; “We don't know.”)

But if it was a fresh batch, he must have had a secure location to set it up, and check in on it at intervals. But that doesn't really answer the question does it? Why would he suddenly decide he needed to brew a batch of Felix Felicis 8–9 months after he stared squatting in Muggle houses? What happened at the end of February or the beginning of March in Harry's 5th year to motivate him? Do we know?

Well; Harry's interview with Rita Skeeter was printed in the March issue of the QUIBBLER. But I don't know whether that would have convinced Slughorn he needed to keep a bit of Felix on hand. We don't even know if he was in a place where he would have seen the QUIBBLER. In fact, it sounds rather unlikely.

However, at the *end* of March, Albus Dumbledore was forced to beat a retreat from Hogwarts over the Dumbledore's Army fiasco.

He doesn't appear to have been staying at #12 after that. And I would have thought that if he had retreated to the Hog's Head, someone would have checked for him there. Aberforth *is* his brother, after all.

The time is fairly tight in order to have a batch of Felix ready by Sept 1. if he only started it at the end of March, but what if Albus had contacted Slughorn before he left Hogwarts to the Ministry's control for the last term of Year 5? After January's Azkaban breakout, it must have been obvious that the whole sit-



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uation was inching its way up to a crisis.

For that matter; Albus and Horace might have been in contact for some time by then. After all, I'm pretty sure that Fawkes could have found Horace at any time if Albus had asked him to.

So maybe we are barking up the wrong tree.

But I feel more and more confident that the visit we paid to Horace to bring him back to Hogwarts in Year 6 was another bit of performance art.



Or, consider; Slughorn could have been asked, or commissioned to make that batch of Felix. By someone who could offer him a secure place to do it in.

What, during Harry's 5th year is the securest place we know of? Outside of Hogwarts, that is? And who had control of accessing it?

And Harry hadn't been back there since the previous Christmas, had he? Even though it has belonged to him since the beginning of last June.

After the Order cleared out, and Dumbledore discovered that the Locket had gone walkabout. (If he had ever known about the Locket, that is. Rowling seems to imply he didn't. But then Rowling arbitrarily lowered everyone's intelligence about 40 points by the time she sat down to write DHs. The damn thing had been in a display case in the parlor while Albus was in and out of the place the whole previous summer for ghod's sake.)

James Potter's name never passes Slughorn's lips, but Horace did speak well of Sirius Black. In his fashion.

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What if he hadn't been squatting in Muggle houses for the whole past year, but some other secured location?

On the other hand, Slughorn isn't a member of the Order and wasn't willing to commit to becoming one.

For that matter, wouldn't the Order have already *had* a Headquarters during VoldWar I? What happened to that one? Albus moved Headquarters to #12 in Year 5 because of his new scam of guarding the Prophecy record, in London (plus wanting to keep Sirius Black under guard so he couldn't mess with Albus's arrangements again), but wouldn't the old Headquarters have been protected too? And we do not know where it was (unless it was the house in Godric's Hollow. That one is still standing as a memorial. That could explain why they didn't go back to it).

One also might wonder just who inherited the Flamels' cottage. Albus could have hidden Sluggy anywhere. Once he caught up to him, himself. Which he demonstrably had done.

After the example of OotP it would be a bit silly of us to lose sight of the fact that a fair part of the action of this series is taking place off the pages that we and Harry have access to.

And Dumbledore collected Harry and took him directly to where Slughorn was with rather suspicious ease once you consider the matter, didn't he?

And the two of them seemed to immediately take up an ongoing disagreement right in the middle, upon arrival, didn't they?

The more I think about it, the more Harry's introduction to Horace Slughorn reads like a pre-arranged setup between Albus *and* Horace.

And with a complex and dangerous conspiracy to stage

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his own death in the equation, I should think that Albus Dumbledore might have appreciated access to a little vial of Felix Felicis on one particular evening in the following June, himself, mightn't he? Re-read the way Harry observed Albus "feeling his way" through that sea cave and compare it with the more subjective version of Harry's experience while under the influence the night of Aragog's funeral. I'd say the similarities are highly suggestive. And even though it was a small batch of Felix, I don't think that two doses would have accounted for it all.

However. The safest option is still; "We don't know."

And since Rowling has relegated Felix Felicis to her ever-growing list of disposable plot devices, which were used once and discarded, despite their clear potential relevance to future developments, we'll never find out.

Although, in retrospect, that whole "recruiting Slughorn" sequence is still inclined to take on the look of another piece of performance art. Indeed, it's The Albus and Horace Show.



But if Sluggy, who we know has tremendous faith in Albus Dumbledore, likes to work behind the scenes, and whose objection to returning to Hogwarts seems largely to have been based upon the appearance such an open association with Dumbledore and the School would present, was already working with Dumbledore — *behind* the scenes — by the spring of Harry's 5th year, we suddenly have to ask ourselves a few more questions regarding some of the other events that we've been taking for granted.



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Slughorn may be fat, but he is not exactly lazy. Even if he does display a certain degree of indolence. Nor is he stupid, however deficient he may be in common sense. And he's a Slytherin, with an eye to making use of whatever advantages come to hand. He also possesses an alertness which is attuned to recognizing an advantage when it is under his nose.

So, the question really has to be asked: just how much did chance really have to do with Harry being given Snape's old Potions text? Or was that yet another of Albus's machinations?

Post-DHs, I was disgusted to discover that the whole issue of the Potions book was yet another of Rowling's disposable plot devices, and that, in fact, it was never necessary for Harry to have known that it had once been Snape's book at all. (Which renders the whole "mystery" about the Half Blood Prince not just gratuitous and irrelevant, but fake.)

But in the interests of theorizing, the issue is still worth batting back and forth as if it had mattered. It certainly mattered that Harry should have had access to the book *itself* over the course of his 6th year. The only question is whether it was by accident or by design that he *did* have it. Having performed a frontal lobotomy upon the whole storyline, Rowling these days no doubt would like us all to passively sit like lumps (very much like Harry) and just accept that it all happened by the will of providence. I, however, still think it plays much better if it happened by some level of design. Even if not any design of the author's.

Sluggy certainly palmed the book off onto Harry without the boy becoming suspicious. And if that was intentional he and Albus might readily have shared a grin when Harry later



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returned the battered cover with the clean, fresh, new interior.

Or possibly not. Not if Snape's agreement to the loan of the book had been intended only to enable Harry to "win" the prized dose of Felix in the first day class brewing contest, and was intended to be temporary, lasting only until a new book could be ordered.

Because by all rights, if it had ever mattered, we ought not to have heard the last of that Potions text at the end of the year. And the fact that we had, frankly, stinks.

For it gradually sinks in, that the whole "Half-Blood Prince" subplot of the book bearing his name, from where we are standing, turns out to have been completely pointless!

It served absolutely no purpose to the story, as the story is presented in book 6. None. At all.

Not the Potions book, *itself*, mind you. It was absolutely crucial to the plot that Harry have access to the book. Without the information in that book he would not have been able to complete the task that Albus set him, and he and his friends would probably not have come out of that year intact.

But he *never* needed to know who had annotated the expanded information into that book.

The only purpose served by discovering that the book had been Snape's book, was to stand in as the punch line of a joke on Harry. And, incidentally, to underscore the fact that when the subject is Snape, Harry *never* seems to get it right.

So at the end of the book, the other shoe had yet to fall. And we never got one. There was no reason for Rowling to have been at such pains to establish that it had once been Snape's book — unless there was going to come a point in the action

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that Harry would need to know that the information in that book came from Snape. Even if it was no more than that he would need to be able to recognize the handwriting. And we never got such a reason. There is *no point* to it.

Ergo; it has all since devolved into apparently being a part of a lengthening string of unbelievable coincidences strung together by some never-named supreme being for reasons never revealed. This is not good storytelling.

Because if getting that Potions book to Harry was deliberate, then there should have probably been some information in that book that somebody wanted Harry to have access to. And it was probably not Sectumsempra. At the end of HBP Harry may just not have found whatever it was yet. But he still might have.

Unless, of course, its whole purpose was just to skew the odds of Harry's winning the prize of a 10z. dose of Felix Felicis in Slughorn's class that same day. I'm sure that Albus would have considered that outcome to be potentially *very* useful, and possibly worth assuring.

And, to pass the book to him by design would have been dead easy.

Minerva had probably passed on to Albus the information that Harry Potter wanted to train to be an Auror. The whole staff knew that (under normal circumstances) Potter would need to take Potions at NEWT-Level in order to qualify for Auror training.

Albus states with such perfect certainty that the OWL results will be coming later in the day when he drops Harry off at the Burrow that you cannot help but suspect that he is

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already aware that Harry received an 'E' on his Potions OWL, but not an 'O'. With only an E on his Potions OWL Harry would be unlikely to provide himself with the textbook in view of Snape's widely-known policy of accepting no one who scored lower than an O into his advanced class. And yet, neither Albus *nor* Horace bother to inform Harry that *if* Horace returns to the school, it will be as the Potions teacher, and Horace *does* admit students who received an 'E' on their OWLs into his NEWT-level class.

Harry admits as much when he showed up in Slughorn's class without a textbook. If there had been any continuing uncertainty as to whether or not he had purchased the proper textbook, it would have been easy enough to make a Floo call to Molly Weasley to verify the matter, once she'd seen the kids off on the Hogwarts Express. It would be hours before the train arrived, after all.

In retrospect, a remarkable amount of care appears to have been taken during the Albus and Horace Show to not let out any hints that Slughorn would not be simply another of the string of one-year wonders teaching DADA, but would be teaching Potions instead.

So I suspect that the staff, or at least Albus and his confederates knew in advance that Harry was going to need a Potions book.

What we cannot know for certain is who actually provided the book. Slughorn? Or Snape?



Slughorn was the last person seen to have possession of that book, after all.

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And I really rather doubt that he didn't know what it was he had. Even if he'd only just been handed it a day or so before he passed it on.

But there is always the possibility that he'd had it for longer than that. Let's explore that possibility:

Well? Any suggestions? I've already come to my own conclusions, but I'll run a couple of alternatives past you.

Alternative #1:

If he already had the book himself, he would have had some reason of his own to pass it to Harry, and to cover up for Harry's sudden improvement in his subject. We do not know what such reasons might have been, but that is certainly what he appeared to be doing all year. So, without Albus's prompting, why would Slughorn have wanted to enable Harry to cheat?

Ingratiating himself to Harry seems to have been the first excuse I can think of off the top of my head, but, if so, it doesn't seem to have worked, does it? Yet we don't get any impression of frustration over Harry's continuing to evade him and his invitations than the obvious, which seems a bit odd.

What about sentiment? I could accept that reason quite easily if it had been Lily's book. He would have probably have been very happy to give Harry Lily's old Potions text, with her notes, perhaps, but he didn't have her book. He had Snape's.

Or had been *given* Snape's. Unless he knew of some kind of a close association between Lily and Snape (which is now beyond doubt) I cannot see sentiment entering into it. And if there had been such an association (which apparently there had been all the way up through their 5th year) you would expect him to have mentioned it at least *once* during all his burling.

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Unless he'd been warned off. Which I think was likely.

As for the book itself: we are all at a standstill regarding that bloody Potions book. This is one of the puzzles that Rowling inserted (perhaps inadvertently) into HBP wherein no matter what kind of an interpretation you try to apply, there is always some detail left over that just does not fit.

But the amount of annotation in that book strongly suggests that it was used over the course of Slughorn's 6th year Potions class by *somebody*, for all of the potions annotations followed the lesson plans as they were presented throughout the year that Harry was in Slughorn's class. Even though at least one of the hexes in the margins had managed to escape a year earlier.

Since all of the writing in the book was the in the same handwriting, both types of annotations were all but certainly made by the same former owner.

And we have no certainty of how the book got into Sluggy's stack of loaner copies.

It should be noted that we don't have even a single word to suggest that Snape ever used Borage for his NEWT-level classes. He certainly didn't use it for his lower years.

The book could have been hidden in that cupboard. The fans could be correct in their original suspicion that somebody stole the book and Snape never got it back — although that would have been at some point after 6th year, since the book was clearly in use then.

Slughorn may not have discovered it among his stack of loaners (where it had been hidden) until after the Marauder cohort had left school. Possibly not until he was packing up his classroom when he retired, but if Harry was right, and he

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would have recognized the handwriting as Snape's, he held onto it. Sluggy isn't an outright thief, but he will help himself to unclaimed things he finds interesting. I think he would have found the Prince's annotated Potions text extremely interesting.

Indeed, he may have enjoyed deciphering the notes and reading Snape's improvements to the standard instructions. He'd have appreciated the hexes as well, most likely. Sluggy likes creativity and he adores novelty.

He may have even regretted having overlooked the little commoner, for I am still not convinced that Snape rated an invitation to the Slug Club (although I do admit that I might be wrong about that). Snape was much too surly, gauche, and (I'm sorry to say) not nearly pretty enough to fit Sluggy's usual profile for his little stars. There were no connections worth having there, either, and he was not a good candidate for the sort of return in obliging gratitude that Slughorn preferred for his patronage.

What's more, if he *had* welcomed Snape into his Club (and I agree that he might have) and pulled strings in Snape's favor, he would have *talked* about it. And he certainly did nothing of the sort throughout the entire year. We were listening.

Indeed, if Slughorn had been the one to provide that book, his statement at the end of HBP of; "I taught him. I thought I knew him!" would have some additional context. With all due respect, although I am sure that Snape was a memorable student, I suspect that Sluggy may have felt he knew Snape from something more than just the memory of having had him in his classroom for seven years, some 20 years ago. I think he may have felt he knew him from his book. But we got no confirma-

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tion that he was aware of the annotations in the book.

And, if he was, maybe to give the book to Harry (which would have probably been a bit of a wrench) provided him with a reason to feel that Harry was obliged to him. Even if the boy didn't realize it.

Well, it *almost* plays. But not quite. I cannot quite accept that reading. To me, the highest probability still seems to me that the old chess master, Albus, gave the book to Slughorn and told him that he wanted Potter to have it.

And we don't know how long Albus had it, or exactly what he intended by that transfer, either.



Alternative #2:

It has been suggested in various discussion groups that Albus gave Harry the book because he was hoping that if Harry managed to become a little potions star Sluggy would hand over the memory.

That one just doesn't really fly either, does it?

The real stumbling block to the book being a feint to get around Slughorn, so Harry could pry the memory out of him is that Slughorn himself behaves as if he is in on whatever the feint was from the beginning.

First he gives Harry the book. Which would have been easy enough to do if he was in the know. (Except that "we" don't know that he was.) And then he spends the whole year covering for Harry's sudden Potions expertise by going on and on about Lily and her potions glory back in the day, and how Harry must have inherited her talent. And presumably neither Snape

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nor anyone else disabuses him of the illusion that Harry is a potions whiz by commenting that there has been no such sign of excellence from Harry in Potions class in the previous 5 years. ("Remedial potions", anyone? One wonders just what Malfoy thought of Potter suddenly eclipsing him in potions class?)

I mean, really, it is a lot easier to believe that Slughorn was a part of a plot to get the book to Harry and to get him used to depending on it.

Which, if there had been something that Harry *needed* in that book, makes its own kind of sense. Even though Rowling never delivered on that possibility.

So let's follow that line of reasoning a while, shall we?

In fact, let's go back to the Albus and Horace Show.



This time around, the problem is gaps, rather than extra information that you have to find a place for. Filling gaps is a doodle by contrast.

Let us not forget that when Albus showed up at Slughorn's final hideout with Harry in tow, he and Slughorn stepped right into the middle of an ongoing discussion over Slughorn returning to the school. That argument certainly doesn't sound like something that had been in abeyance for the past year. To say nothing of the past 15.

And I really find it remarkably easy to conclude that the whole *mise-en-scene* could have easily been a performance staged for Harry's benefit.

He and Albus certainly walked into what turned out to be a stage set.

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Well, I certainly wouldn't put running two scams at once beyond Albus's capabilities. Slughorn may like to think of himself as kingmaker and puppet-master, but Albus is the real deal whenever he chooses to be. He could have enlisted Sluggy's active assistance in leading Harry even as he was using Harry's celebrity as a lure to Slughorn. And I think that Sluggy would have been quite willing to oblige Albus — so long as it didn't involve that awful memory.

In fact, it may well have been Albus's pressuring Slughorn over just what caused his enthusiasm for young Tom Riddle to have cooled so suddenly around the time that they were having all that trouble with a monster in the castle that had given Slughorn the idea to retire in the first place. (For you know that after that particular discussion Slughorn was unlikely to have ever been able to regard Riddle with the same level of enthusiasm.) Even though Horace may have been jockeyed into retiring just in order to make way for Snape, who Albus did not want in the DADA post.

So, can we really take Slughorn at his word that he has been living as a fugitive for the past year? I'm no longer sure we can. I do think we can take him at his word that he has been in hiding for the past year. I also think that Albus may have taken a hand in hiding him. It was very much in Albus's interests to have Slughorn obliged to him.

One of the last things Albus would have wanted to have to deal with upon Tom's return and his own split with the Ministry the year before, would have been Slughorn under Tom's control. Lucius Malfoy waltzing in and out of the Ministry like he owned it was bad enough. Slughorn, under Imperius, using

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his contacts for Tom's benefit would have been infinitely worse.

Particularly if something very much like that had happened the last time Sluggy was running around loose and unprotected.

It's possible that one of the very first things Albus did after the night of the 3rd task, was to contact Slughorn (who was probably always glad to hear from him so long as the subject of that memory didn't come up) fill him in on developments. Both of the developments, and to offer to hide him. Slughorn, an abject coward, accepted with alacrity. I also think that Albus commissioned that batch of Felix from him some months later. Possibly about the time of the Azkaban breakout.

For that matter; was Sluggy at Hogwarts, in the stands watching the 3rd Task?

Maybe he never went home that night at all.



Conversely, as my fellow traveler, Swythyv has suggested, Albus may have been slow off the mark, what with the Ministry brangle. And Slughorn, learning that Albus was convinced that Tom was back, did a bolt before Albus could make the offer. Albus might have wanted to advance his own agenda and start rooting out Horcruxes a full year earlier and couldn't, since he needed Slughorn to replace Snape for Potions so he could put Snape in charge of DADA. He wasn't able to set it up because Sluggy could not be found in time, and held the DADA position open for a Ministry shill as the next best use of the time.

Slughorn may be opportunistic and a bit unclear on the concept of ethics, but he seems to have a functioning moral compass. If he left the school in the first place because Albus was

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suddenly asking him about that interview with young Tom Riddle, I think he is bright enough to have figured out that his holding out about that memory may have contributed to the death of one of his other most favorite students of all time. (The shame he displays when he finally does turn the memory over certainly suggests as much.)

But he couldn't bear to reveal the memory, and he wasn't willing either to return to the school, or to show himself publicly as long as Tom was still out there.

The prospect of having the famous Harry Potter in his classroom was the lure that finally got him to agree to return to public life — in the safety of Hogwarts castle. Albus couldn't promise him Harry's cooperation regarding the Slug Club, but he could sit him down in Horace's classroom, and was prepared to pull whatever strings were necessary to facilitate it.

I really do wonder what Slughorn was told about that book. Because while it isn't impossible for his behavior regarding it to have been totally oblivious, the whole business moves along much more smoothly if he was aware of at least *something* of what was afoot.

I do think that Sluggy may have been told that the boy was competent, but not creative with Potions, his main sphere of expertise being in DADA. It would have been easy enough for Albus to have learned that Harry's Potions OWL had earned him an E rather than an O at least. Such things are a matter of record. And the record would also be accessible to the student's new instructor.

I also rather thought that Albus might have offered the book — which I was sure might contain some marginal information

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that Harry was going to need in the future — to Horace as a tool to ingratiate himself with Harry. As well as to give the boy some idea of what innovation in the subject (or thinking outside the box in general) can produce. It's a pity I seem to have been wrong.

I also think that Sluggy, once he had the book in his hands, would have examined it. He might have realized whose book it was. I suppose a great deal depends upon whether he *would* remember the handwriting of a single student from nearly 20 years earlier. How many teachers would?

But even if he didn't recognize the writing, he would probably have recognized the methods — if they had ever shown up in his class, and he would have probably remembered who came up with them.

Or it is possible that he had been filled in on it being Snape's book, and warned not to let that particular cat out of the bag to Harry.

And, from Albus's point of view, if Harry was able to turn the situation to his advantage in the matter of retrieving that memory, all the better.

But none of this is solid enough to really get a convincing handle on.



Upon consideration, I think the shortest line between two points comes out to Albus first consulting Snape, telling him that he intends for Harry to have access to a dose of Felix Felicis over the coming year, and filling him in on his plan to ensure that the boy should be able to be seen to have "won" the prize

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of a dose of Felix in Horace's class. He convinces Snape to (grudgingly and *temporarily*) loan Potter the use of his own old Potions book, with its annotations to enable this "victory." Due to Snape's well-known practice of only taking students who managed to make an 'O' in their OWLs into his NEWT class. Horace will be able to pass the book to him as a loaner copy, until he acquires his own copy of the textbook.

Then, taking Horace aside and telling *him* that he really wants to get a dose of Felix Felicis into Harry's hands (for the Greater Good), effectively setting up the potions competition of Horace's first 6th year NEWT class. Passing the book with its annotations to Horace, suggesting that the book might be able to give the boy the edge needed to outdo the competition.

Horace then goes through the book, chortling over the annotations and the spell notes in the margins, and selecting the Potion recipe in which the least divergence in procedure will produce the most visible improvement, and using it for the basis of the competition.

He passes the book to Harry as shown in the text.

When Harry decided to keep the book and switch the cover. Snape was thoroughly displeased. I'm sure Albus heard about it, and the attack on Draco Malfoy later in the year probably was reported with a hefty dose of "I told you so!"



Another thing that occurs to me — given the amount of flack poor old Sluggy catches for using an "obviously" inferior textbook for over 40 years — is that while the instructions in Borage are clearly inferior to Snape's annotations, none of

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them appear to be *dangerously* inferior.

The worst that will happen from following the set text appears to be that the potion will not be of optimum quality. Or that it may take longer to produce the same result as in the annotated version. You are not likely to blow yourself up or poison yourself by following Borage's instructions to the letter. Ergo: it is possible that Borage quite deliberately did not use the *most* effective ingredients and procedures in the text, because those have the potential to go more dangerously wrong than the run-of-the-mill instructions that he *did* use.

Paired with Slughorn's exhortation to innovate and improve on the text, the results might be not too shabby.

This might play nicely into at least one fanfiction author's interpretation, in that the recipes are deliberately hobbled, and that while a competent brewer will still get usable results from them, to get truly superior results requires taking some risks.

A further issue to be considered is that Rowling has confirmed that potions-brewing IS magic. This is not a cooking class. The brewer is channeling magic into the result.

With this understanding in the equation, we have an explanation for some of the more peculiar, or dramatic, results which we have seen students achieve in Snape's classroom over the previous 5 years. The students are in the process of attempting to channel magic wandlessly. This factor also raises the probability that a student who is willing to put more of himself into his potion will get a very different result than one who sluffs along only going through the motions.

Harry is a bit suggestible. Not as much as Lupin, perhaps, but the tendency is definitely there. Once he brewed the

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Draft of Living Death according to the Prince's instructions (which weren't really all that much of a departure from Borage's), he was convinced he had discovered a treasure trove of arcane knowledge. He hadn't any real understanding of what he was doing, or why these instructions worked so much better than the ones in the text, but he was fully engaged in the process of brewing potions — as he had never been when Snape was teaching the class.

Hermione was putting the same amount of magic into her potions in Year 6 that she always had. But Harry was suddenly putting in far more than he ever had before. And Harry, I suspect, has a lot more magic to put into a potion, or a spell, than Hermione does.

We've seen this kind of thing before. Neville was continually shooting himself in the foot by not buckling down and focusing over his first 3 and a half years in the school. It wasn't until 5th year that he finally decided that he was going to take control of his magic. It wasn't until 6th year that Harry was evidently given the crutch he needed to convince himself to take control of his magic in Potions class. And when he hid the book after the Sectumsempra incident he immediately decided that he couldn't perform at the same level, and didn't.

Oh, the annotations were useful, yes. Any student in the class would probably have seen real improvement in their brewing if they had access to those notes. But not the amount of improvement that Harry got. For Harry, the Prince's book may well have been invoking a placebo effect.

In the ww, after all, knowledge is power. But power is *also* power.

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I think it is hypothetically possible that an innately powerful student who is willing to throw himself into the work, and to approach the procedure with confidence, might perform every bit as well as one who has additional detailed knowledge about the properties of the ingredients or the ritual of the procedure when it comes to class work. Hermione has demonstrated this probability in her class work from the beginning of the series.

This will apply to almost any class work, but particularly in the study of potions, in which the magic is typically performed wandlessly. Furthermore, if all wandless magic operates on the same basic principles as I have postulated for Dark magic, then it is heavily affected by the wizard's *intent*. More so than in any class in which magic is performed by channeling magic through a wand.

This may well have been the real underlying advantage that Lily brought to all her classes, the ability to engage herself. But this applied particularly to Potions. She put herself into the cauldron and learned the fine details of potions-brewing along the way. Perhaps in the lower years, from Snape.



Regarding Potterverse People

Concerning One Tom Marvolo Riddle

A group of essays devoted to attempting to figure out an answer to this particular riddle. After all, *The villain*, is the *story*.



Riddle Me This

Many years ago JK Rowling made the statement in an interview that she didn't want just a 2-dimensional baddie dressed up in black, but a villain whose motivations the reader could understand.

Evidently you can't always get what you want. Not even if you are JK Rowling.

Not even if you have only yourself to thank if you don't get it.

Let alone apparently not being able to recognize what you actually already have.



Where most of the Harry Potter fandom is concerned, it seems to have taken a lot longer than it really ought to have for the realization to sink in that JK Rowling levicorped just about all of our assumptions regarding Tom Riddle and his works every bit as thoroughly over the course of HBP as she did her most typical reader's assumptions regarding Severus Snape at the end of that book.

And with the release of DHs, it became increasingly clear that she completely failed to recognize that fact herself. Because once she sat down to write DHs she immediately threw ALL of the revelations of HBP out the window and started making up new versions of her first scenario which no longer fit!

Once you see some things, you cannot *unsee* them.

Which ultimately convinced me that she hadn't a clue of what she thought she was doing with this series. Nothing that she tells us regarding the villain of her piece adds up. There is no logic, reason, or plausibility to it.

Didn't the silly bint realize what she was *saying*?



Riddle Me This

The competing versions are in absolute *contradiction* to each other.

You cannot have it *both* ways.

And, I'm sorry, but you definitely can't pull that kind of stunt and expect me to believe that what you are telling me now is the truth. You don't even convince me that you have any basic idea of what you are talking about. Especially when what your first "big reveal" on the subject actually revealed was something that finally *worked* according to what we had been *shown*. In defiance of what everyone inside the story and all your characters kept trying to tell us — and your subsequent reversal *doesn't*.

We might have happily accepted that the characters had all somehow got hold of the wrong end of the stick. In fact, we might have regarded that as *clever*.

What we've finally ended up with is just plain *not* clever. It's lazy, and it's stupid. It's an unmitigated mess.

And I say it's a filthy lie.

The very kindest conclusion I am likely to draw is that your characters are all fools. And, frankly, Ms Rowling, you went out of your way to demonstrate *that*, repeatedly, over the course of DHs. What happened? Did the NHS hold a special group rate on frontal lobotomies and you decided to sign everyone up? Or did you simply think that your *readers* were all fools?

We're not, you know. Even if we do read children's books, or YA books, from choice.

So, I'm afraid that I am going to just stick with the reading of Tom Riddle that was unveiled (however unconsciously, or inadvertently) by the end of HBP. That one at least made a *kind* of sense. Unlike the version that we had been given over the 5

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books previous. Or, ghod help us, in DHs.



Going into the penultimate book of the series most of the characters' say-so had put considerable effort into convincing us that:

- 1 Lord Voldemort's goals were political.
- 2 The Death Eaters had originally been an organization calling itself the Knights of Walpurgis. Even though that was interview information, it was information that we'd deliberately been given to reason from.
- 3 Lord Voldemort and his "message" had at one point enjoyed a broad popularity among the pureblood sector of the wizarding public. In fact it was suggested that his popularity had not necessarily been confined to purebloods.
- 4 That something had happened to disabuse the wizarding public of their beliefs on this issue when his "true goals" were revealed.
- 5 And that either this grand unveiling or his "first rise" to power had begun some time around 1970.

Over the course of the first 5 books, there was even a strong suggestion that at one point Lord Voldemort was actually "in power." This is an illusion shared by rather a lot of the characters within the series (particularly House Elves employed by DE families), but it was always clear to the reader that it was never actually the case. The Ministry of Magic had always officially been the one "in power."

Post-HBP it was now clear that none of these five main

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assumptions were ever altogether the case.

For Tom Riddle, it had always been personal. He just dressed it up in traditional-sounding political rhetoric.

We still haven't a clue of what Rowling thought she was on about with the Knights of Walpurgis — who never showed up anywhere in canon, anyway.

Voldemort's message *seems* to have never even been publicly proclaimed, let alone publicly supported. Acto Cornelius Fudge, in chapter 1 of HBP, the Ministry had pegged him as a terrorist leader as early as the mid-1960, and has been trying to capture him ever since.

We never were given any reason to believe that Fudge was deliberately lying to the PM.

Although it might behoove us to remember that what Fudge says in 1996, may be information that people were only widely aware of *by* 1996. Back in the mid-1960s the Ministry may not have had a clue of what they were up against, and only put the pieces together later.



As of the conclusion of HBP we finally understood that:

The wizarding public (75% of which has personal/familial ties to either Muggles or Muggle-borns, if you remember) has always viewed Lord Voldemort as a threat.

And, excuse me, but if Regulus Black, as per DHs, was making scrapbooks of Riddle's statements, are we supposed to assume that these were statements that the Ministry was running through the PROPHET in order to *demonstrate* that Riddle was a threat? Was Tom was sending rants to the Editor and

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the PROPHET was printing them? Because if he was already dodging the Ministry by the mid-1960s, he certainly wouldn't have been holding public rallies. And the Ministry is fairly good at controlling what is printed by the PROPHET.

Frankly, I don't believe a word of it.

As to Regulus himself, obviously there are more effective and serious-minded ways to defy authority than pinning up pictures of bikini babes and motorcycles on your bedroom wall. More dangerous ways, too.



Or was Lord Voldemort making a public figure of himself?

Upon consideration, I did make a long-belated stab at attempting to chart a possible trajectory of the beginning of Voldemort's first rise, over in the timeline essay wherein he *might* have been.

It lacks overt canonical support, but it fits what little we have been told about Tom's first rise. Frankly, what we have been told of Lord Voldemort's first rise is painted with so broad a brush that it constitutes a positive invitation for the reader to make unfounded assumptions and to draw unsupported conclusions. So I suppose mine are as likely to be valid as anybody else's. Which isn't saying much, and it's still only a guess.

Admittedly, canon sets a rather low bar.

My guess postulates that the origins of "Lord Voldemort" as a public figure was effectively a piece of performance art. In short, a hoax. Or, perhaps, more properly, a *prank*.

In any case, it was a piece of self-promotion on the grand scale of a Gilderoy Lockhart.



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And Tom wasn't alone in perpetrating it upon the wizarding public. He had enthusiastic help.

And that particular persona initially had nothing whatsoever to do with people prancing about in masks and raising hell for the fun of it.

That connection was only made later. Once the Death Eaters had established *their* name and were terrorizing everybody.



Riddle is agreed to have started his "rise to power" after his return to Britain at some point probably between 1958 and, say, 1963. We still do not know what Dumbledore's 1981 statement that the wizarding world had "had precious little to celebrate for 11 years." referred to. By this time it may be no more than a bit of flotsam which was linked to an early plot intention that Rowling was never able to fit into the story.

Or it could plausibly be a reference as to exactly when "Lord Voldemort" had rendered himself unmentionable.

After all, even though everyone says "You-know-who" it is clear that everyone *does* know who is being spoken of. His activities were evidently public enough and went on long enough in *some* admissible context for everyone to have learned what name he was going by, even if he did ultimately manage to frighten the public into never speaking it.

And were we ever given any reason *why* they believed they ought not to speak it?

Not until DHs we weren't. And the only reason it came up then was that by that time Voldemort finally had all the Ministry's resources at his command and was able to make it so.



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i.e., it only became an issue *after* Voldemort won. We were never given any reason to believe that it had ever been dangerous before that. Indeed, Albus was *constantly* telling people to buck up and say the name.

Rowling also never took the trouble to establish that names, let alone "true" names (which "Lord Voldemort" certainly *isn't*) have any particular power in the Potterverse. Albus only told us that the refusal to speak Voldemort's chosen name gave *that* name more power than it merited.

If she had been invoking the tradition that True Names have power over their subject, people opposed to him would have all been calling him Tom Riddle. And Albus would have been making sure that everyone *knew* that that was his real name.

Speaking his name didn't enable him to hear you. It didn't summon him. Speaking his name didn't put you under his power. What's the beef? There seems to be no point to it. We were just expected to go "Oooooo," accept it, and move on without asking questions, like sheep. That's annoying.

Actually, what it is is a clear relic of the series's origins as a series of *children's* stories. The whole "Oooo, it's *Lord Voldemort!* Run!" is in the classic style of "fake scary" that is often incorporated into entertainment designed for children. Especially *younger* children. The kids know the whole "scareyness" is fake. But this doesn't translate well for stories which are supposed to grow up with the reader.

Even when she finally gave this nonsense some belated validation, the execution was lame. Speak "the name" and someone in a Ministry office somewhere will register it and send a squad of Enforcers after you. So, back during VWI was every-



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one expecting the Ministry to come down on them for naming the enemy? (Well it was Barty Crouch Sr setting the policy, so maybe.) But if so we ought to have been *told* about it. And if so, how often did Crouch have to send Enforcers up to Hogwarts to have a talk with Albus?

Now, admittedly, if Rowling had never moved the series out of the exuberant “Let’s pretend!” tradition of children’s books that the first two books were written to, we’d have no argument with it. This kind of exaggerated in-story reaction would have been perfectly in keeping with a tale in which the characters are all very silly, credulous bumbleres with no more practice at critical thinking than the average 9-year-old. In such a tradition, to flinch at the name of the villain is a part of the *game*.

But she did not *keep* the series in that tradition, and once she abandoned the tradition she earned whatever criticism she deserves for not being able to make her transition plausible.

Riddle’s followers called him “the Dark Lord.” Why didn’t the Ministry monitor *that* phrase and get some idea who his followers were? Save them a lot of effort if they had known who to watch.

I really do think it the whole issue of the taboo was primarily a transparent, last-minute, cobbled-together insertion just to enable Harry to capture himself, because Rowling couldn’t think of any other way of getting the trio into Malfoy Manor.

It’s obvious that she *needed* to get them into Malfoy Manor. But the whole “taboo” became yet another in that lengthening list of disposable plot devices. Use once, and discard. And this one was worse than most because it was pure balogneum. In fact, it was balogneum that was well past its sell-by date.



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Even though most of the elements of the Potterverse seem to have been assembled in a haphazard “1 from column A; 2 from column B” manner, when an author of a “proper” fantasy story makes use of a traditional fantasy “trope” of this sort, they should always have the decency to explain how it works in *their* particular universe. And in some 3300 pages, Rowling evidently just could not be arsed to do that. And in fact over the first 3300 pages the bloody trope didn’t even *work*.



It occurs to me that I’ve seen an illustration of something like this problem before. One which was embedded inside another piece of fiction. One which I think it rather likely that Rowling may have encountered. For it is a fairly well-known snippet by Rudyard Kipling. Not that that particular fact is likely to be relevant here. Still, to summarize:

In Mr Kipling’s story; ‘THE POTTED PRINCESS’ the actual story is framed by the circumstance of a native nursemaid, or Ayah, attempting to entertain a small English child by telling him a story in the traditional style of her culture.

Unfortunately, the child is not aware of the tradition from which the story is drawn, and is, moreover, probably too young to have yet “groked” the traditional conventions of storytelling in themselves, so, rather than settling down and listening to the storyteller, he keeps interrupting the story by asking questions, which the Ayah keeps having to field, before she can return to her narrative.

No more are we a part of the “traditions” of the Potterverse (if any). And we have no clear idea of what the traditions of the



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Potterverse really are. A story thrown together from random elements, without regard to why these elements are supposed to fit together in the first place, is not necessarily going to make the slightest bit of sense to an outsider. It all comes across as a cheap authorial effort to make the situation sound more exotic or more dangerous than it is. And I decline the invitation to fill in this blank myself. That is the author's job, and she didn't do it.

I find myself rather grateful to Mr Kipling for reminding me of that.

Indeed, once the parallel finally sank in, I found myself considering Mr Kipling's imprisoned Princess and her half-blood Prince (identified as such in the text!), and the small child listener's triumphant affirmation of the Prince's declaration: "A pot is a pot, and I am the son of a potter!" And I could not help but wonder what kind of a paraphrase we might have here.

It is with some slight reluctance that I concluded that this is probably not one of Ms Rowling's little in-jokes. I would have liked to have given her the benefit of the doubt. Indeed, she did such a thoroughgoing job of upending several prior volume's worth of assumptions in HBP that I was prepared to suspect that she might have been attempting something every bit as clever as her fans had been industriously trying to credit. Alas, no such luck. She was merely trying to shock and surprise. Never mind whether or not what she pulled out of her hat — or the hat itself — actually fit anything.

And while all of our early faulty assumptions had been somewhat swept to the sidelines, even if not completely swept away in the wake of the revelations of HBP, they seemed to have been largely replaced by another one, which, even then, I sus-

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pected was at least equally faulty.

We now were supposed to assume that we knew all there is to know about Tom Riddle.

I was sure we didn't.

We were still missing the *whole point*.

Which in the wake of DHs appears to be that there was no point. Ultimately, canonically *there is no point* to Tom Riddle. No point at all. He is the bogymen under the bed. He is inept without being comical. He is just some incoherent thing to be *afraid of*.

Can you blame me for preferring the version we had at the end of HBP?



So let's look at the our primary issue here. Which is to say Tom and his rise to power. Or at least what we had been led to assume regarding it.

Frankly, we have been actually *told* so little about Voldemort's first rise that we are pretty much free to roll our own. There is no underlying consensus that one can use as a guide.

After DHs, I came to the conclusion that Rowling wasn't self-aware enough (or was too burnt out) to realize what she had done. Or that she had completely contradicted herself.

Which brought me to the point wherein Rowling appeared to have expended so much effort on *gratuitous* misdirection that I finally had to ask whether this was giving her way too much credit. Throughout the first five books of the series we were repeatedly given the impression — or the outright declaration — that Voldemort's public message was one which had

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formerly gathered at least some degree of open public support.

Despite the fact that this claim — as presented in the story — made no real sense at all.

It still doesn't. By the end of HBP, it is clear that Tom's activities never were presented as having ever been an acknowledged civil war. And any attempt to claim that this was the case *after* HBP directly contradicts Fudge's statement in HBP that according to the Ministry, Voldemort was a terrorist leader that they have been trying to catch for nearly 30 years.

I put a great deal of effort into the pre-DHs versions of this collection trying to hammer out a progression that would resolve this fundamental contradiction. Acto DHs, it supposedly turns out that I need not have bothered. It *never* made sense, and it was never *going* to.

Once we had been given the official Riddle backstory it was clear that there was never *any* point in time that Tom and his stated aims had EVER been publicly supported. Nor did he care!

If Tom Riddle had ever wanted political power in the Wizarding World, he should have kept up his "virtuous orphan" act and accepted Slughorn's offer to pull some strings for him at the Ministry. He might well have been Minister for Magic by the time the Marauders started Hogwarts!

But then he would have been expected to do the *work* of a Minister for Magic (not to mention having to work with Albus Dumbledore in charge of the Wizengamot). That prospect didn't suit him at all.

Not that he is allergic to working towards a goal. He's better than the average wizard (and definitely better than the average pureblood) at that. But he doesn't have the patience to put

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up with other people's aggro. Indeed, he only tolerates aggro when he is the one producing it.

Instead, he and his band of lost "roaring boys" were simply a nasty little gang of violent hooligans, right from the get-go. Terrorizing people was their whole point. Regardless of what various of his later groupies *thought* they were about, *he* wasn't in this for gain, or influence, or to advance the cause of pure-blood supremacy.

This is the kind of mind that pours boiling water into an ant-hill just to watch the bugs suffer and die, and scurry about in a panic and trample each other trying to get out of the way of the stream. There is no long-term future "goal" involved in that. His "policy" was violence for its own sake. His only goal was to make everybody in the world *afraid* of him.

At least on Riddle's part.



Many of his later followers undoubtedly thought that there was some glorious future "purpose" to it, or that they were somehow striking a blow for pureblooded wizarding superiority. But Riddle wasn't under any such delusions. That line of bull was all just empty rhetoric to him to reel in the minions. Whatever works.

And except for the totally delusional ones, most of his followers eventually figured out that they were risking their liberty and their position within society to no purpose. Only Bellatrix and her immediate associates were willing to go looking for him once he was safely off the game board. And I still think that either Lucius Malfoy or somebody else inside the DEs camp

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was not uninvolved in seeing to it that she got shut down before she got her mission off the ground.

And Voldemort's reign of terror began, not in 1970, as we had all originally been led to believe, but possibly all the way back in the late 1950s. Or certainly not much after, say, about 1963.

Assuming that it *hadn't* actually started in the early to mid-'50s during the decade he spent in Albania. And, for the record, that much is a *long* way from impossible. He did allegedly bring a few established followers with him when he returned from his first 10-year exile.

Whether under that name or not, Voldemort and his Death Eaters were a fact of wizarding life in Britain for nearly 20 years before he was defeated at Godric's Hollow. And next to nothing that Rowling has to say on the subject in the first five books quite squares with the "new, improved" version of events as presented in HBP.

To her, I think the DEs were never really more than some amorphous scary threat looming on the horizon, which she wasn't particularly interested in. We've got to do a lot of retrofitting to drag these puppies back into something that fits the parameters that she'd given us to work in after she turned it all upside-down.

But I thought we were up for the challenge. Mind you, this is all speculation.



Tom's rise probably started out rather slowly, and in stages. First, there was a period where no one really connected what was going on as an organized campaign. Mainly because it

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wasn't actually organized. This was the period that he was establishing and solidifying his complete control over his core *followers*. And this would have probably been a slow, and insidious process. One that took several years on its own.

There were undoubtedly a few deaths during these early years of his "rise," and there were a number of "mysterious disappearances" that might have pointed in his direction if anyone had known what direction to look, but with probably absolutely nothing about any of them that anyone could prove he was responsible for. (I suggest that an investigation of the lake in that sea cave might resolve the mystery of some of those disappearances.) The fact is, that the deaths and disappearances in themselves were not the *point*.

The point was of his establishing full ownership of that core handful who had settled in to follow his lead. *Without* their catching on to just what degree of power over themselves they were giving up. And, at this point, I think there were no more than a handful of them. It was a tight, focused core group, small enough for him to manage to control it by force of personality, until finally, he managed to convince them to let him set what was effectively a slave mark onto them.

And after that, they had no more choices. They were his.

There must have been some point where the wizarding public realized they were under attack by an actual terrorist *group*, but may have been a while before everyone knew the name of the group. And quite possibly even longer before they knew the name of its Leader.

You really do have to recognize that when anyone in the series says; "You-know-who" whoever they are talking to *does*

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know who. I suspect that this second phase of the Dark Lord's first rise probably started when the Death Eaters adopted the Dark mark as their signature. It would have been hard for the Ministry to have ignored that. That's when they finally joined the fun and started trying to capture them.

The violence would have taken a while to escalate. But over a decade or so of this kind of thing, confidence in the Ministry was being steadily eroded. To which, under the direction of Barty Crouch Sr, and people of his stamp, it ultimately responded by making itself over in Voldemort's image and preying on its own constituency in order to be seen to be "doing something" about the situation.

Riddle was probably hugging himself with glee at *that* development. He had effectively colonized the Ministry as his publicity department, and they were earnestly teaching the whole wizarding world to be *afraid* of him.

And once people were properly frightened of the very thought of Death Eaters, he revealed the "Lord Voldemort" persona — in which he was still perpetrating his hoax on the wizarding public, as the Leader of these terrifying Death Eaters.

And then launched some incident or group of incidents, which finally managed to render himself unmentionable.

My own bet is that it was made abundantly plain that he didn't bloody care one jot about the statute of Secrecy.

You know, that piece of legislation that every witch and wizard has been taught for centuries to believe is the only thing that keeps them safe from the Muggles.



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This turnaround in perception has never been adequately explained in canon — apart from the assumption that all wizards are dithering idiots. We were never told that there was any tell-tale on the speaking of his bogus title in the course of the first war. It wasn't until he had the resources of the entire Ministry at his command in the 2nd war that he was able to institute that silly taboo. And in the first war, the Ministry of Magic never did that, or Sirius Black would have *told* us about it in his rant about "how things were back in the war" in OotP.

Mind you, such a premise — that the speaking of someone's name makes him able to hear you — has long been used in other stories by other writers. It's a fairly classic fantasy trope. But there is no indication in books 1–6 that anyone had ever actually done that in the Potterverse. And the magical technology for doing such a thing was very clumsily retrofitted into DHs.

But the first war was not conducted under the conditions that arose in DHs. So we need some other explanation for the ww's squeamishness about speaking the name of their enemy.

Which is not beyond anyone's capabilities. We already know that every marked DE carried his own link to his Master. And nobody knew just who the DEs were. Several fanfic authors have already adopted the trope that to speak of Lord Voldemort in the presence of someone bearing the Dark mark would enable Tom to eavesdrop on the conversation. I think this suits the requirements admirably, although it would have been a hassle and a half on Tom's end of the equation to be able to get any clear information out of the conflicting babble. It would also explain the DEs own reference to their Master as "the Dark Lord," which would not set off the connection



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when there was no information to be relayed. But this is all fanon, not canon.

When you stop and think about it, something like this would have made information gathering fairly easy for the DEs. Particularly for Tom's moles in the Ministry. Even though it does make Albus come across as a fool, and an ignorant fool at that, to be insisting on calling Tom by his (bogus) title. Which I doubt is what Rowling intended.

Barty Crouch Sr would probably have kept the existence of the Dark mark highly classified information if he and his Aurors were aware of it. But eventually it must have got out that somehow the terrorists were picking up information from people who were engaging in indiscreet talk about their leader.

Once that secret was out, I think Tom would have been perfectly capable of using it for his own purposes by making some kind of a semi-public announcement that; yes, he could *hear* you. *Mwahhahahah!*

Sent a letter to the PROPHET, did he?

And then Trelawney makes her damn Prophecy, and it spooks him enough that he finally takes the gloves off, and steps up his agenda.



Prior to that point he undoubtedly thought that he had unlimited time and could work all sides of his game plan at a steady pace until he had everyone right where he wanted them, with the Ministry in total disarray, wizarding Seclusion in tatters, and anarchy over all. And it was working.

I'm inclined to suspect that he may also have acquired a new,



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even better-placed mole inside the Ministry around that same time. Which would have escalated everything.

But with a Prophecy in play he must have no longer felt he had that kind of time; and he may have prematurely launched a peremptory strike upon the wizarding world in general, before he had managed to soften the Ministry up enough for it to collapse with one definitive stroke (assuming that the actual collapse of the Ministry had ever been his intention which is looking less and less likely).

This mistake resulted in a long, bloody, losing struggle in which for all that he steadily lost ground and resources, the growing terror and uncertainty that his followers' actions, and the Ministry's reactions, were sowing gave the wizarding public the exact opposite impression. The worst of the horror of "Voldemort's first rise;" the events that left the wizarding world unwilling to speak his name even after he was presumed dead; was probably almost completely contained in that final two years, following a build-up of nearly 20 years of growing anxiety, uncertainty and all of British wizardry's loss of faith in the Ministry's ability to protect them.

Snape's report of the Prophecy would have also been the point at which Tom started distributing his Horcruxes to key followers for safekeeping.



For all that Albus Dumbledore conducted us on a tour of young Tom Riddle's life and times, he seems to have been unable to show us anything of Tom's *motivations*.

We never got a clue of why the boy turned out to be a



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sociopath. Sociopathic personality disorder is not an hereditary condition. Having a snooty father, who was drugged, and a dangerously inbred mother, who had no common sense, is not a recipe for producing a sociopath. Particularly when neither one of the parents had the slightest direct input on the kid's upbringing. And, grim as it was, Tom's orphanage was clearly set up as being run by well-meaning people who tried to do their duty for the children entrusted to their care. With limited resources.

Yet it was obvious that young Tom was already a nasty bit of work by the age of 11. Albus claims to have recognized that his instincts for cruelty, secrecy, and domination were already far too well developed. Also that his power of will was so strong as to have already brought his magic at least partially under control, with no outside training.

And we got NO direct clue as to what set him onto his eventual path.

So. Are you willing to accept "because the author says so" as an adequate explanation? Because I'm not at all sure that I am.

By the end of HBP, we knew she had at least one more bombshell to lob at us regarding former Professor Snape (probably a whole series of them). I wouldn't have bet much against the probability that she had at least one more in reserve with Tom Riddle's name on it, too.

But no, instead, over the course of DHs she puffed him up like a balloon. Made him bigger, crazier, and more looming, but left him with far, far less in the way of substance.

My own suspicions had been that when he finally went — and there was no doubt that he would go — his life was botched

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beyond recovery, there was nothing left for him here; he would take at least some degree of our pity with him. Or at least our recognition of the monumental waste of a life.

No such luck. Evidently even Harry's weensy bit of sympathy for the orphaned infant Riddle (or even the flayed suffering thing in the celestial King's Cross Station) was just a momentary boyish *weakness*.



This particular essay was originally entitled 'Tom Riddle and the Knights of Walpurgis' and it was an examination of what kind of faction in the wizarding world might have taken a young Tom Riddle under their wing, and groomed him for their purposes. Purposes which he ultimately rejected. That essay was later developed into the one entitled "The Grindelwald Conspiracy" which took up residence over in the 7th Son Collection of exploded theories after the release of HBP.

Originally, taking information given us by Rowling in an interview made during the 3-Year summer, before the release of OotP, I had postulated that these wizards were a clique of pureblood isolationists who were members of the fraternal organization known as the Knights of Walpurgis, a group which JKR had identified as an organization that Voldemort had taken over and repurposed into the Death Eaters.

We can now see that this was not the case. If nothing else the Pensieve presentation on The Life and Times of T.M. Riddle demonstrated that Tom Riddle appears to have been self-trained and self-determined before he ever heard of the wizarding world. And that, if he ever "took over" the Knights of

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Walpurgis he must have done it by default, winning the hearts and minds of their children when those children had been at school with him. No organization recognizable as the Knights of Walpurgis figures in the narrative as it stands now.

Well, the proper repository for exploded theories is ‘The 7th Son Collection’, so you can read it there, if you’re interested. It all looks a bit comical now.

But it might not be a bad idea to take a final look at the Knights of Walpurgis and see if there is any legitimate context into which they still fit in the narrative that we actually have.

The first thing to remember is that the Knights themselves do not actually appear anywhere in the official canon. They were referred to only in an interview. And while Rowling *claims* that she does not deliberately lie about what she tells us in her interviews, what she tells us does not always pan out in the finished work. I suspect that the Knights may be one of the potential elements that simply did not pan out. (Or, of course that she, like Albus, was playing a double-bluff and that she *does* quite deliberately lie to us in her interviews.)

But, is there a context floating around into which such an organization as the Knights of Walpurgis might reasonably fit?

Damn straight there is.

They’re the model upon which the Slug Club was based.

No one’s ever claimed that the Knights of Walpurgis were inherently evil. Nor that it was founded for evil purposes. If it ever actually existed, I very much doubt it was.

No, what I suspect is that by the mid-20th century it was something very much in the style of a high-profile, high-status, highly respected fraternal organization along the same lines of

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the Oddfellows Club, or the Shriners, or the Glorious Order of the Moose or whoever. And its purpose was to advance the lot of those “deserving,” but less fortunate, who fit their most desired demographic. In return, these beneficiaries would advance the goals of their benefactors, and later would take up the torch and pass it on. It was the whole underlying Patron/client network given an identity and a name.

The Knights may not have even been an “all Purebloods” organization at its inception. Although it probably became so later on. Certainly once Seclusion was solidly established. It may not even have been a specifically wizarding isolationist group, although we have no way of knowing that for certain. But by the start of the 20th century I rather suspect that it was that particular crowd of Old Boys who were running the Club. And much of the rest of the wizarding world as well, probably. Or at least they felt they *ought* to be.

And even if they weren’t all die-hard Isolationists, they were convinced they were the *crème de la crème* of wizarding society.

If Horace Slughorn is a member — and he may very well *be* a member — that membership is one of his most precious bits of distinction. We don’t know who the Slughorns are when they are at home, he may even be one of the formerly “deserving” who owes them his unending gratitude.



So where does Tom Riddle come in?

Well he evidently wasn’t taken up by them as a boy — as I first thought, and spun a fine conspiracy theory from. The Knights may very well have contributed to the Governors’

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Fund for indigent students but they didn't take a personal interest in him.

And he wasn't taken up by them as a young man working at Borgin & Burkes, either. He had his own agenda by that time. He was after that locket of Slytherin's that his uncle Morfin had babbled about, and B&B was the best place to get a lead on it. Such items occasionally change hands, and there was every chance of it turning up there eventually. There wasn't a lot that the Knights could do about helping him find it. Although he no doubt managed to impress any number of them with his "modest young wizard" impersonation when they showed up in the shop. I suspect more than a few of them were valued customers of B&B.

He had also been at school with any number of their children. And quite a few of those children had been part of his old gang. But at that point in his career he wasn't leading a gang. He was still acting alone. He may or may not have kept in touch with a few favorites, but he was not setting up anything like the DEs during the period that he was out of school, working for Burke, and waiting for the locket to turn up.

It wasn't until his return to wizarding Britain after his self-imposed 10-year exile that we get any solid indication that he had been bitten by the "World Domination" bug. But by the time of that interview with Albus he had already collected at least a few "fellow travelers"

Which ones? Why, the most *collectable* ones, of course.

The ones who regarded themselves as the *crème de la crème* of wizarding society.

One of whom may have invited him to a Knights meeting as a guest. Or perhaps suggested revising his old "Lord Voldemort"



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Hogwarts persona and coming along to a meeting as a prank.

Tom may have not *quite* yet shed the name of Tom Riddle, at that point. But he no longer particularly resembled the handsome young fellow of uncertain parentage who they had gone to school with. They may have all regarded it as a bit of a lark. "I say! This is Lord Voldemort from abroad who is hoping to become the new DADA Professor at Hogwarts."

Well why not? You don't have to be a Marauder or a Weasley twin to perpetrate a hoax. Just ask Gilderoy Lockhart.

So he goes, and he sees that, as he expected, it is just the Slug Club grown up. Run by a lot of old fogies going on about how wonderful they are.

And a lot of bored scions kicking their heels around the edges, impatiently waiting for their daddies to turn loose of the reins.

Bored, rich, pure-blooded, high-status scions. With nothing much to occupy them.

Resources.

Highly *collectable* resources.

Not just the ones he went to school with, either. There have been several new crops since he left Britain. Most of them now in one place.

Not all of them suitable to his purposes, of course. Some of them lack the degree of resentment that makes them easy to catch, or the taste for violence that makes them worth keeping (and provides one with blackmail material). But that can be sorted out later.

And, it also turns out that some have acquired wives and families to whom they are devoted. That won't do either. Not that families are a bad thing, necessarily. It isn't just the Knights



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who should perpetuate themselves over the generations. But Riddle ought to have first claim on his followers' attentions. (Riddle's note to self: enlist the young ones *before* they acquire wives and families. Then you inherit their sons as well)

Oh, yes, I think we still have a potential use for the Knights of Walpurgis. At least by association. The Knights may still exist to this day. But I doubt that Riddle has any part of it. Officially, or otherwise. He never actually did.

And it would be a mistake to assume that the Knights are all Riddle's followers. Just as much as it is to assume that all Slytherins are DEs.

After all, I am sure Arcturus and Orion Black were both members in excellent standing.



Most of the rest of this exploration, however is still trying to thrash out a canon-compatible answer to this particular Riddle.

In short: just what is it that the man wants?

Taking into account the fact that Riddle is a true sociopath, (which has seemed evident to me ever since CoS) I have always seriously doubted that even that "true family" of his choice that he spoke of held any higher place in his affections than did the "true family" of his birth. Or that his ultimate intentions regarding either of them were significantly different. Albus Dumbledore, despite his alleged determination to always attempt to see the best in people obviously agreed with me. And tells us as much.

And, notwithstanding the history of the long decline of the House of Gaunt, Voldemorts are made, not born.



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In fact, it is understood that sociopaths are made very early in life, and, in the Potterverse, quite possibly only under conditions which may not typically be found inside the wizarding world. There is a bit of extrapolation on this matter in the essay entitled; 'The Pachyderm in the Parlor' over in the Briar Patch sub-collection. But in any case, by the time Tom Riddle received his Hogwarts letter the damage clearly was already done. Albus Dumbledore may have compounded it by taking one look at the boy and distancing himself, but he didn't cause it.

He might have limited the collateral damage if he had not been so busy sitting on his hands. It is quite possible that by the end of his life he considered the career of Tom Marvolo Riddle to have constituted another one of his own "huge mistakes".

But if the boy really was a sociopath, by the time Albus caught up with him, it was already far too late, for Tom.



It wouldn't have been the fact that the boy was a loner that Albus mistrusted. Albus ought to be quite familiar with the kind of isolation that a kid who is smarter than just about everyone around him tends to find himself in.

That is yet another reason to look askance at Remus's contention that James and Sirius were the brightest students of their year. They may have been a match for the Weasley twins, or even a bit ahead of them, and they may certainly have been the brightest of their year in Gryffindor. But they were no Albus Dumbledore. And their chief advantage was a pooling of resources, and an amplifying exchange of ideas, not individual



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brilliance. Together they were indeed formidable. Separate, they were bright, clever boys, but not prodigies.

What may have set Albus's alarm system off about Riddle is that Riddle was not just a loner, he was a *user*. And he did not value anyone or anything but himself. So long as we are playing "compare and contrast," we got zero suggestion anywhere in canon that Severus Snape was a user. If anything, give him a kind word and he was far too willing to allow himself to be used. And if Snape did not care about people, it is because he did not *let* himself care. Which, however regrettable, is a long way from being incapable of it. Even Albus, who is not really all that emotionally intelligent himself, would have recognized that. Eventually. If he'd have let himself.

As to that; the 11-year-old Riddle also boasted of being able to make other people feel what he wanted them to, so I suspect that his influence on his housemates, even that early, was not altogether a matter of his playing with an unmarked deck.

More disturbing yet may have been his claim to be able to make animals do what he wanted them to, *without* training them.

And whatever *that* particular magical gift is, it is mercifully rare. We don't know whether it even has a name — although I'm rather suspecting that it may be related to his demonstrated ability for taking "possession" of others, because we *know* he's done that — more than once.

If so, that alone might have been what had Albus attempting to intimidate the youngster. But it's inconclusive. If this was ever supposed to be important, Rowling snuck it past us so quickly that most of us didn't even notice, and she never really provided an explanation. By the time the reader reaches HBP,

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they *already* know Tom Riddle is capable of possessing other creatures. But it's not impossible that this *in particular* might have been what waved the red flag at Albus.

Although it certainly sounds like he never was able to bring himself to *warn* anyone. Or even talk about it in anything but vague references to anyone after the fact.

He *did*, however, launch a campaign to purge the Hogwarts library of any reference to the creation of Horcruxes. And quite possibly of any other unsavory practices based upon possession as well.

It would be useful to know whether this campaign took place after the summer of 1938.



On a side note, one suddenly has to wonder just how much input Ms Rowling's commitment to the campaign to eliminate the use of cage beds in the orphanages of eastern Europe had upon the writing of HBP (it seems to have had none on DHs). The article which drew her attention to the issue ran in 2003. By that time the manuscript of OotP was already at the publishers, and its impact, however great upon Rowling, could have had no effect up through volume five of the series.

Still, for all that Tom's orphanage was clearly not in the same vein as those documented in eastern Europe, and the use of cage beds was not, so far as I know, ever adopted in Britain, it is very difficult to hear of Rowling's views on the matter, of the children subjected to such treatment and their "attachment issues," and not to reflect upon Tom Riddle, whom no one had ever loved.

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That Mrs Cole tells us that Tom was a “funny” boy, and that he had evidently been so virtually from birth suggests that the fundamental damage to young Tom Riddle was done long before any ill-intentioned human agency could have gotten their hooks into him. The only way that anyone could have saved Tom would have been to have gotten him out of that environment and into an affectionate foster family before he had the chance to develop a sociopathic personality disorder in the first place.

And, no, the orphanage did not make him what he was, either. But it didn't help. (Harry, by contrast, would have probably managed to be mildly happy in that orphanage. More so than he was with the Dursleys, at any rate. Magical or not, He might even have made friends there.)



But for one thing, I seriously doubt that Tom was the first young bully to have ever grown up in that orphanage. All it would have taken is for a slightly older such example of bully to have deliberately hurt or frightened Tom when he was a tot of 2 or 3 to make him form the determination to be the one who held all of the power of pain or fear over others, once *he* was bigger, and stronger and had the force to do it. But that only set his goals, it did not make him a sociopath. He was already a sociopath.

I think we are still missing a crucial piece of information, here.

And in defense of my original theory, one would expect that as a child who *could* make himself personable to adults and to adolescents alike, when he cared to, he might well attract the sort of attention which intends to make use of such a child.



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But he doesn't seem to have done so. Or at least not at the orphanage. He seems to have taken up a stance of opposition to his fellow inmates as well as the staff (for whom he has no respect) and he never wavered from it. He never even *tried* to cultivate *them*.

It is possible that once he got to Hogwarts and “turned over a new leaf” Tom was well-developed enough as a Legilimens to see through the intent of anyone who meant to use him for their purposes. And, in a simmering fury over any such “betrayal”, would have begun to take steps to make himself much more powerful than they ever could anticipate, in order to prevent them from ever benefiting from any of his actions. You can even read something of this between the lines in his interactions with Horace Slughorn.

No. *He* would use *them*! All of them. Forever.

And a child to whom nothing in his earliest life, was ever freely given, including affection or attachment, indeed, one who was convinced of the need to *take* every advantage he has ever gained by means of subterfuge and stealth, (until he grew to the point of being able to effectively apply force and fear) does not typically learn the virtue of gratitude.

And he was a natural Legilimens. That was evident when Albus brought him his Hogwarts letter. At some point Tom Riddle must have discovered how to instinctively hone those skills to the point that he saw through his housemates' rhetoric to their real opinions of any half-blood. Or Muggle-born. At that point he was probably widely believed by his schoolmates to be Muggle-born. By mid-point, in the series, in all of his appearances on stage, if you try to squint past the bombast of what



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is always at least partially a “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 open despising of Muggles. In DHs it is clear that this contempt extends to his followers as well.

By Harry’s age Tom had learned the inestimable value of being able to conceal his reactions; but he certainly would have *had* reactions to such a discovery made about a would-be mentors’ opinions regarding him, let alone any suggestions to enlist, or use him. Yes, even such innocent and benign usage as Horace Slughorn’s determination to name-drop and boast of having “known him when he was a boy.”

Compare this to the situation of the debriefing interview at the end of OotP between Harry and Dumbledore.

Dumbledore made mistakes, yes, big ones. He probably made a great many more of them than he ever realized or admitted to. And he certainly made more, and worse ones, than we were aware of until after his death. But by the end of OotP he clearly doesn’t see Harry as *nothing* more than a tool. And Harry’s earliest, probably his pre-Dursley upbringing has been such as to instill enough innate honesty that he could not convince himself that Dumbledore had tricked him, even if he had withheld critical information from him.

Besides, when the ballots are all in, Dumbledore had done no more than to confirm that yes, there is a monster out there who wants Harry dead, and Dumbledore is trying to help keep him alive. Of all of Harry’s reactions at the end of OotP the only one that truly seems closest to a direct echo of Tom’s is not his response to Dumbledore, it is his fixation on Snape, whose input into Sirius Black’s death was negligible, but who Harry

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seems determined to blame for it. Rather than himself.



But by the time Riddle dropped out of sight after the murder of Hepzibah Smith he knew his future target faction’s party line backward and forward and could quote it chapter and verse. He knew who the easily deluded were and, probably, the name of their fraternal organization. And he held them all in contempt. He despised the entire older generation, Muggle or wizard.

But every child, every bored scion who was motivated by a desire for power over other people was his meat. He could use that desire for *his* ends. And when he decided it was time to make his move towards setting up his very own personal bid for absolute power, he knew what to promise them and was able to reel them, and ultimately, their descendants right to heel, to serve him as his tools. All promises phrased in terms that they certainly “could” have, but probably “would” not manage to refuse. He had no intentions of ever fulfilling his promises to them. When they had served his purposes, he would see them slaughtered like sheep.

(After GoF I found myself wondering if the older Death Eater, Nott, in the graveyard scene was one of the original followers who had taken Tom in — and were taken in by him in turn — when he was just a boy at Hogwarts. And I discover that while I had various details wrong, I had the essence of the matter absolutely right. There was a Nott among his very earliest followers, and we are given to suspect it was the same man.)

Also, allow me to say, right off the top, that I think the *last* thing that Voldemort wanted is what he *claimed* he wanted

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when he was out addressing his troops. He never intended to overthrow the Ministry and settle down to rule wizarding Britain. He opposed the Ministry, because he could count on the Ministry to continue to oppose *him* and he could thereby give a perpetual demonstration that *nobody* opposes him with impunity. Rowling was flatly never able to convince me of anything else once she flip-flopped us all back to her first version of “what Riddle wants.”

After HBP it finally surfaced for many of us that there was a great deal *less* to Tom Riddle than we had been led to believe. That, in fact, along with Sirius Black and Severus Snape, we had yet another case of arrested development here.

Stop and think for a moment. Tom showed every intention of eventually overturning the Ministry of Magic’s authority, and even in HBP he seemed probably capable of doing it, but did it ever seem that he have any coherent plan of setting anything functional in its place?

We certainly hadn’t been given any hint of it. And what Rowling *did* give us after the fall of the Ministry was an overblown cartoon version of ‘1984’ that was totally unbelievable, and was dependent upon the premise of a sheep-like populace which rolled over and accepted a Ministry policy flip-flop from; “Beware of You-Know-Who and the DEs!” to “Beware of the Muggle-borns who are stealing your magic!” in scarcely a month with not even a peep of protest, let alone any *resistance*.

What we got was an incoherent twaddle of pre-adolescent ranting against any kind of established authority, and rude names directed at anyone his followers have been brought up to regard as inferiors. Indeed by the time we were privileged

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to be in attendance upon his “mustering of the troops” even as early as in GoF his rhetoric was so overdone and bombastic that it almost comes across as a deliberate mockery of his audience. You could practically envision him posturing and strutting about with a wooden sword, wearing folded newspaper bicorn hat.



And somehow *everything* was all about *him*.

This is familiar, you know? Have we seen this kind of thing before? This narcissistic demand for absolute submission, trust, and support. This conviction that merely to *state* a thing is so, that by the sheer force of “will” this is going to *make* it so. And that if it doesn’t, it still might just as well be, because everyone will be forced to accept it and behave accordingly *anyway*.

This is an utter refusal of the basic social contract. Indeed, a refusal to even to submit to the natural order and be subject to its cycles of death and rebirth.

Well, yes, we have seen *exactly* this thing before.

Elsewhere in English children’s literature, in fact.

Classic English children’s literature.

Very, *very* classic English children’s literature.

Not literature produced by Mr Kipling, to be sure, but from around the same era.

I would suggest that most of us have indeed met *exactly* another such character who reneged upon the social contract at an implausibly early age, made his escape into a world of danger, magic, and wonders, and who flatly refused to ever take personal responsibility for anything, or to comply with society’s expectations.

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And yet, nevertheless, he confidently expected that anything he chose to want should be handed over to him as an entitlement. Or else, he would simply *take* it.

Furthermore, this character, who is possessed of virtually supernatural levels of charisma, and who has a low tolerance for tranquility, went on to make a point of seeking out other young boys who had proven to be directionless (and dull-witted) enough to have drifted outside the safety nets their families had initially provided, and proceeded to lure them out of the workaday world into one which gives normal children nightmares, to be his followers. He's forbidden them all to know anything that he does not, and leads them in a life of gratuitous, never-(never-) ending conflict against a group of adults whose enmity has resulted in the whole lot of them being collectively hunted. And so they live in hiding, as fugitives.

And just to add the (green) frosting on the poisonous cake: should any of his young followers show signs of outgrowing him; he kills them.

I'm old enough to recall the '70s and '80s during which there was a fair bit of ongoing pop-psych discussion regarding the "Peter Pan" Syndrome. I think Rowling has given us a shining example of it.

And once you realize that, rather a lot of other things begin to fall into place as well.



For Riddle himself it was never really political. Or at least it was never *consciously* political. That's just part of the performance. For him it really IS the cult of personality. And, as

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the Lj user known as Swythyv was early to point out, he preys upon *children*. They are the ones most likely to be *impressed* by him, and they are the ones who are most likely to be led into supporting his ersatz "cause" through the combined lures of adolescent rebellion, and peer pressure.

I doubt that, once he set up his initial little band, and fully gained control and effectively established *ownership* of them, via his Mark, he has ever bothered to enlist any additional follower who was significantly over the age of 30.

Or even 25.

And even those first ones, who were certainly in their 30s by the time he set up his little band of lost boys, probably followed him then because they were *already* used to following him when they were all at school.

And the Ministry was trying to combat him by conventional political measures, since they don't really understand what they are dealing with. It is small wonder that their efforts are doomed from the start. If Tom Riddle is an unwise child — and he is an *extremely* unwise child — *they* are a passel of exceedingly foolish grown-ups.

The kids he targeted in the beginning were the very crown of wizarding society.

They were the top of the trees. Even in the Potterverse "present" there is a lingering assumption of inherent pureblood superiority. 50 years ago, that assumption was even more openly acknowledged and it overlaid everything.

50 years ago, the Slug Club was composed of a half a dozen teenagers. All boys, possibly all Slytherins (although not necessarily) and with the exception of Riddle, very probably all pure-

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bloods from prominent families.

30 years later, Muggle-born Gryffindor Lily Evans was a shining star in this little constellation. 20 years later yet, Slughorn has included any number of witches, non-Slytherins, blood-traitors and mixed-bloods in his Club. I'm not sure that would have happened in Riddle's day.

And we have known from the chapter in which we first met the young Riddle, that he likes to collect trophies. At Hogwarts, he was collecting trophy followers even more determinedly than Slughorn was.

It isn't that *he* genuinely believes that pureblood wizards are the only ones worth knowing or being, but that — at the time he started doing it — they were the most valuable ones worth collecting. So his whole line of rhetoric is calibrated to appeal to that specific group. (Which **really** raises the question of what *Snape* is doing there among them.)

And his early followers were already a lot of spoilt prats who were drunk on their own sense of entitlement. He just used that, and extended the argument that if they were entitled, they were therefore entitled to do *whatever* they wanted, to *whomever* they wanted, however socially unapproved that might be, even by the tenets of their own society. And he would give them that particular outlet and the opportunity to do it too, so long as they accepted his leadership, guidance, and control.

And it is clear that Tom Riddle is still essentially a nasty child who treats the entire world as his very own model train set. He will spend months setting up the tracks, and building the villages, and setting out the little tiny trees, until he is ready to flip the switch, let her rip, and enjoy the resulting train wreck.



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Thinking it over, there is another rather well-known trope which the young Riddle fits even better than that of Peter Pan. This one should be familiar from popular entertainment media. Especially given a mid-20th century twist. Appropriately enough.

The mad scientist.

Pan would have been the very maddest of scientists if it had ever occurred to him to be so. Whatever game occurred to him, he would be determined to win it. And god forbid that anyone else give him **competition**. Rather fortunately, that particular game never did occur to him. Sometimes the universe is merciful.

But Young Tom Riddle/Dr Strange No-Love, is solidly inside the zone. *This* is where the young Tom Riddle seems to have been coming from. At least back when he was young and still had some kind of a grip. Because the kind of things he seems to have got up to early on really do come across as rather brilliant lunacy. Not sustainable in the least, but brilliant.

That "paper pensive" really was extraordinary, even though one does have to wonder for just what purpose Tom had originally intended it.

Tom did that **on his own** at pretty much the same age that the Marauders created their Map. Having overlaid his memory of murdering the Riddles onto his Uncle Morfin seems to have been what sent him down the rabbit-hole of experimenting with memory storage and retrieval, and that the year he was working on it turned out to be the year that he finally discovered the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets would have enhanced the value of the paper pensieve tremendously — which is probably



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only one of the reasons why he kept it. Not to mention that by the end of its year, it also contained all his experimental notes on Horcrux creation.

But what he *ultimately* used it for could hardly have been the reason for why he created it, any more than that Albus was collecting people's memories of "The Life and Times of Tom M Riddle" back in the 1920s–1960s in order to some day show them to Harry Potter.

By this time, if you have worked your way through the collection of essays under the 'Harry Potter and the Dark Lord' heading, you will have encountered my own interpretation of how one makes a Horcrux. And I postulate that to possess the sacrificial victim is an inherent component of it. With this in mind, regarding the Ring, I am 96% convinced that killing Myrtle/creating the Ring was an *experiment*. In the full-bore mad scientist tradition.

In fact, it was done **primarily** as an experiment. Reasoned out logically, and executed very much in accordance with scientific principles. And it worked.

Tom may or may not have already found the books which referenced Horcruxes by the time he questioned Slughorn on the subject. Slughorn wibbled about an unnamed "spell" which enabled it. Sluggy would probably have been squeamish about the AK too, but I *don't* think he'd have been anything like as squeamish over the AK as he was about that unnamed spell.

But I *could* see Sluggy hyperventilating in that manner about a **possession** spell. Possession is pretty widely known about in the ww, but it isn't actually something that happens very often. I very much doubt that it's mentioned any more often than it



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has to be, and the only person in all seven books who we've ever heard of having **done** it is Tom Riddle.

We got a few clues in HBP that Tom may have had a history of possessing animals back in the orphanage, but we don't know of him actually *possessing* another human being. He didn't possess his Uncle Morfin and send him to murder the Riddles. He just knocked him out, stole his wand (and ring) and later pasted on his own memory of having done it.

But if the books referencing the creation of Horcruxes were describing a possession spell, Tom may very well have decided to see whether he could create one without using **any spells at all**. And proceeded to *do so*, by possessing Myrtle and forcing her to look at the Basilisk. Even if someone had been casting Piori Incantatum on his wand 10 minutes later there wouldn't have been a trace of what killed Myrtle. Or of what had opened the chamber.

I think he stuck to this spell-less Horcrux creation with Madam Smith as well. Some five years later.

I doubt that he continued to use spell-less murders to create all his later Horcruxes, but he still didn't need a spell in order to possess his victim.

While we're on the subject; possession is another thing that Rowling seems to have thrown into the pot without really thinking through the implications. She used it as a major element in both of the first two books, and then never touched it again. Even though it was an established element in her universe.

Even when she suddenly had all Horcruxes acting like the One Ring, there doesn't seem to be any indication of the Locket trying to actually **possess** any of the trio once they grabbed



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it and had to deal with having it as the fourth member of their party. Mess with their heads, yes, possess them, as in *take them over*; not so much. It is all very well to argue that they kept it from concentrating on any one of them by passing it around between them, but that doesn't explain how it didn't even seem to have taken Umbridge over when she'd had it for over a year.

(I do play with the possibility that the Cup took Bellatrix over once Tom entrusted her with it, but that would have been off-stage, and is another of my theories that remains unconfirmed, although that reading might potentially answer a number of questions.)

And actually what comes closest to behaving as possession that we hear about over the main course of the series (leaving aside the argument that the Imperius curse was developed as a spell-based simulation of possession) makes it sound like the commonest danger of possession is from cursed artifacts rather than other wizards. Like "the book that you can't stop reading" and suchlike.

But that kind of hazard seems to be common enough that mid-level Ministry wonks like Arthur Weasley and other people with no higher-level clearance than he has are aware enough of the possibility to easily accept it, even if it isn't the first possibility they might think of when something is clearly causing a problem.

It would take a complete whackjob like Tom Riddle to be reckless enough to *experiment* with Horcruxes. But his whole life appears in retrospect to have been *exactly* such an experiment.

Turning the paper pensieve into a Horcrux later on was *also*

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an experiment.

Those other orphans and their pets had probably served as his first experimental subjects.



I still thought that most of the fans were making a big mistake when they assumed that Riddle's personal goals and those of his followers were one and the same. Or that what we hear him *say* about his goals to anybody has any resemblance to the truth. Tom Riddle didn't get to where he is by telling other people his secrets. Nothing that Tom Riddle says to anyone else is exempt from being, on some level, a variety of "performance".

Unfortunately for his supporters, Tom had a natural bent for Legilimency, and by the age of 11 those skills had developed to the point that he could get enough of a glimpse into most people's motives for him to have already learned that people are not to be trusted, and to suspect ulterior motives on everyone's part. What is more, by the time he reached his 5th year at Hogwarts and had finally found the Chamber of Secrets he had already sharpened those skills enough to have seen through his companions.

He had already learned from them the knee-jerk loathing for mixed-bloods and mudbloods and Muggles that a certain type of pureblood harbors. He had also learned of the disdain and the fear, contempt, and distrust that various groups of human wizards frequently hold for every other magical species. And he was willing to use all of these attitudes to further his own goals by way of the classic strategy of divide and conquer. He does not necessarily really share any of these attitudes. He

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himself approves of no group. Or in the long run, any individual. Only himself.

But he will *use* them all. Gladly.

Oh, yes, he personally despised Muggles, it was Muggles who first thwarted him, and frightened him, and let him down. He will do them a bad turn whenever the opportunity presents itself.

And he developed a very real and very personal loathing for his father — and not without at least some cause, given that he only ever got his uncle Morfin's version of the matter. And saw that he might have been living in luxury as a son of the house, rather than dumped off in that orphanage like a piece of rubbish.

...Which brings up the point, I will *not* dwell upon it, that the subtext of the Gaunt *melange* is one of the ugliest things in canon. The taunts and slurs that Morfin Gaunt directs at his sister come across a good deal less as those of an older (or younger) brother than as signs of sexual jealousy on his own part. And old Marvolo's reaction to those taunts isn't what it ought to be either.

But I suspect that Tom's rhetorical "foul, filthy, common Muggle father" was a comparatively empty epithet, his loathing would have been just as intense had his father been a wizard who had abandoned him

However; he was raised among Muggles, and he was off the radar for a decade after he murdered Hepzibah Smith and dropped out of sight. If I am wrong, and there ever was more to him than a nasty overgrown child who was content to simply make a concerted effort to frighten the bejesus out of everyone, then the Potterverse had a bigger problem on its hands than



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we've been given any indication of.

But Muggles were not his top priority target. If he was anywhere near as clever as everyone seems to agree he was (not that we saw any on-stage evidence of it), he must have known perfectly well that there are far too many Muggles out there for him to have much of an effect upon them. Or at least, not so long as he was a mortal man.

Hold that thought.



Riddle ought to have had a very good idea of just how many Muggles, and more to the point, just how *few* wizards, there are in the world. And the wizarding numbers are low enough — less than half a million at most, thinly dispersed across the planet — that one man with a mission and a group of willing and deluded followers might very well be able to dominate, or destroy, all of them, eventually. Particularly if he can get that roiling sea of Muggles into the act, and he personally has unlimited time in which to accomplish it.

I think that if Tom Riddle was as bright as everyone tried to convince us (and they may have been right in that, but that doesn't mean he was rational) and if I am wrong, and he really *did* have a coherent goal in mind, what Lord Voldemort may have intended is nothing more or less than to overturn the International Act of Wizarding Seclusion. In fact, to unleash his followers onto the unsuspecting Muggle world. Without any limits. At all.

In short; to throw both of the groups that he most despises at one another in a fight to the death.



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And given the numbers involved, is there any doubt who would win?

He had to have had some idea of how thoroughly Muggles outnumber wizards. And, having spent the latter part of his childhood in a Muggle nation in the grip of a *total* war (assuming that Potterverse Britain was involved in a mid-century Muggle war, even if not a wizarding one. Unfortunately, from what were shown in canon we can not depend on that), he had at least a very good idea of just how thoroughly *destructive* they can be. And just how far they will go in the service of dogma.

Particularly if they are frightened. And he definitely *meant* to frighten them.

Several dozen Dark wizards let off their leashes might well do inestimable damage before the Muggles finally caught on; Particularly with a Giant or two along to help them. Not to mention Inferi, some werewolves, and, eventually, Dementors. But how long do you think that wizards would last once Muggles fully realized they were up against the supernatural? And do you think those Muggles would be all that scrupulous in distinguishing between “good” wizards and “bad” wizards?

Well do you?

And if wizards can be brought under full Muggle attack, what are the odds of the Goblins managing to escape. Or the Centaurs, or, in fact, *any* of the magical races.

After all, why stop at being the most powerful wizard in the world if you can be the *only* wizard in the world?



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But, of course, first he had to make himself immortal, or where's the fun in that? And afterwards, he would be able to stir things up enough that any new magical child that is discovered will be summarily destroyed. While he carries on, the “good work,” immortal and untouchable. Whittling away at the Muggle masses at his leisure. All the world will walk in terror of his name.

In short, he intended to set himself up — not as the classic Evil Overlord — but as the universal bogymen.

So, once he had his deathlessness arranged for, and anyone who might still recall the existence of young Tom Riddle was either firmly under his thumb, or no longer in a position to be an inconvenience, and the one person he is still leery about confronting was safely occupied in a physically isolated and demanding job — especially once this inveterate meddler is safely on the road to spreading himself too thin by trying to oversee everything that affects an entire wizarding Nation — Tom surfaced and after one final, still unspecified errand in the “enemy camp”, (ETA: as I had earlier speculated, he went to dump a Horcrux) he went building himself a core following from among the sort of wizard with which he is most familiar. And whose conduct and behavior, I suspect may occasionally disgust him. Which is to say, the sort of wizard who is ripe for evil to begin with, and needs only “permission” to do his worst. Which he would happily give them.

Until the whole series went to hell in Rowling's handbasket it was staggeringly easy to believe that Voldemort used his followers' fear and loathing of Muggles and mudbloods as — on his part an almost completely cynical — rallying cry, and he had



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traditionally given them pretty much of a free pass to wreak as much havoc as they please, so long as they could keep from being caught and shut down.

This enabled him to broaden his range of initial targets to include any half-blood or pureblood wizard — *and* their families — who opposed him. He also probably made a point of periodically having his followers target the wizarding families of apparent non-combatants as a way of upping the overall terror index.

Once he reached the final stages of his first rise, and the gloves were off, the more outrageous their behavior the better for his purposes. And he was making tremendous progress. In the minds of the public, he was winning.

Sirius Black's description of the wizarding world during the final period of VoldWar I goes as follows:

"Imagine that Voldemort's powerful now. You don't know who his supporters are, you don't know who's working for him and who isn't; you know that he can control people so that they do terrible things without being able to stop themselves. You're scared for yourself, and your family, and your friends. Every week, news comes of more deaths, more disappearances, more torturing... the Ministry of Magic's in disarray, they don't know what to do, they're trying to keep everything hidden from the Muggles, but meanwhile, the Muggles are dying too. Terror everywhere... panic... confusion... that's how it used to be."

Knowing what we know now, we can see that this situation could have been brought about with remarkably little real actual support within the wizarding world. If Rowling's statement in the joint interview, that the British wizarding world consists of

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some 3,000 witches and wizards, an "army" of between 5 and 6 dozen Death Eaters, with a willingness to indulge in lavish use of the Imperius Curse could do it quite handily. Particularly when you factor in a similar number of Inferi at their command, a pack of werewolves to call upon on nights of the full moon and the odd Giant or two to do the heavy lifting.

Back in the first war, Tom did not have the Dementors.

Nor did he really need them. He already had everyone exactly where he wanted them.

With the Ministry doing its part in the confusion by preying on its own constituency, in an attempt to hobble *him*. They were effectively acting as his publicity department.

And then Sybil Trelawney made her stupid Prophecy, and he believed it, which was the point at which it all came tumbling down like a house of cards.



Well, as of HBP, he's publicly back now. And after stringing him along for nearly a year and wasting his time, Albus Dumbledore finally revealed to him (through Harry) just how thoroughly he managed to shoot himself in the foot over the matter of that damned Prophecy.

Yes, I am convinced that Tom had hitched one last ride in Harry's head for that debriefing session. And I've yet to see anything in canon that contradicts it. And there's a great deal in DHs which strongly suggests that I did get that one right. Albus's official statements to the contrary notwithstanding — and upon closer examination, even those statements don't *actually* contradict it.

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Well, the outcome wasn't carved in stone yet. And if it is either the Potter brat or Tom who was to ultimately be destroyed, Tom was going to make damned sure that it will be the Potter brat. But it looks like there isn't a whole lot of chance of securing true immortality until that complication is out of the way. Particularly not now that he knows he has lost the Diary.

We still don't know just what his long-range plans for that Diary were. We probably never will. I'm no longer altogether convinced he even had any. But I can provisionally accept that it was a part of some typically Byzantine plot to remove Albus Dumbledore from his path.

Well, deathlessness will just have to do. Despite the delay.



Meanwhile, he had a network to rebuild and an agenda to get back on track. The chief priority at the beginning was to reestablish his own organization. Then it was to spread his influence. And to get the old meddler out of the picture. Then settle the Potter brat, and/or then to destabilize and to destroy any lingering trust in the legitimate government. Those last two can be run concurrently. In the meantime it's enough to just keep the pot well-stirred. Which he did all through the course of HBP.

If the entire British wizarding world consists of no more than 3,000 people as Rowling tries to claim, even if Riddle's total followers at all levels; human, Giant, werewolf and all; number no more than a couple hundred, the odds were excellent of his being able to produce a state of emergency and paranoia which would pitch the whole into an unworkable



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mess and make the Ministry of Magic and the Wizengamot which oversees it vulnerable to collapse.

That was the case from the point he came out of that stone cauldron. The whole issue could have been a lot more plausibly handled, but the outcome was always fairly certain.

Even if he really *had* intended to rule the world, and *I'm* not convinced he did, only that it was a claim worth making and he had to do *something* with his time, he would have, as usual, amused himself by making plans.

Byzantine, unnecessarily complex, and unreasonable plans. Plans that never had a hope of coming off. But they would have been fun to play with, and given him something to work towards.

Eternity is a long time, you know. You need a hobby.

Once he had Britain and Ireland properly cowed, he might have had vague intentions of using this enlarged power base to carry his apparent agenda to Europe. He would have been overreaching himself, but supposing for the minute that he was better at long-range plans than he ever gave us any indications of being, let's follow this train of thought a bit farther down the track as to what he may have been daydreaming about:

Internally, various pogroms would continue to whittle away resistance and keep the rest of the population of the UK and Ireland demoralized. Many of the small-fry would escape the country. This will not matter. The worldwide population of wizards is thinly spread. He will catch up to them in good time. He *has* time. He may not be truly immortal and invulnerable to Time yet, but he does seem to have attained a satisfactory degree of deathlessness.



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Still, true immortality may be the next item on his to-do list. Right after taking over wizarding Britain, killing Harry Potter, and before expanding his reach farther.

He may not officially overturn the Act of Seclusion and fully unleash the dogs until he has the European Ministries completely demoralized as well. But his actions, and those of his followers, will not exactly be conducted in secret behind the lines. After all, his rhetoric is all geared to wizards one day *ruling* Muggles. By that time the Muggles will have a considerable degree of awareness that *something* is attacking them and they will be itching to come to grips with the "enemy." In the meantime they will be doing a nice job of pointing fingers and making trouble for each other. As long as any of their governments are functioning and hostile to one another, they certainly won't be looking over their shoulders for wizards. Yet.

Riddle anticipates that his European campaign will be assisted by sympathizers on the Continent, and there may be areas with a large enough number of such sympathizers for him to leave them to it, so long as they accept his direction in certain key issues and events.

From Europe he no doubt intends to spread his campaign to the Middle East, and North Africa, with various smaller campaigns in sub-Saharan Africa. Particularly in those post-Colonial areas with a large European component to their society. From there he will move on to Asia, Australia and the Americas.

He probably anticipates that he will also be required to fend off various enemy campaigns, launched from the Americas and from Australia spearheaded by British expatriates who fled his regime in the UK, Eire, and Europe. But the thinness of wizarding popu-

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lation will tend to make these long-distance attempts a sufficient strain for their organizers for them to be able to be beaten off without major losses. And with any luck, by that time the Muggles should have gotten into the act and be targeting anything that looks like a wizard and asking questions later.

His total destruction of the wizarding "world" will probably take another 100-200 years at least. But, by then, he'll have the time.

Only by throwing themselves upon his mercy will any of the remaining magical peoples be given any protection from the fully aroused Muggles. When he has these remnants of the wizarding world totally under his control, any conflicts between factions will be subtly encouraged, and the general pogroms will continue until only those who support him totally will remain.

He will keep those around for as long as he finds them amusing. And then he will hand them all, wizard and Muggle, over to his real allies.

The Dementors.

Mission accomplished.



The Bad Seed

This is another foray that turned out to not go where I thought it would. Although some of the vibes I was picking up at least seem to have actually been there.



This is another awkward issue which took a long time in the process of painfully surfacing. I'm still not quite sure what to make of it. (Rowling, of course, made nothing of it.)

But, upon the whole, I think we've got another serious disconnect regarding Tom and Albus that took much longer than it should have to finally come into focus. And now that the questions are finally surfacing, the whole underlying set-up between them is looking odder and odder. And there really don't seem to be any viable answers on offer. I suspect that either Rowling is an even less competent writer than I'd been giving her (dis)credit for, or something must have been going on in that interview between Albus and Tom at the orphanage that we as the readers were not a party to. There definitely seems to be some missing context here.

We were clearly shown that young Tom Riddle was already a nasty little predator at his orphanage. His theme song seems to be; "You can't prove it was me." He worked completely alone, by preference, and he clearly didn't give a damn what anyone there's opinion of him might be.

A couple of months later there he is at Hogwarts. And the next thing you hear is that he is charming everyone around him, students and staff alike. Before all that long he is gathering followers, becoming popular and cultivating every-



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body's good opinion.

What the bloody hell happened here? Why, and more to the point, *how* did he know to suddenly change his entire mode of public behavior? And how did he know the exact way that it *needed* to be changed? This cannot be just from learning that there was magic in the world and that he was a wizard.

Let alone, how did he even know how to **DO** it? Even being a fledgling Legilimens doesn't explain that. Not adequately. In our first meeting with him, he clearly hadn't ever done this before. The closest he came to it was when he was boasting to impress Albus, and that was hardly the most polished of performances. Indeed, you got the impression that this kid had never tried to charm anyone in his life. He had never before tried to do anything but push people around and have done with it. And he wasn't a bit pleased to discover that Albus couldn't be pushed.

Did Tom — however briefly — legitimately try to turn over a new leaf? Did he somehow think that wizards must somehow be different and he wanted them to like him? I suppose it is possible, but we sure aren't given that impression.



But if so, how long did it take before he realized that they really weren't different at all — but that by then he had found that he enjoyed being able to *trick* people into doing what he wanted, rather than just forcing them?

And, upon consideration, suddenly not only do the images not match up between the vicious little loner-by-preference of the orphanage and the budding social leader of not that long



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afterwards, but *Albus's* behavior at the orphanage is wildly variant from what we might have expected from him, too.

The kid, however nasty a little brat he might be, was only 11. He didn't even know that what he could do was magic. He did what he did just because he *could*.

Even though he knew perfectly well that it wasn't *nice*. No one could stop him, and imposing his will upon the universe is what *every* small child tries to do. Most of them would have learned to adapt to some other method by Tom's age, simply because they find they can't. Tom didn't have the "advantage" of normal limits. This was a boy who had grown up entirely without normal limits upon him *and* his magic.

He also seemed to want to "get back" at the world in general over something. No one, least of all Albus, has ever bothered to ask what. The discovery that he was actually a wizard was also clearly a deeply moving experience for him, even if it didn't move him into any position which made him likable. And Albus seemed to have *despised* him for it. What was that all about?



After Albus had spoken with Mrs Cole, he may have expected to meet a typical little bully, perhaps more sly than usual, but I get the impression that what he did discover was something that he did not expect, and once Tom told him the sort of things that he could do, Albus stopped smiling. And by the time he left the building he had decided to keep an eye on the boy for other people's sake (not that he actually bothered to *warn* anyone of any potential danger, mind you). But we cannot be sure of specifically *what* it was about Tom that disturbed him so greatly.



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But I suppose we might try to make a guess.

Tom can't have been the first nasty little bully to cross Albus's path. Indeed given his record, Albus seems to have, if anything, far too great a tolerance for bullies — and for bullying — on his patch. But Albus made no concession for Tom's ignorance and lack of any kind of previous guidance. He immediately distanced himself and proceeded to lay down the law with a clear message of; "I don't like you. I don't like what you are doing. But you're a wizard and you have the right to attend my school. However; remember this, boy: if you put a foot out of line we'll toss you out on your ear, wizard or not."

Even finally being handed the Grindelwald backstory doesn't explain this reaction. Gellert Grindelwald was handsome, dashing, gregarious, and charming. Tom was only handsome. That's not that much of a similarity. And it is certainly not an echo. They didn't even look like one another.

Frankly, if anyone we've met resembled a young Gellert Grindelwald, it was Sirius Black.

Given the sullenness and hostility, if Tom Riddle reminded Albus of anyone, it is as likely have been his brother Aberforth — with whom Albus is likely to have still been at odds at that point. I suspect it was only after he went off and defeated Gellert Grindelwald that Albus and Aberforth came to any sort of a reconciliation.

But, for a man with such a much-touted reputation for believing in 2nd chances he sure didn't seem to be offering all that much of one to Tom Riddle. (Nor, later, to Severus Snape.) Tom was lucky to get any kind of a chance from Albus at all. And if he could have done it without losing face, I think that Albus might



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even have reneged on the whole deal. The only concession he made was not to warn the rest of the staff against Riddle so as not to “poison the well” in case the boy did try to clean up his act. And by now we can be pretty sure that that particular decision was just Albus’s typical refusal to take any real responsibility for anyone else’s welfare, if he could possibly avoid it.

Albus had already made his promise to insure that Tom came to Hogwarts before he actually spoke to the boy. He had given his word to Mrs Cole that he would be taking Tom, “whatever” she had to say about him; that Tom definitely had a place in his school. Albus doesn’t usually go back on his stated word. Not unless he is forced to. He has a finely-developed sense of the sort of 3rd-grade morality which pervades this series. And he hadn’t yet met the boy when he gave her that assurance.



I don’t get the impression that Tom’s refusal to allow Albus to accompany him to Diagon Alley came as any kind of a disappointment. Nor was it any kind of a surprise. Albus handed over the funds with an air of washing his hands of the matter.

But why? What went on under our noses here that we simply didn’t see? Either Tom tried something on Albus that Albus took extreme offense at, or something in that list of abilities that he told Albus to impress him, did. Highly UNfavorably, too. And it probably wasn’t just that young Tom was a Parselmouth. Albus doesn’t seem to care one way or the other about that.

But either this is the very shoddiest excuse for plotting by a lazy writer on the order of; “I need A to do X, and B to do Y, so they will, because I say so” and never mind establishing any

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kind of background which would explain the motivations, or the responses, or the sudden shifts in behavior — or else something that came up in that interview *really* jerked Albus’s chain. And even learning about Gellert doesn’t really help us figure out what it was.

Either Albus went into that interview forewarned in some manner, and Tom’s statements inadvertently identified him as a major potential threat (Albus having met a similar monster at some point before, and so recognized the caliber of threat Tom represented?), or some other exchange took place off our radar, because we just never got the proper context to interpret it.

We watched Tom use Legilimency on Harry all the way back in PS/SS. We did not have the proper context to interpret that until Book 5, but it is definitely there. It wasn’t until book 6 that we had the proper information and context to interpret our observations and know that the Diary revenant was a soul fragment, establishing the Diary as a Horcrux. It would not have been at all astonishing if Rowling turned out to have snuck something of importance into the orphanage interview that we missed — not having the proper context to know what to look for at the time. But if this is the case, she never took the trouble to point out just what it had been. And by that point in the series, there is a good chance of it being something that we already knew about.

Or, as an outside possibility, we might conclude that Albus is *much* better at editing a copied memory than Slughorn is, and that whatever the real issue was, we never got to see it.

Because even now, downwind of DHs we still haven’t an overt clue. We cannot even postulate that Albus looked at Tom

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and saw a young Gellert Grindelwald. Tom's manner was *nothing* like Gellert's.

A few years later, Albus might have been forgiven for coming to that conclusion, once Tom had learned to lay on the charm. But certainly not in that first interview in the orphanage. Gellert Grindelwald was a nasty piece of work with a supremacist agenda, but he wasn't an obviously raving sociopath. Or not one of the extreme variety that Tom was. And he wasn't a loner.

So the whole issue is still, to all intents and purposes, a mystery to me.



Unless, that is, the real issue is that Tom managed to goad Albus into losing his temper and setting fire to the furniture. I suspect that someone who thinks as well of himself as our Albus might very well resent a child who had managed to draw him into a pissing contest with an 11-year-old.



However. Although Rowling didn't make all that much of a point of it, when you stop and take a closer look at just what kind of things young Tom was boasting of being able to do, chatting with snakes was probably the most wholesome and non-threatening thing in the entire catalogue.

My attention suddenly is particularly drawn to his claim of being able to make animals do what he wanted them to do, without training them..

I don't know about you, but doesn't that sound a bit like... *possession*?



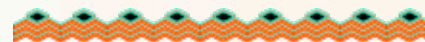
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Slughorn tells Tom that the subject of Horcruxes was already banned, and had been purged from the Hogwarts Library by the time Tom was asking about it some five years after Albus delivered a Hogwarts letter to a child in a London orphanage. Slughorn attributes Albus as being the person responsible for this act of censorship. He comments that Albus had been particularly fierce on the subject. Slughorn doesn't, however, tell us precisely when this campaign of Albus's was conducted. Nor whether this purge was limited only to the subject of Horcruxes. Horcruxes was just the topic which Tom had asked about.

Perhaps I'm not giving Albus due credit. If he was aware that possession is an inherent component of various particularly unsavory magical practices — not necessarily just limited to Horcrux creation — and knowing that Hogwarts was soon to be hosting a student with an alleged talent for that particular skill, maybe he really *did* try to do something in an attempt to limit the potential opportunity for damage.

When you stop and think about it; in retrospect, Albus must have *already* been suspecting the possibility of the Harrycrux as early as November, 1981. So far as Albus was concerned, an association of Tom Riddle with Horcruxes was clearly already on the table.

In hindsight, perhaps it's not that hard to understand Albus Dumbledore's willingness to slap a label of "irredeemably evil" onto a child.



A Muggle-Raised Halfblood

Well. So.

Why *would* pureblood supremacists choose to follow a half-blood?

First we have to ask whether his followers *know* that he is a half-blood. We were given some indication in Order of the Phoenix that my own early suspicion that the majority of them probably don't could well be correct. And any of them who do certainly do not *admit* to knowing that he is a half-blood.

Bellatrix Lestrange seemed outraged at the very suggestion, and she claims to have been among his closest favorites once upon a time. But then, Bellatrix certainly wasn't one of his *original* followers. And there is definitely a possibility that there is more to her outrage than appears on the surface. There could be a history there. Quite apart from her being a member of the Black family.

I was pretty sure that some of his original followers, which is to say, the ones who had been in school with him, probably suspected that he was at least not a pureblood. Riddle, after all, is hardly a traditional wizarding name. But the most that anyone could say is that they would have known perfectly well that there are no Riddles listed in 'NATURE'S NOBILITY'.

But that would have been no indication that he actually had a Muggle for a father. He could have simply had a Muggle for a grandfather. Or even a great-grandfather. Or that the Muggles who ran that orphanage he lived in could have lumbered him with that name. Orphanages did assign names to babies given into their care.

And if I'm correct that the whole "Lord Voldemort" rig that

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they were running, with Tom as the front man, was started off as a group effort, then the *last* thing that they would have chosen to spread around was the fact that the whole thing was completely bogus. Or, at least not until they could get a maximum payoff of publicly embarrassing their elders from it.

Especially not once they decided to use the Lord Voldemort persona as a mouthpiece for a pureblood supremacy manifesto.

Although *that* decision wasn't made for at least a few years.

I now suspect that the core group of Tom's original followers was probably composed of no more than a handful of his ex-schoolmates. We may have been misled by Albus's statements of the wide variety of reasons that other schoolboys had chosen to follow Tom's lead back at Hogwarts. There is no real proof that *all* of those schoolboys went on to follow him once he started publicly calling himself Lord Voldemort.

And if, as I have postulated, the "Lord Voldemort" hoax was originally presented in the nature of a prank on an older generation which thought far too well of itself, those few unfiliated compatriots who might have remembered the "Lord Voldemort" in-joke from Hogwarts, might well have kept quiet so as not to spoil the fun.

The Diary Revenant did tell us that only a few of Riddle's contemporaries were a part of the "Lord Voldemort" silliness back in school.

And, years later, by the time the Lord Voldemort persona was now being identified as the leader of the group calling themselves Death Eaters, they may have felt they had other reasons to decide to keep quiet about it in public.

The Death Eaters, after all, didn't go "public" until some

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years after that hypothetical (and successful) prank on their elders. Assuming there ever was such a prank.



And, in addition, there was that ring that he started wearing in his 5th year and probably claimed was an heirloom. Only a wizard from a wizarding family would have worn *that*.

Yes we are back to the sigil of the Hallows again. We really didn't have any context for that until old Xeno Lovegood showed up wearing it at the Weasley wedding. But the very fact that he did so is a bit of a game changer.

First off, it totally pwns the idea that the sigil was ever any family's coat-of-arms. Family coats-of-arms are unique. The sigil of the Hallows has been being used by a no-longer-especially "secret club" as their own emblem for centuries. Ergo; the ring and its sigil didn't identify Tom as a Peverill, it identified him as a descendant of a family of Hallows questers. Which is an exclusively wizarding group and a very, very old one. That's probably what Sluggy was referring to when he claimed that anyone could tell that Tom was from the right sort of family background to get ahead in the Ministry.

Yeah, yeah, I know, many if not most wizards today may consider the Hallows questers a bunch of complete loons, but no one considers them Johnny-come-latelies. If the boy was connected to one of *those* families, he was "old blood," even after a name change, and managing to misplace his heritage.



Tom had already developed a fine contempt for "ordinary"

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people well before he showed up at Hogwarts. And he was all too obviously willing to regard his being a wizard as "special." He would not have publicly expressed anything less than disdain for the Muggles who had raised him. It would have been apparent that he scarcely regarded them as his own species. There's nothing in that to give any of his housemates from pure-blood supremacist sympathizing families pause. But his lack of a recognizable wizarding name would have still probably gotten him called "mudblood".

It also took him some years of research before he finally had to give up and admit that his father had probably not been a wizard; before he finally turned to his despised mother's family and managed to get a line on Marvolo Gaunt. After encountering Morfin, I doubt that he would have broadcasted the whopping disappointment of that connection to his schoolmates, either. Although in view of the age of the family name, he might *possibly* have admitted the connection.

And there certainly was nothing about his magic, his control of it, or his skills to have given anyone a clue that he was anything other than the purest of the pure. Unless his observers were aware of the fact that from Merlin on, the *real* magical prodigies usually tend to be those of mixed heritage. And I suspect that the most die-hard pureblood families do not like to admit that. They certainly do not teach the knowledge of that little peculiarity to their children.

We also had it handed to us on a silver platter in HBP that young Tom Riddle's control of his magic was both prodigious and precocious (as was that of young Lily Evans in DHs, unless Rowling simply lost track of keeping such things in propor-

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tion). No one in Slytherin House would have suspected that young Tom was anything other than a child of wizards — even if he had been raised by Muggles. Perhaps *especially* if he was known to have been raised by Muggles. Where, after all, was such innate skill suspected to have come *from* in a child who was raised completely outside the ww?

If Horace Slughorn was astonished to discover (some 30 years later) that a child with the skills of a Lily Evans was Muggle-born, he would have certainly not have guessed that young Tom Riddle was a literal half-blood.



Voldemort seems very up-front about his Muggle father when the discussion has only been between him and Harry (and unconscious Ginny, or freshly-maimed Pettigrew moaning and sobbing in the background — whom I suspect Voldemort completely discounted). But when it came down to addressing the troops, he reveals only that his father is buried there in the Little Hangleton graveyard (as, no doubt, is Marvolo Gaunt. In fact there's probably no shortage of Gaunts in that graveyard). If anyone had chosen to investigate the matter they would have quickly discovered that there had been wizards in the vicinity of Little Hangleton for a long time. Parselmouths, too.

Given the following quote from CoS, I'm not convinced Riddle's schoolmates ever really had any clear idea of his parentage.

"[Lord Voldemort] was a name that I was already using at Hogwarts, to my most intimate friends only, of course. You think I was going to use my filthy Muggle father's name forever? I, in whose veins runs the blood of Salazar Slytherin



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himself, through my mother's side? I, keep the name of a foul, common Muggle, who abandoned me even before I was born, just because he found out my mother was a witch? No, Harry — I fashioned myself a new name, a name I knew wizards everywhere would one day fear to speak, when I had become the greatest sorcerer in the world!"

We do not get any indication in the above passage to suppose that these particular early "friends" were all that deeply in his confidence. Nor, indeed that they were all that numerous. And, given Riddle's general slyness, there is nothing in the summary quoted above to indicate that he had come right out and admitted to those "intimate friends" his intention of ultimately making himself feared throughout the wizarding world, either.

Or not yet. No, the signs were certainly all there, and any of them probably could have guessed as much. A few of them probably did, and some of them may well have agreed with him that this was a desirable goal, but his ultimate intentions regarding the wizarding world I think he kept to himself, when he was still at Hogwarts.

And while it is unquestionable that Riddle's school friends knew his original name, it is far from an outside possibility that they did not know — even then — that his father was actually a Muggle. The young Tom Riddle, was unaware of that fact himself, until he had actually tracked down and spoken with his uncle Morfin. And the young Tom Riddle, unlike Draco Malfoy — up until HBP — was very well able to keep his own council.

They all understood that Tom was believed to return to his orphanage in the summer. They probably also knew that Tom had never known his parents. But Tom could easily have given



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them the impression that his father was a wizard and that his mother had only gone off among the Muggles after he left her. It's not like he even knew the full story himself, at the time. As pointed out above, he didn't get that until he rooted out Morfin, which he didn't manage to do until he was 15.

However, Tom would have rapidly determined the general worldview of his Slytherin housemates and reflected it back to them. Few of them would have supposed him to be anything other than a magical child of magicals like most of themselves, despite the knowledge that he had been raised in a Muggle orphanage, possibly under a false name — which is a story that I think he was willing enough to spread around since he could gain some sort of advantage from it. It would have made him “interesting.”



At any rate, his schoolmates did know that he was raised in a Muggle orphanage.

This might have been taken as a given, knowing that he was born outside the wizarding world and his mother died within an hour afterward, leaving him in the hands of the mundane authorities.

And Tom was highly personable when he chose to be. For a brilliant orphan boy to be determined to trace his true family is something with which I think quite a few of his housemates would have been willing to assist him. Either in or out of school. Some of them may have even had hopes of discovering him to be a long-lost cousin or something.

We were given a minor clue in HBP that at least a couple

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of the other boys suspected something about Tom's background. Tom's demure response about lacking the “proper background” to Professor Slughorn's teasing prediction of a glowing political career, provoked a response from at least a couple of Tom's companions, but the odds are against that response having been based upon any suspicions of a possible Muggle, or three, dangling from Tom Riddle's family tree. We have no idea of what exactly their suspicions were, or whether those suspicions were even in the right ballpark. Although, in hindsight, they had probably merely recognized the Deathly Hallows sigil on his ring.

By the time that conversation took place Tom was habitually wearing Marvolo's ring. With the specifically wizarding sigil of the Deathly Hallows associated with the Hallows Questers engraved upon it. (An association with which Tom appears to have been completely unaware to the end of his life. Oooo, irony). Although the Gaunts probably were hardly the only bloodline who attempted to claim a connection to the Peverills, Tom himself never attempted to do that. Which is probably just as well. It would have been gilding the lily, and I doubt he would have been believed.

But I'm sure that somebody did recognize the device on that ring. Slughorn certainly did. In fact he obviously recognized it again when Albus turned up some 50+ years later, wearing it, with the stone broken, trying to convince Slughorn to return to Hogwarts.



On yet another count, that oh-so-grandiloquent name

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that he adopted; “Lord Voldemort,” seems associated more closely with his ambition to make himself immortal than the one to make himself feared. Such an ambition certainly does not inspire widespread horror in and of itself. After all, it had already been done — by Nicholas Flamel — who is hardly a byword of stalking Evil. If anyone had happened to catch wind of that goal, it would not have automatically set off any particular alarms. Certainly not back then.

If they had caught wind of it, early observers would have probably admired Tom as a properly ambitious Slytherin lad with a laudable goal and the brilliance to just possibly carry it off, someday. Such a public façade would have been very much in keeping with the face Tom presented to authority while he was still in school. The “Lord Voldemort,” of his later iteration, did not surface for anything up to 20 years after that early meeting of the Slug Club, and the only people who already knew of that alias were the ones that he took down the road to ruin with him.

With at least a few possible exceptions. Orion Black was two years behind Riddle at Hogwarts, a member of the Slug Club in his own right, and fit the profile of being highly “collectible,” according to either Slughorn’s or Riddle’s criteria. And yet, when Riddle returned to the ww and set up the Death Eaters, Orion did not permit himself to be added to the collection.

Nor, so far as we can tell, did Orion’s older cousin Alphard. We do not know for sure whether or not Cygnus, Alphard’s younger brother did. But he may very well have.

By the time Orion’s elder son was old enough to sit up and take notice, Orion was throwing every spare knut into applying layers upon layers of protection upon the family home. With his

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own father’s evident endorsement.

This is all very suggestive. But I’ve already amply explored the possibility that the Black family, or at least Orion and his father Arcturus were aware of something of Riddle’s background in the ‘Man’s Best Friend’, ‘Noble House of Black’, and the ‘Raiders of the Lost Horcrux’ essays, some of which has been rather unconvincingly counter-indicated in DHs, but I will not repeat it here. If the elder Blacks did know anything to the purpose, they do not seem to have shared the information with Orion’s cousin, Cygnus’s branch of the family.

But then, Cygnus married one of the Rosiers. Who were oh-but-definitely, “connected” to Riddle.



By the end of the series, the followers who were the most likely to know of Voldemort’s half-blood origins were Peter Pettigrew, who would have had opportunity to learn it from Harry at the end of Book 2 and may have overheard Riddle confirming it while he himself was moaning over his mutilated arm at the end of Book 4, Lucius Malfoy, who had the keeping of at least a few of Tom Riddle’s personal effects for a dozen or so years, and Severus Snape, who likes knowing everyone’s secrets, and, having been sent to infiltrate Dumbledore’s school may have learned it in the course of his spying. Indeed, Albus might have told him of it outright.

All three of whom were most likely to hoard this information themselves in order to use it to their best advantage later.

Indeed, in Snape’s case, Voldemort may even have confided it himself. From both Voldemort’s conversation with (or at)

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Harry in the graveyard before the DEs showed up, and Barty Crouch's statement to Harry, before they were interrupted by Dumbledore's rescue party we can conclude that Voldemort often took care to mirror back to those he was attempting to influence, some element of their own background, offering some illusory point of "connection" and presumed fellowship between them in order to enlist their sympathies.

Whether this was his general practice, or a gambit that he had judged to be best deployed in the case of Barty Crouch Jr, in order to win his loyalty and use him against his father is still uncertain. We got no clear indication one way or another to the end of the series.

For that matter, it may have just been a habit that he picked up over the years that he was working as a sales assistant for Burke. He was probably very persuasive at selling things.

The fact that in CoS the Diary Revenant also uses this ploy with Harry who he fully intends to kill before the evening is over suggests that this behavior may have been so habitual as to be a mere reflex, possibly by the time he was out of his teens. If there are other literal or technical half-bloods in his ranks (and we got no real suggestion of it, Snape appears to have been unique) it is just barely possible that they may also know this fact about their leader.

Still, the information we were given in HBP suggests that this is unlikely. We now know that his "inner circle" are comprised of only a few dozen followers, and most of those are the descendants of his original followers, or scions of other families of similarly pureblood extremist views. In fact, the majority of them now appear to be "hereditary" minions

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rather than new "recruits." Incomers who are outsiders, like Snape, have probably always been a rarity. As were such cases as Barty Crouch Jr, acting out their own adolescent rebellion by joining up with the "other side."



I tended to doubt that Riddle spent his missing decade in Britain once he had murdered Hepzibah Smith and escaped with some of her rather significant treasures. Dropping off the face of the earth, tends to imply that you don't stick around where the people who know you by sight are going to see you.

Until DHs was released I thought that Tom had decided that he had a lot of world to see and a lot of other places to go, hunting for ways to secure his immortality. And I imagined that post-war Europe and the Middle East had offered plenty of opportunities for a young, clever, ambitious Dark wizard. India and Asia would have had their attractions too, I suspected. Possibly South America as well. Particularly British-held Argentina.

None of these, were likely hunting grounds for artifacts significant to the founders of Hogwarts School, however.

It now turns out that I was probably wrong, and once again this was a thread that didn't really materialize. Rowling went for the cheap and easy on this stretch of the official Riddle backstory. So far as we can tell, Riddle went no farther than Albania, seems to have gone there directly as soon as he left Britain, and stayed there.

Acto Rowling, Riddle had already decided upon what method he was going to use to secure his immortality before he finished school. Had already created the first two of his Horcruxes

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by then as well. (Which I have a lot of trouble believing, and finally just plain reject. Although I do agree that he had already created the Ring.)

I will admit that his sweet-talking the ghost of Helena Ravenclaw into telling him what she did with her mother's diadem was at least an unanticipated insertion, and took me a bit by surprise. I don't doubt that he had already pried the other half of the story out of the Baron. And it was very nice to have all the WTF? references to Albania finally sorted out and given some context.

Evidently what we are now supposed to conclude (*if* we believe Harry. I will state up front that I don't) is that Tom finished school, was not allowed to stay on as a teacher and search the castle for suitable artifacts, so he went off on a traditional "grand tour," instead. Or at least that's what he may have given people to understand. He doesn't appear to have gone off to do it with friends. Or if he did, he parted company with them once they got to the eastern Mediterranean. In any case, he made a beeline to the Albanian forests and ultimately managed to recover the Ravenclaw diadem.

And then, he returned to Britain, and took up a post in Borgin & Burke hoping to ultimately get a lead on his mother's locket, which had been Slytherin's. He ended up with the Hufflepuff Cup too, as a bonus.

I rather suspect that Harry's reading of the chronology of these events was bas-ackward (*quel surprise!*) and Tom took up his post at B&B directly upon leaving school — and then blipped off to Albania after he murdered Hepzibah and had reason to get out of Dodge for a while.

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So while it is possible that he spent a decade trying to get a lead on a Gryffindor artifact other than the sword (which was probably already quite famous to everyone but an incurious dolt like Harry), he certainly never managed it. Instead, he is now assumed to have spent that decade hunting for the Diadem, and given where and how it had been left, it may have taken the full decade to find it, too.

It also is more than likely that by 1981, since he soon expected to have the school under his control once he murdered the child of Prophecy (for, after all, what other reason would he have entrusted Lucius Malfoy with the Diary?) he expected to soon have the leisure to search the castle for a Gryffindor artifact, or to simply wait until the Sword made its reappearance, and take possession of it whether he turned it into a Horcrux or not. You'll notice that he gave Lucius that Diary at exactly same time he ordered Snape into the school "to spy." You will also notice that (acto Albus) he asked for the Diary back within a couple of months of his return, too..

Oh, he had plans, all right.

And in a pinch, there was always the Sorting Hat, which had also been Gryffindor's. And which he ultimately intended to retire from active service, anyway.



This would also be a reasonable time and place to do a bit of debunking of a persistent rumor which is regularly brought up in the fandom regarding the inevitable comparisons between Lord Voldemort and Adolf Hitler. Namely the persistent rumor that Adolph Hitler himself was a bastard child whose

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mother was Jewish. This parallel is clearly intended by Rowling as well — who ends up coming across as a complete ignoramus for invoking this myth — given the fact that the charge itself is utter bunkum.

For it is quite untrue, and is readily disproved by even a cursory look through a modern, reputable biography. (It probably ought to be pointed out that many if not most of the immediate post-war bios were anything but. Rita Skeeter would have been proud of some of them.)

In fact, upon investigation, the actual rumor itself seems to have predated Adolf's birth by a full generation, if not more, and it is an extraordinary example of the persistence of human spite and general nastiness.

Where it appears to have originated is that Adolf's grandmother (who was not Jewish) was in domestic service as a young woman, sometime in the early-to-middle 19th century, and was "walking out" with a local farmer. As has been known to happen, she ended up getting pregnant out of wedlock and she and her farmer (who was, indeed, the kid's father) were forced to marry in haste.

Well, as commonplace as that all sounds, it was about the most exciting thing that had happened in that little backwater for a decade, so the local gossips just couldn't let it pass. It didn't help that neither the farmer nor Adolf's grandmother were the least bit popular.

Furthermore, the actual facts of the matter just weren't dramatic enough to suit them, so they glommed onto the fact that the family she was working for (which was Jewish) had a son in his mid-teens and ran with it.

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It also didn't help that her employers had, very decently, given her some kind of monetary wedding gift to start house-keeping with. Apparently no good deed does go unpunished. Their wedding gift was rapidly recast as "hush money."

The child, Adolf's own father, seems to have been a real little shit, and he grew up to be a very big shit, and abusive with it. He was even more unpopular than his parents, and of course all the old scandal got raked over on a regular basis just because people of that stamp positively invite others to say nasty things about them, and to *keep on* saying them. (And if you are determined to act like a bastard to people, other people will call you one if given any kind of excuse.)

And of course by that time nothing could really be proved to anyone's satisfaction one way or the other. And even if it could have, it wouldn't have stopped the talk. Consequently, 20–40 years later the tale was *still* making the rounds when Adolf was a boy.

Which would have infuriated him since it simply was not true. And the whole family *knew* it was not true. And the gossips kept right on talking. Small wonder he developed a "complex" about it.

Germany also got shafted big time at the end of WWI and was itching to find an identifiable scapegoat. The Jewish community made a very easy target. Adolf certainly resented the Jews' very existence for his own reasons, but his own reasons alone would not have created the situation that developed.

What was rather more relevant to young Adolf's psychological development, however, were the parents that he actually had.

His father was a brute. There is no question about that, nor any other way of stating it. Herr Hitler was a brute, and a batterer who beat his wife, and beat his kids, and beat his son

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Adolf, black and blue, on just about any or no provocation.

Immediately after WWII biographers used this well-documented history of abuse to conclude that the child must therefore have been a monster from birth and had richly deserved it. More recent biographers have had a good deal less invested in proving to the world that since Adolf was obviously “born” to be a monster, then everybody else involved is comfortably off the hook.

But, while having an abusive parent can produce some seriously maladjusted personalities, it does not seem to be the critical factor that produces sociopaths. And by pretty much all accounts, Adolf Hitler does seem to have been a sociopath. Even if not quite on the same scale as Tom Riddle.

An unconfirmed, but reasonable-sounding hypothesis raised by a more recent investigator — whose name escapes me. I’m sorry. What I read was an article in a magazine in a doctor’s office sometime in the early ’80s. The article was extracted from a book, but I did not ever encounter the book itself. I’m pretty sure the magazine was something like “PSYCHOLOGY TODAY.” This investigator drew attention to the fact that the Hitler family had just lost an infant shortly before Adolf’s birth. The author, who I believe was a psychiatrist, postulated that Adolf’s mother, trapped in a marriage with a battering brute of a husband and having just been bereaved of one of her children, might have been so deeply in a clinical depression during Adolf’s earliest months that she was never able to bond with him.

And that IS a factor which can contribute to producing a sociopath. Such development is not guaranteed, but it is documented as being relevant.



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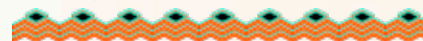
And if this is the case, then, ironically, the early biographers turn out not to have been altogether wrong. Young Adolf was indeed a monster, if not precisely from birth, then certainly before he was old enough to walk or talk. And maybe there was a reason his behavior got up his father’s nose from an early age. Herr Hitler senior was clearly not a patient nor a tolerant man.

Beating a child doesn’t produce a sociopath. But neither does it cure one.

Still, for all that Rowling herself has referred to Lord Voldemort as “a Hitler,” we are not really concerned with the life of Adolf Hitler, here. Our concern is with the life of Tom Riddle.

I do have to admit that drawing the Riddle=Hitler parallel certainly makes a lot better sense than the Hitler=Grindelwald one. Rowling was not able to make that association even remotely convincing, and the dates we’ve got simply do not add up. In fact Rowling’s Grindelwald arc, as presented, so bollixes up the timeline that we can no longer even safely assume that Riddle ever heard of anyone named Adolf Hitler. The whole prospect of a mid-century war has taken a complete left turn, since, apparently, Grindelwald never took his war to Britain. Rowling might have been better advised to draw her straight line between one set of two points or the other. She couldn’t have it both ways and shouldn’t have attempted to.

Quite possibly Riddle would have admired Hitler tremendously — if Hitler even existed in the Potterverse. Or Tom might have if the man hadn’t been a Muggle.



The Riddle House

So. Who owned the Riddle house?
Short Answer; Voldemort did.

From the summary given in the opening chapter of GoF it is clear that the house changed hands any number of times after a notorious triple murder took place there in the summer of 1942.

At the time of the Riddle massacre Tom Riddle was a youngster, still in school, who still had his fortune to make and there wasn't really much of anything that he could have done about the house then, even if it had occurred to him to wish to.

Some 15–20 years, or so, later he had launched his career as a Dark Lord and over the following 20 years, or so, he managed to appropriate a great deal of other people's resources which probably included a fair amount of money. Or, in the case of real estate, magically forged records of ownership. I suspect that Tom Riddle would have been perfectly capable of taking possession of the place by magically fuzzing the land records. One wonders whether very old wizarding families are as sniffy about persons who purchase their own estates as some Muggles of great pretension reputedly are about upstarts who purchase their own furniture.

We do not have any details regarding what he was up to during the 10 years of his exile which took place between some point after, say, 1948 and around 1963 or so. (We do not have any solid data to which to tie the actual date of this exile either, unfortunately.) He could have been off making his private fortune, in addition to a quartet or so of Horcruxes. Which would have enabled him to undertake a wide range of subsequent actions. Not the least would have been the acquisition of his

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grandfather's house. In fact, both of his grandfathers' houses. For I would imagine that in anything like the land records, he took possession of the Gaunt property as well.



A few hints we got as to the Riddle house's ownership in the opening chapter of GoF are:

- 1 The Riddle house has belonged to its conveniently absent "rich owner" and has stood unoccupied for quite some time. (At least 13 years, perhaps? More? Maybe much more?)
- 2 Voldemort, just returned to Britain, in secret, appears to have already known that the house would be unoccupied and available for his use without contacting any of his followers, or, indeed, undertaking any sort of investigation.
- 3 Tom Riddle was raised in the mundane world and knows something of how such things are managed in it. And he knew very well that this was his own father's family's house, not simply an abandoned property standing vacant. That was the whole *point* for his purposes. He needed proximity to his father's gravesite. And the Gaunt hovel, his alternate hide-out, was in ruins. (And he knew that, too.)

I propose that, at some point before, or possibly during his first rise to power, Voldemort decided, upon some whim, to add his grandfather's house to his personal holdings. We know that he has a pronounced liking for returning to the scenes of previous "triumphs," and that he takes possession of such places

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if he can. He likes to collect trophies, after all.

And he already had a good reason to be in the area. Just because he could have hidden the ring Horcrux in the Gaunt cottage as early as the summer after the Riddle Massacre, does not mean that he did it that early. The evidence and maybe-evidence is mounting up to suggest that he did not start dispersing his other Horcruxes into remote hiding places until after he learned of the Prophecy. That discovery couldn't have been made earlier than the last couple of months of 1979, or early in 1980.

Although my own favorite interpretation is that he left the Ring there in the Gaunt ruin as a booby trap for his uncle Morfin (assuming Albus had been able to secure his release from Azkaban) around the spring or summer of... roughly 1948.

Upon his return with Pettigrew, he may even have hitched a ride with Nagini to check on it one night, so long as he was in the area. She probably wouldn't have needed to get into the building to know that it was still there and hadn't "caught" anything.

I definitely favor the idea that the Ring was his first Horcrux, and that, yes he created it from the death of his fellow student Myrtle. He hid it in the Gaunt hovel just before slipping out of Britain after the murder of Hepzibah Smith, stashing it there as a sort of "traveler's insurance" policy before he set out for Albania in search of the Ravenclaw diadem.

I do have to remind myself that we have nothing to *confirm* that he did so. All we have to work from is that while he does seem to have dumped the Diadem in the Room of Requirement sometime between, oh, 1958 and 1963, he *didn't* hide the Locket in the sea cave until '79 or '80, *didn't* turn the Diary over to Lucius Malfoy until '81, and had given Bellatrix the Cup for safekeeping at some

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point after she finished Hogwarts in the early 1970s and his first defeat at Godric's Hollow in '81.

And, really, once you stop and consider the matter, an intention to check on the Ring that he left in the ruins of the Gaunt hovel is probably the reason why he was even in the area at all after his return to Britain around 1958-'63. He may have already acquired the Gaunt property — to which he had a perfectly valid claim — by negotiations at long distance after learning that Morfin was reported to be dead, and had been content to let it fall into ruin. But if he had concealed a Horcrux there, that required a personal visit. He'd guarded the place with aversion spells and booby-traps, which would not draw attention, but he still needed to make sure the Ring had not been disturbed.

If this is the case, and he did *not* hide the Ring about the same time he divested himself of the Locket and the Diary, he may have at any point after his first return to Britain dropped by to check on it, take a look at the old place and have a nice gloat, and discovered that the Riddle house was once again vacant and for sale. Right about the time he was setting up that job interview to ask for the DADA post at Hogwarts. He may have just decided to give himself an early birthday present.

And in any case, what other DE — or indeed, any wizard at all — would have had any reason make that kind of a pilgrimage? Most of them did not even know of the existence of the Riddles. Tom was probably tickled pink to discover, through an agent's questioning of the locals, that no one had ever been able to bring themselves to stay there for very long after his first "visit."



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Given Riddle's tendency to read the universe as having been created for his own gratification and that, consequently, all events must be about him, the fact that the Riddle house was standing vacant must have seemed like a "sign." Or at least it suggested that taking control of both of his grandfathers' properties was an appropriate action to take. I thought that Harry might do well to consider making a through search of the Riddle House once he took up his quest. I'm not at all sure why that thread was completely dropped. They tried to check out the orphanage, after all. Not that it turns out to have mattered.

That the only witness to Riddle's previous visit to his father's house was still employed on the property might even have appeared as a bonus, since that way he knew exactly where the man (who was certainly no threat to *him*) was and he could keep track of him without the slightest bit of effort merely by keeping him on the payroll.

While it is certainly possible that he may have confided this transaction to one of his higher ranking followers, every indication we've been given is against it. I think that he is more likely to have set this acquisition up entirely through mundane channels. In fact, I think he may have even set up an independent mundane bank account and a trust, with an executor to manage the property at a distance ("for tax purposes"), to see that Bryce was paid and the taxes taken care of, and kept the information completely to himself. After all, *somebody* managed the estate during the 13 years of his absence. Somebody *other* than a DE.

Because I doubt very much that the DEs had any inkling of the Riddle House's existence. For one thing, if Bellatrix had known about the Riddle house in 1981, I suspect that she'd have taken

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the place apart looking for clues of his whereabouts after his disappearance, and that certainly does not seem to be the case.

Although you do wonder, once the Ministry had openly admitted that Lord Voldemort has returned, whether anyone has been keeping an eye on the old place *recently*?

And perhaps it is time to take a sidestep and ask ourselves: "Just who were the Riddles?" And does it even matter?

To all appearances, it really doesn't seem to. The Riddles were stated as being rich, rude, and snobbish. They were also not popular in the village of Little Hangleton, where, to all appearances, they were the predominant landowners in the region.

You get no impression of anything even remotely suggestive of any nobility in that description. Nor even of long-established country gentry, or, for that matter, even particularly old money. In fact, they sound a lot less like the last in an ancient line of bad baronets than they do of the 3rd generation of a shirtsleeves-to-shirtsleeves in 4 generations history of a pack of jumped-up tradesmen. Even the location of the Riddle House, some 200 miles from Surrey, supports this reading. That distance from Surrey sets us squarely in the Yorkshire-Lancashire region, which is liberally endowed with "fine old houses" built by successful Victorian industrialists. Not right next door to their old factories, certainly, but within a comfortable commuting distance to them. In the countryside, you know.

It belatedly occurred to me that if Rowling really wanted to tie it all up with a nice shiny bow, that deteriorating mill town where Spinner's End is located would have probably turned out to be Great Hangleton, and the owners of that long-defunct mill, the Riddles. Six miles makes a reasonable commute to one's place of business.

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And having the owner and his family murdered would certainly be a good reason to have closed the mill down.

Tom may have indirectly put countless Muggles out of work when that mill closed.

(ETA: No such luck. Spinner's End is evidently in a town named Cokeworth. Which I would more expect to be in a mining district rather than a place with mills, but what do I know?)

And even if I am wrong about the Riddle house, I think we can feel pretty confident about who owned the woodland on the other side of the valley which holds the ruins of the Gaunt house.

Until quite recently there was even a Horcrux concealed on that property. You rather doubt that Tom would have left something like that lying about in a public wasteland, don't you. And both of those properties seem to share a single boundary. He could have acquired the holdings of both sides of his family, and combined them into a very nice piece of real estate indeed.



Speaking of which; I am convinced that there is another piece of real estate which was among Tom Riddle's holdings. One that very few people know about, given that it was never mentioned in canon. But at least a few of his followers, possibly only his original followers, have probably heard of it. One or two of them may even have been there.

In the first place, it isn't in Britain.

It's in Albania.

Think about it. It took him something like a decade to finally locate the Ravenclaw diadem. He wasn't wandering the countryside like an itinerant monk. I think he managed to take pos-

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session of a piece of property, with a villa, and had established a base that he worked out of. That's why he high-tailed it back to Albania when he was defeated in 1981. And where he went back to after being dealt a major setback at the end June in 1992.

He may have been riding snakes in a forest, but I suspect that there was a house close enough for him to find as comfortable a nest as could be managed in the foundations.

And the house probably had the reputation of being haunted during the periods that he was between snakes. VaporMort probably wasn't randomly haunting a forest, either.

For that matter, some of his earliest followers, who had returned, or come to the UK with him back at the time he was asking for the DADA position may have been well aware of that place, and may have mentioned it over the 20 years or so between his return and his defeat.

For that matter, it isn't completely off the wall that Peter might have learned that Tom had once *had* a base in Albania, either. Even if he knew no more than that it was in a forested area. After hearing Harry's accounting that Albus thinks that Tom is back in Albania at the end of 2nd year, that would at least have given him a place to start looking, once he decided to seek out his Master and throw himself on his mercy.

It would be a lot easier for me to believe that he was looking for a *house* rather than hoping to stumble across a specific *snake*. At worst — or maybe that's at best — the property would provide a place for *Peter* to go to ground and be safe from pursuit.

And, really, it's pure "kid logic" that someone would actually run off to Albania to look for a *snake*, or even a disembodied spirit. Peter is very resourceful, but if that had been the plan, I

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would think he might just have given up and gone off to Fiji or somewhere that had no association with the DEs at all.

But, yes, I'd say that there is probably a crumbling villa somewhere in Albania with a bad enough reputation that people in the area know about it, but no one much goes there.



Which brings us, reluctantly, to the House of Gaunt.
Or do I mean sty?

I think the thing that most disturbs the reader about Rowling's rendition of the "House of Gaunt," is that it is so monumentally over the top that it throws the balance of everything that ever had *anything* to do with Tom Riddle off.

Although, having once encountered it, we cannot really be surprised by anything else that follows. We certainly cannot say that we weren't warned.

This pervading lack of balance afflicts the entire novel of HBP, when you take a closer look, but it is most glaringly apparent in the depiction of her villain.

What became of the intentions that Rowling claimed to have in that interview all those years ago when she stated that she *didn't* want just a 2-dimensional baddie dressed up in black, but a villain whose motivations the reader could understand? "My name is Tom Riddle, and I am a sociopath" clearly wakes up every morning, issues a patented Evil Overlord cackle and addresses his image in the mirror with a query on the order of; "Now, what shall I do today that is *eeeeevil?*"

Assuming he even generates an image in the mirror, that is. (Yes. He does. We've seen it. I'm just being sarcastic.)



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Let me make myself perfectly clear; I have *always* interpreted Tom Riddle as presented, as a sociopath, so that discovery was not in the least astonishing, nor is it the point of my objection.

What I would like to know is why has Rowling cut the ground out from under her own feet regarding what she has always claimed to be palming off as her underlying message? You know, the one about how our choices somehow *matter*?

How can choices matter when nobody involved is represented as being qualified to actually *make* choices? Sociopaths do not consciously *choose* to become sociopaths. That kind of damage is done so early that there is no question of there being any kind of *choice* in the matter.

It is also now also glaringly apparent that all children in the Potterverse are hosed. They apparently have no viable option for doing anything but to blindly repeat their families' patterns in perfect lockstep. There is no question of nature vs. nurture in Rowling's world. Children look like their parents, act like their parents adopt their parents' political stances and effectively become their parents. And in the three cases we have been shown where a boy consciously chose to defy his parents' expectations, and to oppose their parents position, two of them (Sirius Black and Barty Crouch Jr) came to exceedingly bad ends, so splitting off from a family's bad choices is certainly not being held up as a viable solution. And Percy Weasley was only spared at the last moment because he recanted of having ever tried to be anyone *but* his parents.

(Girls, by contrast, are presented as having the "choice" of running off and making unacceptable marriages and merely being disowned by their disapproving families, and never heard



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from again. Although you have to admit that Merope Gaunt's story certainly didn't pan out anything like so harmlessly.)

Clearly this is a world in which "family values" are held to be preeminent. Regardless of whether a given family's values are actually sound, or otherwise. And such values are overriding, too. To the point of all but universally trumping any flaky radical ideas about personal agency, or the autonomy of the individual. Individualism is clearly not admired in Rowling's Potterverse. And eccentricity is universally sneered at, although grudgingly permitted in selected cases.

So. Consequently, Death Eaters kids are presumably damned because they accept and keep faith with their families' bad choices (which we can already see that they are given little option to reject), and Harry is somehow a potential hero because he manages to revere a family he cannot even remember. Excuse me?

Let alone in that in the end, his so-called "great victory" was in ultimately *choosing* NOT to act, *at all*.



Well, okay, I suppose it *was* necessary to give us a glimpse of the Gaunts. If only to give us a lens through which to examine the Blacks, the Malfoys and any of the series's other pureblood extremists and their families, all of whom seem to be set upon the same downward path. Not to mention introducing the Peverill thread (which was reasonably well done, actually, but I'm damned if it seems to be even remotely relevant to anything). But why did the picture have to be painted in such broad strokes? Why does Riddle's evil suddenly have to be set up as being essen-



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tially predetermined, hereditary, and all but retroactive?

Particularly given that while a certain tendency toward instability may be hereditary, sociopathic personality disorder *isn't*.

An Lj user who goes by the handle of Wikdsushi summed it up in an early posting a few days after HBP came out:

The Ballad of Tom Riddle:

sings

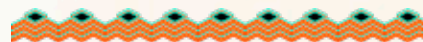
*Mah momma talked to snakies,
and mah daddy, he were drugged,
that damn kid killed mah basilisk,
and my followers is thugs....*

Because what we've ended up with is a picture of monsters spawning monsters, who are inevitably fated to grow up to be monsters, even when they were not raised by monsters.

And not one single choice, or a person properly equipped to make one, in sight.

Then, just to add further insult to injury, at the end of the tale Rowling finally blows us a raspberry and reveals that; **surprise** nobody's choices ever mattered a bean — except to give nosy observers a handle to *think* they'd figured out what kind of people the characters were (wrongly, of course, the minute it diverged from what Rowling tells us we are *supposed* to think of any of these people, in complete defiance of what she *shows* us) — and that all that really matters is being able to sit on our arses and choose to do nothing (which is the ultimate victory, don't you know?), and to accept the eventual fact of our own deaths.

«spits»



Dark Arts & Dark Marks

This particular article is a stripped-down version of one of the essays which had originally been a part of the Snape sub-collection. That particular exploration was already duplicated by other essays in that collection. Consequently, given that it was Tom Riddle who insisted upon forcing the issue of the Dark mark upon us — as well as his followers — it seemed reasonable to move some of the exploration related to it here.

Back at the beginning of the Harry Potter series, in common with most readers I really thought that the story was another journeyman effort to write a timeless tale of the inevitable and eternal conflict between Good and Evil.

However, in most such attempts there is usually a very good reason provided for why the study of the Dark Arts is generally discouraged. Usually this is something inherent to the nature of the Dark Arts themselves.

And I couldn't find one provided anywhere. Just a general rather intellectually lazy acceptance that the Dark Arts were bad and that good people didn't use them.

Which in itself is highly unsatisfactory, and invites a second look.



In my "Foundation" essays, I made an energetic effort to postulate that there was an inherent reason to leave the Dark Arts alone. That reason being a variation of the traditional trope that to get swept up in Darkness ultimately diminishes you.

By that time we'd seen the creature that came out of the stone cauldron in the graveyard at Little Hangleton, and that

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creature just did not stack up at all favorably with the charismatic Dark Lord of everyone's wibbling about through the story up to that point.

Back at the beginning of my analysis of matters related to the Potterverse, I had first postulated that Tom Riddle was suffering from what I then dubbed Dark Arts-related dementia. That was an early iteration of the concept and one that could not really be sustained in its original form.

I had originally thought that the lure of the opportunity of study such magic under such patronage might be one of the benefits that was framed as a reason to sign up with Tom Riddle's Death Eaters. At the time, I believed that to many of the other characters in the Potterverse, such an offer might have a reasonably widespread appeal. Given that at that point this particular essay was a part of the Snape sub-collection, the argument was framed as applying to a young Severus Snape.

I also thought that while the arrogance of youth and its accompanying conviction of personal immunity might very well have shielded a young follower during the early days, when he considered Dark Arts study to be a part of his "birthright" that those wusses in the Ministry were trying to deny him, he might, after a period of unrestrained Dark Arts activity under Voldemort's sponsorship, have very well found himself undergoing some "dark night of the soul" as a consequence of those activities which might have set any available family skeletons a-dancing, and may have served as the necessary wake-up call prompting him to rethink whether signing up with the DEs was really all that good an idea.

That is certainly a variation of the story that Dumbledore

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was handing out regarding Professor Snape, anyway.

However, I no longer support this particular theory. Whatever degree of perceptual damage a wizard may develop (and any damage really does now appear to be perceptual rather than organic) through unwary exposure to channeling chaotic magic by unsafe methods, it seems to take a long time before it reaches the point of making his actions dangerously unstable.

And, furthermore, it is clear from canon that while certain specific spells are indeed unlawful in Rowling's wizarding world, the actual study and practice of the Dark Arts *isn't*. The whole Black family — and probably others — are widely known to be Dark wizards, *and* are still reckoned as pillars of their society.

But then Rowling fairly obviously has no interest in even making up her mind about what the Dark Arts even are supposed to *be*. She never bothered to set up that part of the foundation of her exercise in world-building. She waves three unforgivable curses at us, and leaves it at that.

So, if no one objects, I will stick to my own interpretation on the issue. I at least *have* one. Admittedly, while applying it to the Potterverse may be a mistake, it can only be an improvement in matters of offering some kind of guidance. For, inside of canon, there appear to be no guidelines whatsoever.



Which brings us to the Dark Mark:

Frankly, post-DHs the Dark Mark is hovering perilously close to qualifying as bolognium. But that is not to say that it has always been so. Indeed, upon introduction it was not.

I am beginning to suspect it may have stowed away into GoF

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during the rewrite which gave us PolyjuiceImpostor!Moody. We had no hint of the existence of the Dark Mark in the first three books, although it would have served no useful purpose in any of them, either. In GoF it escaped being associated with bolognium since it played a very limited part in the course of that story. It was merely a glowing symbol sent up over the World Cup campgrounds that caused a panic due to prior associations, and a summoning device which enabled Tom to assemble his followers as witnesses to the grand climax of that particular sequence of the adventure. Basically, it was set-dressing.

For Snape to be taunted about his Mark by Moody was an interesting, and rather suggestive clue, and Snape's "reveal" of its significance at the end of the story was both decently set up and well-scaled.

It was only with HBP and, worse in DHs, that the device started morphing into whatever the Author wanted it to be to fit whatever she needed at that moment. I'm not convinced that it *quite* qualifies as bolognium yet, but it is getting close.

We have been given comparatively little solid information regarding the Dark Mark, considering the level of significance it seems to carry in the story. For one thing, we have very little information on its cultural origin. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that this is yet another ancient symbol (such as the sigil of the Deathly Hallows) which may even have once been benevolent in meaning, and whose original symbolism has effectively been corrupted and besmirched due to Voldemort's widely known adoption of it.

Nor do we know quite how Voldemort coordinates and manages this particular communication network. It seems to me

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unlikely that he must always have a follower at hand in order to activate a summons, as was shown toward the end of GoF. It also seems unlikely to me that he would not be able to summon his followers individually or in smaller groups than that required for a full assembly.

Particularly since if Karkaroff was telling the truth — and we had no reason at the time to believe that he wasn't — about the DEs underlying "cell structure." To only meet in full assemblies would not have been conducive to maintaining the secrecy of each others' identities which Karkaroff claims was the case across the organization. Karkaroff claimed that only the Dark Lord himself knew the names of all of his followers.

Karkaroff could, of course, have been lying.

In DHs this internal secrecy regarding one another's identities appears to have been completely discarded. It is obvious from the first chapter that everyone in the organization knows exactly who all of his associates are. Rowling seems to have either forgotten about the cell structure, or Voldemort changed his organization's structure after his return. I suppose that once the Ministry was due to fall, he could have decided that internal secrecy no longer mattered. His followers, after all, were not planning to rule anonymously from behind the scenes. Even if the Minister himself was an imperiused puppet.

As to the issue of the summons from the graveyard; the simplest explanation that I can come up with is that the newly created simulacrum of a body was still lacking whatever "anchor" this direct connection to his followers required, and that he was, therefore, unable to perform this function until he had a chance to reproduce it. Or, perhaps it was merely that to issue

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a general summons had always been sufficiently uncomfortable that he had always awarded to one of his subordinates this particular "honor".

Snape, who is presumed to have been enlisted toward the end of Voldemort's first rise, states that the Dark Mark was used by the DEs to identify each other. Consequently, we do not know whether the Dark Mark had always been a part of the organization's communications network or if it was a comparatively late innovation replacing some older system.

Post-DHs we now are given to understand that any individual DE was also capable of summoning his Master. I suspect, however that one did so only in the most dire of circumstances or only by prearrangement.

Assuming that this was not simply yet another of the all-too-many insertions to DHs which were apparently invented and deployed primarily for the purpose of enabling the Author to get to the end of the manuscript with the least amount of delay.

It is just possible that causing the Mark to be revealed was something over which the DEs had some voluntary control. Although Rowling gives us no real information on this matter. If this is the case; I suspect that it may have been possible to conceal it by a spell, which its wearers could normally cancel and restore at will. It would have been only when they were actually summoned by their Master this concealment was overridden, and it may have either needed some sort of "cooling off" period before it could be concealed again. Or, on the night of Voldemort's rebirth, Snape simply didn't bother to do so since he hadn't originally been intending to roll up his sleeves for anyone that evening.

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And the possibility that the Mark can be concealed is the only circumstance under which I could accept the wide belief that Voldemort enlists followers who are still in school, and living in a dormitory. And at that, I *still* resist it.

Rowling supplies us with no good reason why he ever should do so (apart from taking advantage of adolescents' eternal determination to believe they are the hub of the universe). I don't suppose she ever bothered to think the matter through.

Voldemort grew up in an orphanage, and he attended Hogwarts, himself. He knows how little privacy someone living in a dormitory is likely to have. One cannot readily believe that he would physically mark followers who are exposed to that level of risk of discovery. Unless, of course, the Mark can be concealed by the wearer.

It would be far simpler in any case for him to merely wait out the necessary time for them to be finished with school and have that particular risk past.

Or at least wait until they have acquired Apparition licenses! Which they won't legally be able to do until 17. The Dark Mark is a *summoning* device. Why mark someone who cannot obey the summons? It's not like they can just leave the school.

Students would be of little practical use to him as Death Eaters without being able to Apparate. You are not even taught that skill until 6th year and you do not get a license until you are of age. Marking students is ridiculous.

That said, the occasional exception may well have been made. Particularly when the inductee, or his circumstances are

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already exceptional.

For all that Harry and his friends are convinced that Draco Malfoy was revealing a Dark Mark to Borgin in order to force his cooperation, I still think what is far more likely is that Draco was told that to complete this mission was the price of his admission into Voldemort's followers' ranks. It was his initiation ordeal. Whatever he was using to intimidate Borgin is likely to have been something else. Even if it was only one of the edible Dark Marks available at Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes.

At a stretch I could — just barely — be able to accept that an exception was made in Draco Malfoy's case and that he was inducted into the ranks before his 6th year. Particularly if we are supposed to understand that the DEs do have the ability to communicate with their Master through it. To actually have such a Mark would have enabled Malfoy to notify his Dark Lord that the way into Hogwarts was now clear for the invasion that had been a part of his mission.



However, if routine concealment of the Dark Mark is the case, by the time most DEs were no longer in control of the concealment of their Mark they would typically have already been dead, or unconscious, or in the hands of the Dementors, who, as Crouch Jr informed us, are blind.

In the case of death, Voldemort would probably be aware of it and have no reason to "call" a corpse (unless he wants to turn it into an Inferus, and there is no suggestion that he can *physically* summon a follower, only that the Mark provides the destination target). Those who were dead in his service might

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even no longer have had any visible mark on them to identify them as his.

In the case of the captured, Voldemort would have fairly quickly been made aware of this as well and would have taken care not to activate their Marks. It is plausible that no one ever examined the DEs in Azkaban for Marks which might have reappeared since their imprisonment when the concealing spells failed. And after Voldemort's fall the marks would have faded to nearly nothing anyway.

In DHs it is clear, however, that if a follower does try to summon their Master, any other follower in the vicinity is also aware of it. *If*, that is, we are willing to accept anything told to us in the course of DHs.

But, the only example we've ever seen of Voldemort calling his DEs to him did not conform to any of this. He sent out a general call to all of them at once, and needed to use Pettigrew's Mark in order to do it. This does not speak strongly in favor of any great degree of sophistication regarding the Mark unless there is a good deal more to the matter that we have not seen, and nothing that Rowling showed us in DHs suggested any great level of sophistication to it either. Thus rendering the Dark Mark into yet another piece of balogneum for us to have to swallow. Much like the Order's message-bearing Patronus system, which doesn't make a whole lot of practical sense either.



What is even more likely is that — as good as any system might be — there would probably have been at least a few slip-ups, of which the Dept. of Magical Law Enforcement was aware.

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When one factors in the likelihood that the final, most wantonly violent phase of Voldemort's first rise was launched over the last 24 months of it, either there were too few of these cumulative incidents to have struck the investigating Aurors as significant yet, or, more likely, this particular information was classified. I think that the fact that any of the DEs were "marked" might probably have been highly classified information that Crouch Sr. as head of Magical Law Enforcement would have ruthlessly suppressed outside his own department. The real Moody, and any other Aurors in the field may have known about it from this source, but Moody also may have learned about it later from Dumbledore.

The false Moody certainly knew of it, and taunted Snape with it. Which could have turned out to be suspicious. Yet another missed opportunity of Rowling's.

But without magical concealment, the Mark, being bright red, would be sufficiently noticeable even when not "active." Even if it can be concealed, there may well be magical ways to cause it to reveal itself — so long as Voldemort is alive and present on the physical plane somewhere to "complete the circuit."

After he was gone, there was no longer a physical connection to be activated, visibly or in any other manner. How much the significance of the Mark on those few captured DEs who were unable to conceal it in time was realized is uncertain. It is for this reason that I suspect that Voldemort did co-opt a pre-existing symbol for this purpose. One which a wizard might reasonably have been expected to have adopted as a decoration even without Dark Arts associations.

Although once the DEs started sending up a glowing green

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version of it as a calling card, any older cultural associations would have been difficult to reconcile in the public mind.

In any case, Minister Fudge, who was still a Junior Minister in the Department of Magical Catastrophes during Vold-War I, would not have been on the “need to know” list. He remained clearly unaware of the DEs’ personal Dark Marks’ existence after all his years of public service. In fact it is quite possible that sealing those particular records was another of Crouch Sr’s big “mistakes” which he acknowledged at the end of his life, having attempted to protect and reserve it as his own private resource. It could have been the sort of thing that he intended to keep to himself as a tool toward capturing that “one last Dark wizard” which, toward the end of his career, is alleged to have occupied his ambitions.



Regardless of the original cultural source or symbolism inherent in the snake-and-skull device, the point at which the fledgling DEs adopted the Dark Mark and started sending it up to “sign their work” appears to be the point that the DMLE realized that they had a group of terrorists on their hands and started attempting to identify and capture both them and their Leader.

It *appears* likely that the identification of “Lord Voldemort” as that Leader may have taken place around 1970, if we accept the textual evidence handed to us by Albus Dumbledore in Book 1 chapter 1 of the series.

What also appears probable is that “Lord Voldemort” was *already* widely known to the general wizarding public in some

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context *other* than as a leader of a band of terrorists.

We were never given sufficient hint to be able to attempt to extrapolate where Tom Riddle got the idea of marking his followers with a slave mark that tethered them to him so irrevocably that they would be unable to escape.

We do not know of any probable source (apart from, possibly, the geasa imposed upon House Elves) from which such a connection could have been developed from. And neither do we know of what kind of apparent advantage to its wearers must have been included in the enchantment of the Mark which was strong enough to induce Riddle’s followers to agree to accept it.

I mean, there must have been *something* apart from merely agreeing that it was a “cool design” and now it was *theirs*.

Admittedly, this is one of the trappings useful in producing the kind of “secret society” which appears to be irresistible within the directives of “kid logic,” but the early DEs were hardly kids. Most of them were around 30, and the very top of the trees insofar as social status goes. Tom Riddle was, and had, *nothing* to offer them that they could not have gained for themselves merely because of who they already were.

Nothing, that is, but permission to act up and behave like savages, and *the devil* with maintaining a civilized façade, and not letting “the side” down.

Nor, over the course of the series have we ever been given much indication of any advantage to its wearers for having agreed to accept the Mark. Neither in bearing the Mark, itself, not any social advantage accruing to being one of the “elect” who bore it.

The Death Eaters, after all, were an *illegal* organization.

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There was no social or professional advantage to be had by signing up.

So why accept it? Unless it was presented as an opportunity that one couldn't refuse?

Leaving us all with the unsatisfactory explanation of; "because they're evil."

What I am becoming more and more convinced of, however, is that the Tom Riddle who existed before he was forced to survive as a disembodied spirit for a decade really *was* an entirely different proposition from the version of him that we eventually met.

And WE never really met that earlier Tom Riddle as anything more than the Diary Revenant, or those glimpses which Albus Dumbledore chose to show us. *All* of which had been hand-picked by Albus to display Tom Riddle in the very worst light.

I think that perhaps we might have dodged a bullet thanks to the fact that Rowling has no interest in villains, despite the fact that in the tale of Harry Potter, as in most other of such stories, it is the villain who IS the story.

For Tom Riddle seems to have been the very King of Grifters. And if he had ever been given even the *slightest* chance to take control of this story, it would have turned into a Trickster tale.

Tom Riddle would have utterly eclipsed the Marauders, and left the Weasley twins in the dust. And we would all have been cheering him on.

Regarding Potterverse People

A Closer Look at the Weasleys

Taking a closer look at the dynamics of the Weasley family as presented in canon. I tend to think there are more riptides under the surface than Harry Potter ever noticed.

The Weasley Family

This is another of the original essays in this collection.

It hasn't gone through anything like the number of shifts and changes that some of the others have.

I'm still pretty sure that, right from the beginning, I was seeing things that were actually there.



The Burrow.

Home of the Weasley family. To Harry Potter it is nothing less than paradise on earth.

Poor kid. What does he know?

Not being a 12-year-old wizard who has been thrown upon the mercies of the Dursleys for most of my life, I tend to view the situation at the Burrow from a rather different perspective than that of Harry Potter. In my opinion, while I agree that the Weasleys are certainly not going to be making any lists of the top 25 dysfunctional families in British literature any time soon, I don't think that Harry Potter is in a position to be the best judge of the situation.

From where I'm standing, I would say that the Burrow is not a notably happy household. Although by the opening of HBP things seem to finally be settling down a bit after a rough period of several years standing.

Because, in retrospect, that household was going through a very rough patch for some years. Since just about the time we met them, in fact.

The Burrow's residents don't seem to be particularly conscious of this. They seemed to think that the undercurrents of pervasive dissatisfaction and rampant aggression that most of

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them lived with pretty much everyday is normal.

But then, it is amazing what people will accept as normal if it happens to be what they are used to.

I suspect that even if you lined them all up at any time in the series to that point (or even afterwards), and questioned them about their family the most you would be likely to have heard in criticism would be that Molly nags, and that Percy is a pill.

No argument there. Molly is a *champion* nag. And Percy is a pill.

In fact Percy is *such* a pill that he sticks out like a sore thumb amidst this little tribe of savagely cheerful barbarians. What on earth went wrong there? How does one account for it? How did we (and he) manage to get to that point?

In fact, by the end of GoF, Percy seems so completely at odds with everyone in the family (except his mother) that it surprises the reader not in the least to discover that by the opening of OotP six weeks later he has come to a complete falling out with all of them. *Including* his mother.

A good many (mostly younger) fans immediately decided that of course this indicates that Percy will ultimately betray everyone and support Voldemort, rather than just the Ministry. Admittedly, we had been most actively invited to believe this by Ron, who has always blindly followed the Twins' lead wherever Percy is concerned.

Well, if there is one point that has ever been made plain to the reader over the course of the series to date, it is that blindly following *anybody's* lead is usually a mistake. Even Dumbledore's lead. Certainly the twins'.

The events of OotP offered no obvious alternative reading



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of the situation however, and extended the invitation to conclude that Ron's accuracy rating had suddenly taken a turn for the better. Nor did the sundry revelations of HBP show us any further development from the situation as it stood at the beginning of the previous year. (Although I got a distinct impression that Percy Weasley had little reason to be altogether happy with Minister Scrimgeour.) Somehow I am inclined to be suspicious of anything that is being handed to me with such air of complete *fait accompli*. Rowling has a history of having way too much fun misleading her readers.

A great many fans, hearing Ron's accusations of excessive ambition on the part of this least favorite of his brothers spent much of the 3-year summer between Book 4 and Book 5 asking why Percy had not been Sorted into Slytherin.

Others have wondered why, considering his academic record (12 OWLs, after all), he was not in Ravenclaw, or, considering his blind loyalty to Barty Crouch Sr, in Hufflepuff. Evidently a lot of fans, particularly younger ones, just cannot wrap their minds around the possibility that there are major downsides to the underlying character of "Gryffindor," and that, in fact, all Gryffindors are *not*, by definition, glorious — despite ample examples in canon to the contrary. Lockhart, (probably) Bagman, and Pettigrew for starters. This particular gallery of rogues has now been amplified by the addition of Cormac McLaggen and Romilda Vane.

This perception prevails despite the fact that Percy's obvious thirst to "prove himself" is expressed in about as pure a form of full-throttle Gryffindor directness as we have seen anywhere in canon

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There are at least a few conclusions for us to draw from this.

First; it offers clear support to my contention that the Hat sends children into the House that most closely matches the child's aspirations rather than the one that is necessarily the closest match to his personality. Percy clearly wants to be admired as the fine, virtuous, upstanding young man that he is so confident of being — and is willing to put in the *effort* of being. He is definitely not guilty of choosing to do what is easy.

It is not raw power that Percy craves, although he is pleased enough to be awarded it as a sign of approval. Like all true Gryffindors he wants to be *admired* for his virtues. And he has been attempting to make a parade of those virtues since before we ever met him.

Where Percy made his biggest mistake, socially, (at least from where Ron and the reader are standing) is that instead of looking down to his younger brothers for this potential admiring audience, he looked up to his mother.

Molly does not admire what the twins admire.

Nearly every action that Percy has ever been shown to have taken from Book 1 to Book 4 (apart from dating Penelope Clearwater, or betting money that he did not have) could readily have been dictated by his asking himself; "what would Mummy want me to do?"

It should probably also be pointed out that Molly herself is *far* more ambitious than anyone seems to be giving her credit for. Ambition isn't only a characteristic of Slytherins.

Second; it offers us some possibilities on the timing for what-

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ever seems to have gone wrong in the general Weasley backstory.

Because clearly it *isn't just Percy*. Percy may be the Weasley that seems to have most obviously grown in a direction that is counter to the apparent template, but right behind him are the twins — who are obsessed with making money, if Ron is to be believed — and then there's Ron, who doesn't seem to know *what* he wants, but whatever it is, it's something *other* than what he's got. And, finally, Ginny who for the first half of the series seemed to have dodged the whole issue by fixating on Harry Potter for close to three years before finally giving up and looking elsewhere. Or at least that was Hermione's reading of it back in OotP. The other shoe finally dropped in HBP.

And yet Bill and Charlie are, to all appearances, easy-going, happy, successful and contented with their lots. As is Arthur, who seems to be completely unaware of the kind of resentment, defiance and both covertly and overtly pitched battles that rage around his ears in his family home.



It really did look to me as though, at some point, something in the dynamics of this family went seriously wrong. And I think where it originally went wrong was most probably between Arthur and Molly themselves. Not that either of them would admit to it.

And, given that the resulting fallout has landed primarily on their five younger children, I suspect that what went wrong is that at some point, only slightly before we met them all, Arthur stopped meeting Molly's expectations.

What I *think* may have happened is that Arthur, like most

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younger Ministry employees was bounced around any number of Departments and divisions as he climbed the ladder inside the Ministry hierarchy. Molly was behind him every step of the way with support, advice and general backup. In Molly's estimation, they made a fine team. Arthur, if asked, would have agreed.

And, then, probably as a part of the general rotation of Department Heads following Cornelius Fudge's ascension to the office of Minister for Magic at some point in 1990, at a comparatively young age Arthur Weasley was promoted into a position somewhere in the lowest-ranking executive level and was dropped into the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Department as its new Head.

And almost immediately fell in love with Muggle technology.

I think this blindsided everyone, himself most of all. There was nothing in his background to suggest any tendency to develop such a fascination. From his deep and continuing level of ignorance about both Muggles *and* their works, we can pretty well conclude that this isn't a life-long interest, and that he probably didn't bother to take Muggle Studies during his Hogwarts years, or, even hang out much with any of his Muggle-born classmates. In fact it shows all the hallmarks of "new convert fervor."

The fallout is that what was supposed to have been merely another professional stepping-stone to bigger and better things suddenly metamorphosed into his Dream Job. He had discovered his calling, and wouldn't have budged from it on any consideration. And Molly felt cheated, shut out, and left behind. Arthur had changed the rules on her.

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While I hesitate to come right out and state flatly that Molly Weasley is a fool, her tactics when thwarted are rarely well-considered, and this was no exception. She retaliated by refusing to have any of Arthur's Muggle rubbish in her house. Which meant that he now spent a large percentage of his limited time at home in the garden shed tinkering, rather than in the house making his presence felt among their maturing brood.



Molly emphatically does NOT encourage any of her children to share their father's enthusiasm for Muggle gadgets. And I doubt that she has any particular fondness for Muggles themselves either, although she probably has no specific animosity toward Muggles in general — so long as they keep their distance and do not inconvenience her. This *is*, if you recall, a witch who, upon our first introduction, is complaining aloud about the number of Muggles "swarming" in a London train station. (A station from which she has been routinely seeing her children off on the Hogwarts Express, each year for the past decade.)

This is also a witch who home-schooled seven children in order to guard them from interactions with their Muggle neighbors. (Although considering the twins' proclivities it's hard to think of anything else she could reasonably have done.)

But Molly also seems to have even managed to isolate her brood and even keep them from associating with the other *wizarding* children known to live in the vicinity of the Burrow, as well, so quite possibly her objection is not necessarily to Muggles, so much as to *outsiders*



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Which is a whole different problem, but definitely a problem. In my own experience this kind of mentality often crops up where there is alcoholism or some other socially "shameful" condition lurking in the family woodshed, and a sudden fascination with Muggle tech certainly does not meet that definition, however embarrassing. We don't really know much about the Prewetts. Nothing apart from a few names, and that one branch of the family was peripherally connected to the Blacks. Which is hardly a strong recommendation, but not likely to be a source of social embarrassment. And we know little of the elder Weasleys, either.

Arthur, however, has the happy gift of being able to tune Molly's nagging out and let it just wash over him. Even Molly eventually recognizes a lost cause when she sees one. And, in fact, I think that by the time we met them, Molly had finally washed her hands of any further attempts to encourage Arthur to move on in his career and "make something of himself."

From that point, to a large extent she relegated him to the status of "one of the kids." It was only after his promotion at the beginning of HBP that Molly stopped ordering him about like one of the kids, too. And during the period that her husband was one of "the kids," she pretty obviously turned the weight of her expectations and ambitions onto the rest of "the kids."

Bill and Charlie were already well on their way through their Hogwarts careers by that time. In fact, Bill was already out of Hogwarts by mid-1990. Both Bill and Charlie left a track record of getting high marks, Prefect badges, team Captain and Head



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Boy appointments and an impressive number of OWLs for their younger siblings to have to live up to. Both of them also knew who they, as individuals, were well enough to be able to sidestep Molly's quacking or shrug it off without any more open hostility than can be expected from the average adolescent male who is being gratuitously nagged by his mother. She wasn't really able to get much more of a handle on them, by that time.

Although it probably ought to be noted that they both moved out of the Burrow immediately after leaving Hogwarts and got themselves nice, fairly prestigious, and demanding jobs overseas, and well away from Molly's sphere of influence. Indeed, Charlie may even have left Britain prematurely, before sitting his NEWTs.

But (and I can tell you this from experience) the full weight of a grown woman's expectations and "support" can be a heavy burden for a child. Even when there are five of them to share it. Percy, as the oldest one of the younger ones seems to have borne the brunt of it. He was already well settled in Gryffindor when things went sour for Molly and she started looking to her children to serve as her representatives to the world, rather than her husband.

Molly's ambition is not much in the Slytherin style, but she has a hell of a lot of it. By the time we first meet them, Percy was unmistakably "Mama's boy." The Twins and Ron (who are all dyed in the wool Gryffs. Where else could the Hat have sent them?) were instinctively in the process of defining themselves as above all things **not** Mama's boy. And, through the Harry filter, for the first three years of our acquaintance Ginny appeared to be being consumed and undermined and strangled



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by Molly's apron strings until she had next to no personality to call her own. She didn't get her first personality transplant until OotP, and I'm no longer altogether sure that the one we saw was quite what had been originally intended.

To outside observers it must have seemed small wonder Tom Riddle found her such easy meat. Instead, we are now (i.e., post-GoF) retroactively expected to understand that Ginny, in her own defense, seems to have been long engaged in developing a tough, cool, underhanded slyness, honing considerable talent as well as practice as a smooth-tongued liar, and, until her 4th year at Hogwarts, even more practice in keeping her head down (rather in the style of Peter Pettigrew, when you stop to think about it). Tom undoubtedly found plenty there that he could work with.

In a world where nearly everyone can at least hope to live into the neighborhood of 90–120 years, being a child-minder is probably considered to be only a witch's "first" job. Particularly in a society which appears to encourage and facilitate very early marriages. Once Ginny is out of Hogwarts, married off, and set up in her "first job," Molly, like most witches, will be largely free to embark on her "real" career. That career may well *not* be as a professional grandmother, and she may well be counting the days.

When Molly first married, she may have felt that this "real" career would have something to do with wherever Arthur had established himself by the time the children were grown, but Arthur let her down badly by entrenching himself in a dead-end job, and she may now be working from the assumption that seven intelligent — and successful — children that she herself



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home-schooled until they were old enough for Hogwarts will look very well on her résumé.

Make no mistake. Molly is not even remotely “evil.” She is not secretly a Dark Side supporter. She would not knowingly betray anyone she believes to be on the “right side.” She is a valuable, if exceedingly irritating, ally and she is basically a good woman by nearly anybody’s lights. But she is a classic example of a domestic bully. In fact, Molly is a right tartar. And she is possessive with it. In her mind she *owns* every one of those children *and* their actions — which is where the ongoing Clash of the Titans with Ron and the twins comes in.



At the opening of HBP, there were three major rifts between family members that were actively in play in the Weasley family dynamic. The two longest-standing ones had already had far-reaching side effects. The most obvious rift, the most recent, and the only one that was being openly acknowledged, is the one between Percy and the rest of the family. This one was quite new in its then current form, but it had been well telegraphed in advance. When it finally happened, no attentive reader could have been particularly surprised.

The rift that one had grown out of, and the one that had been both most disruptive in the long run, and will be the next to heal, is the one between Molly and the twins. In PS/SS the twins were a pair of lively, mischievous and, to all first appearances, fundamentally good-hearted 13-year-olds, with a great deal of family feeling. They pranked their mother, and drove her nuts and teased Percy mercilessly, chiefly because they

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could, and he could not stop them. They were also gratuitously cruel to animals. But you still didn’t get an impression of deliberate intention to cause harm from them. They also both still got very good grades without putting in very much effort.

By CoS the balance has tilted. They are spouting misogynistic pond scum and their pranks on Percy have begun to take on a vicious tone. They are cruel to whatever can’t effectively fight back, and they are at open war with their mother. They no longer seem to care about school and the following year they barely manage to scrape 3 OWLs each. By GoF they are “obsessed with making money” and their dealings with Ludo Bagman have taken on a seriously nasty edge. What happened?

Well, what I think happened is that some point during their 3rd year (Harry and Ron’s first), it finally sunk in on them that they could not *both* be appointed Prefect. And they agreed between themselves that neither of them would accept the office at the expense of the other. They gave the situation a serious look, finally agreeing: “Well, bugger this for a lark.”

And from that point on made damn certain that the appointment wouldn’t be offered to *either* of them.

And, realizing full well how their mother would probably take *that*, essentially they chose each other over her good opinion, hunkered down to withstand the storm, and prepared to give back as good as they got. In fact, to “fight back” *first*.

They also turned most of their attentions and adjusted their goals to the time when they would no longer have to deal with Hogwarts.



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Percy sided with Molly in the resulting brouhaha, so he became a “fair target” for the twins’ attentions, and the twins were not going to let up on him any time soon. In fact, they were not content until they had driven him right out of the family altogether. And they were prepared to make sure he didn’t return. Indeed, over the next couple of years they had gotten progressively more into the habit of openly attacking Percy with no holds barred, probably because there was a limit to how openly they could attack Molly without Arthur mixing in, and that they absolutely didn’t want. Somewhere in all of this the fact that this was a continual exercise of two-against-one escaped them altogether.

And Percy responded by getting mad, but never getting even. And my statements elsewhere about how ghod help you if the twins happen to dislike you — because nobody else is going to do it, extends all the way into the bosom of their family. Not a single one of that family, apart from Molly, has *ever* had a word to say in Percy’s defense.

Over the first four books, no one else in the family (apart from, perhaps, Ron who follows the twins’ lead in just about all matters without any consideration or reflection whatsoever) had ever been shown to take an *active* poke at Percy, either — although his older brothers and Arthur would, and did, tell him to pipe down when he got too overbearing — but no one apart from Molly ever stuck out their necks to defend him. Not even Ginny, who is very quick to leap to *Bill’s* defense whenever Molly started in on him. Indeed, by HBP Ginny has begun to pitch right in with the twins in their open attacks on their least favorite brother.



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Which, given the concern that Percy had shown for Ginny throughout the Year of the Basilisk, struck me as rank ingratitude. Percy was the only member of her family who realized that something was *wrong* in her first year at Hogwarts and tried to *do* something about it.

His reading of the issue was totally off in left field, of course, but at least he did *try* to help. Which is more than the wretched twins ever did. Percy has more than once been shown to be willing to offer a great deal of utterly sincere assistance and reassurance to children younger than himself, even if he does do it in a pompously overbearing style. Such concern for younger children, in the Potterverse, does not seem to be a common thing at all, and it is greatly to Percy’s credit.

And of course in OotP we got the “new” Ginny. And an even newer and more “improved” model the following year. I found that I did not particularly approve of the “new” Ginny, myself (and thoroughly disliked the “mean girl” variant of Year 6). We needn’t have worried, however, by the epilogue she had disappeared in turn, and the rather colorless Stepford!Ginny had taken her place.

And you will notice that *Ginny* was also never appointed a Prefect. Like I say, there are very few flies on Minerva McGonagall. (And why anyone would appoint a child with what appears to be some form of multiple personality disorder as a Prefect would take some explaining.)



I suspect that Ron, who has conspicuously sided with the twins, practically from babyhood, inadvertently managed to



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set Molly against him when he was not much out of diapers. Which can be readily seen in the passive-aggressive way that she has habitually treated him throughout the first four books (always maroon jumpers, the sandwiches that he *doesn't* like, indeed, *dry* sandwiches, even though they had to have been freshly made that morning, the infamous dress robes, etc.). If Ron hadn't been Molly's first and best connection to "poor little Harry Potter," I suspect that the aggression Molly expended on Ron might have been of a less passive variety. In fact, until his all too unanticipated appointment as a Prefect, she doesn't even seem to see Ron as an individual at all, just as an irritating blur somewhere deep within the twins' sphere of influence.

But once her deputy, Percy abandoned her in favor of a career, there he was, her youngest son Ron — against all the odds — awarded an appointment as Prefect, and in a perfect position to serve as "perfect Percy's" perfect replacement. I thought we could expect to see a considerable shift in the dynamic between Ron and his mother in the remaining two books of the series. Particularly if the twins moved out of the family home and were now living above the shop, thus removing a whole opportunity for friction upon which Molly would be otherwise expending her boundless energy.

It looks like I only got that one sort-of right. The dynamic between Molly and Ron, shows a distinct improvement in OotP — particularly early in the summer. But old habits are hard to break, and Ron just doesn't flatter Molly with his full attention and utter deference the way Percy did. And that made a considerable difference in her receptiveness to him. Maybe I get a 50%–60% accuracy rating there. But certainly no higher.



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Arthur, Bill and Charlie have all managed to stay carefully neutral throughout this particular protracted battle, and so might Ginny have done if she had been given the luxury of a choice in the matter. As it stands, for some years she could only keep a low profile and try to remain out of the crossfire. Molly had staked out an open claim on her only daughter, but Ginny's refusal to support her in the fight did at least somewhat deflect the twins' attention from her while they were all still at home.

But all the indications seem to be that the twins certainly had started out with the determination to "get Ginny," once they were all at Hogwarts and Molly wasn't around to protect her.

However, the adventure of the Riddle Diary seems to have spooked the twins enough for them to have, for the most part, laid off Ginny even at Hogwarts since then.

And of course as soon as she was old enough to start asserting herself, Ginny openly aligned herself with the twins as regards Percy. That went a long way toward getting them on her side. Even if she didn't enlist their support against her mother.

Of course by HBP, she was just a little late to be enlisting any kind of support against her mother. By then, the twins seemed determined to woo Molly's favor, themselves, and do everything in their power to make her forget she'd ever had a son named Percy.



The least obvious, but most long-standing rift was the one between Molly and Arthur, and once Arthur had been pried



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out of his fascinating little professional backwater, things even looked like easing up on that front a bit, as well.

But I think this rift was built into their characters and waiting to bite them from the moment they got together. The actual final straw may have been Arthur's love affair with Muggle technology, but the underlying cause is that Molly has a domineering disposition, and Arthur is one of those people who can be neither led nor driven. Eventually even the Mollys of the world will stop pumping a dry well and turn their attentions elsewhere. With Arthur's new promotion the rift appears to be gradually closing, and once the balloon went up in DHs and all the family but Percy seem to have gone into some form of hiding, he and Molly had an external enemy to face off against together. But the potential is still there, and that rift may open up again whenever the two of them get out of step with one another.

This was probably not so obvious when Molly and Arthur were still at Hogwarts, and it's the kind of thing that makes me very uneasy about any "romantic" relationship between Ron and Hermione. Ron and Hermione have some of the makings of a rewarding long-term friendship or a really kick-ass working partnership. And it is absolutely true that their individual strengths are each balanced by the strengths of the other. But moving any of these contexts into the domestic arena does them both a disservice. They truly *don't* want the same things from life, and they *don't* really agree on what is truly *important*. Unfortunately the problem with marrying one's "Hogwarts sweetheart" is that most of what one has as common ground is simply Hogwarts itself. And they will not

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be at Hogwarts forever.

The prospect of seeing Ron and Hermione devolve into a latter-day Molly and Arthur does not strike me at all as a cozy, fluffy, or happy ending, regardless of the opinions of a half a billion 12-year-olds. 12-year-olds are not forced to live with their idea of what would make a happy marriage when they are 12. Molly habitually treats Arthur dismissively, and Arthur retaliates by tuning Molly out. I think that Ron and Hermione both deserve something rather better than that.



Something that has steadily become ever more obvious in canon however, is that "purebloods" are not a monolith. They come in any number of different social strata within the wizarding world.

There appear to be no longer any remaining "aristocratic" wizards of the sort who once held Muggle titles, assuming that there ever really were any significant number of such in the first place. Sir Nick and the bloody Baron's day was a long time ago.

Attempting to take their former place in the social order are a faction of — these days usually either "isolationist" or "supremacist" purebloods like the elder Blacks, the Malfoys, and their ilk, along with their Ministry-entrenched "inclusionist" rivals, like the Crouches, all of whose fortunes are newer, but just as large or larger, and none of whom owe any of their distinction to the gratitude of Muggle governments.

Then there are the plebeian purebloods, who may not completely come up to the standards of purity as defined by the isolationists, and are, by definition, not out of the top drawer,

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but who, these days, are graciously admitted to be useful and necessary to a functioning society. Rather like the distinctions between rich WASPs and poor WASPs.

I have always contended that somewhere in the dim and misty distance of time the original Muggle-born ancestors of the plebeians were “discovered” and educated at the expense of the Masters of the wizarding “Great Houses” with the understanding that afterward, they and their descendants would support them. Such wizards frequently share the prejudices of their “Great House” patrons and are even nastier about upholding these prejudices than their patrons are. Much of the upper echelon of the MoM, of course, is a bastion of this sort of plebeian pureblood. This kind of class distinction may not be as strong across the board as its equivalent in the outer mundane society once was, but it has never entirely gone away, and it now seems to be on the rise again.

And finally, with the steadily increasing incidence of Muggle-borns entering the wizarding world at least since the early 19th century, there are those whose distance from their Muggle-born forebearers have only just finally managed to outlive the perception of their being some level of halfblood. Some of the distinction between the ancient “noble” families and those of plebeian but mostly pureblooded retainers’ descent dating from the pre-Seclusion era has probably become somewhat less important over the past century and a half, but for these “late-comers” there are no concessions made. And few advantages available to them apart from those they can grasp or create for themselves.

Of course in some cases, such as with the Weasleys, who

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(from the information regarding the Black family tapestry) seem to have been regarded as blood traitors by the 1930s or thereabouts — which says more about the Blacks than it does about the Weasleys — it seems largely a matter of chance that the Weasleys even ARE still purebloods by this point in time. But much of this impression is almost certainly due to Arthur Weasley’s own character. His own parents probably did not share his fondness for Muggle technology. And you will notice that when the time came, he married a pureblooded wife. I contend that for all that his political background is probably pure inclusionist and highly Muggle-tolerant, Arthur Weasley’s own enthusiasm for Muggles and their works shows all of the fervor of a new convert.

However, given the difficulty of keeping one’s bloodlines “pure” it is clear that most of Arthur’s forbearers did not altogether share his broadly egalitarian attitudes (considering that his mother really was one of the Blacks, I think that is a safe assumption). And it is still uncertain whether these attitudes are fully supported, even today, by his wife.

But at this point, it rather seems unlikely that all of Arthur and Molly’s grandchildren will be purebloods. And much Arthur will care. If he survives, he will love his own “little halfblood ones” every bit as much as the others. As will Molly, as well, although I question her willingness to extend the same broad acceptance to her potential daughters-in-law.

And by the end of the series, the issue of future generations of Weasleys is now actively being raised, too.



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But the Weasley household that we had seen up to the end of HBP had not, in my opinion, been a visibly happy one. After all, this is Molly's household, and Molly is not a notably happy woman. She is more typically an angry one.

And by the later part of the series she is a frightened one, as well. It is not an improvement.

At the opening of part 6 in a series of 7 in the story arc, the Weasley home situation was due for a shift. With the departure of her primary antagonists as well as the defection of her closest ally, most of the surface causes for Molly's perpetual irritation and ill-will were now out of the equation, and Molly was going to have to look elsewhere for the "causes" of her chronic dissatisfaction.

For that matter, as a value-added bonus, she has even lost the source of irritation offered by Arthur's Dream Job, since he has finally been forced out of it, into a promotion which both removes him from his Muggle rubbish (forcing him to deal primarily with wizarding rubbish instead) and pays better, to boot.

Mercifully, she appears to have turned much of her dissatisfaction outward and blames it on the war, rather than on Arthur and the two children still remaining at home. But does it surprise anyone, anyone *at all*, that Molly Weasley is now showing all the signs of positioning herself to become the mother-in-law from Hell?

To be blunt about it, it was not Arthur, but Molly herself who needed a new job. One as demanding as she can handle.

And, ultimately, she got it. Molly is the sort of witch who is probably at her very best in the middle of a shooting war.

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This is another of the original 30, and it went through a LOT of fits and starts before it finally settled into its final iteration. And Rowling was *no help* at all.



In fanon circles, over the course of the first several years of the fandom, there was a great deal of stewing and much debate concerning the ages of the two eldest Weasley sons. By extension, this debate had also raged over the question of the probable ages of Arthur and Molly.

The first of these debates seems to finally be more-or-less settled, although hardly to everyone's satisfaction. Or even to any truly conclusive result. Rowling's "impressionistic" approach to numbers introduced unnecessary contradictions to the issue that were readily avoidable (even though *she* didn't bother to avoid them), but settled it finally appears to be. Provisionally.

To retrace this rather twisting path to enlightenment:

In her online interview in honor of World Book Day in March of 2004, JK Rowling appeared to have put the first half of this debate to rest. Charlie Weasley was stated as being two years older than Percy. Bill as two years older than Charlie. Since we know the ages of Percy and the younger Weasleys this appeared to settle that matter, and I still think we can assume that this is probably more-or-less what Rowling actually meant.

Or at least what she meant, *then*.

Despite the fans' wails of protest.

And even then it didn't reflect what she had already showed us in the books, in which Percy had to have been at least *three* years behind Charlie at Hogwarts, or Charlie would still have

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been there when Harry and Ron showed up.

Or at least he would have had to be if he finished a full 7-year course of study and sat the NEWTs at the end of it.

Instead, he has clearly already been at the Dragon Reserve in Romania long enough to have made at least one visit home, in order for Ron to have seen the burns he got from wrangling dragons.

And also despite the ruin of the fans' years of over-complex calculations of Charlie and Bill's probable ages, based upon the length of time it had been since Gryffindor last won the School Quidditch Cup. Winning the Cup, it turns out, had nothing whatsoever to do with the matter. The whole issue of the Quidditch Cup was either flotsam, a false lead, or completely irrelevant.

However; the devil is in the details, and unfortunately the devil soon managed to fly away with any kind of tidy resolution. Rowling's statement was first amended when it was noted that Percy was evidently three years behind Charlie at Hogwarts, not two. This could still have been painlessly explained by giving Percy a birthday after September 1 and forcing him to wait an extra year to start at Hogwarts. But Percy's birthday had already been posted on the site as August 22. Having done that, Rowling had managed to botch the issue beyond the point of being able to make an easy fix. Besides, a September birthday two years before the twins would have had Percy in the year *directly* ahead of the Twins, rather than *two* years ahead of them.

So she simplified the whole thing by stating on her website that Percy is 3 years younger than Charlie and 2 years older

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than the twins. Which should have worked just fine.

And then she went and *unsimplified* the matter all over again in her December 2004 posting of a Happy Birthday notice for Charlie, which throws the whole explanation out of whack again.

By giving Charlie a December birthday she had clearly rendered at least one of her statements regarding the ages of the three eldest Weasley sons as untenable ("One of these things is not like the others..."). With a December birthday, Charlie was once again only two years ahead of Percy at Hogwarts, rather than three. Even if he was 3 years older, since now it would be *Charlie* who had to wait an extra year to start Hogwarts.



I felt quite undeservedly smug on the Quidditch Cup issue. I did not nail the ages of Bill and Charlie Weasley correctly, either. But I came closer than many. Mainly because I contended that when Gryffindor had last won the Cup was no clear indication of just when Charlie Weasley had finished Hogwarts. In retrospect, it now appears that Gryffindor had last won the Cup in Charlie's very first year on the team. And never again afterwards.

Charlie probably had something to do with that big win, but it doesn't sound like his term as Captain was significantly better than Oliver Wood's. Unless we are all missing something.

And we may be. Evidently the year before Harry and Ron arrived at Hogwarts was a thoroughly pitiful year for Gryffindor Quidditch, if Minerva is to be believed. Doesn't much sound like Charlie was in charge that year. If he was 3 years older than Percy, that ought to have been his 7th year. If he was only

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two years *ahead* of Percy because of that December birthday, it would have been his 6th year.

My own contention was that Oliver Wood's exaggerated veneration for Charlie Weasley could have only come from his actually having *known* Charlie Weasley. Ergo, Charlie must still have been at Hogwarts recently enough for a 5th-year Oliver Wood's time at Hogwarts to have overlapped. In fact, I held that what was most likely was that Oliver Wood had actually been a part of Charlie (a former Captain)'s own team. And as far as that goes, I was absolutely right, on both counts.

Most of the comments made by characters in passing had primarily been applicable to the age difference between Charlie and Ron (and, by extension, Harry). The extreme (up to 14 years) age gap that a few fans proposed between Charlie and Percy was never convincing, and even applying this length of time to the gap between Charlie and Ron never felt right to me, nor, apparently to a great many other people. I was not alone in my determined rejection of a 14 year gap, or even a 10-year gap between Charlie and Percy. I thought it was probably more like five. I was wrong about that, too.

However; setting this long gap's timing; as I followed most of the arguments, read something like:

IF the issue is that Gryffindor hasn't won the cup since Charlie was Seeker, AND;

IF Charlie played the position of Seeker throughout his Hogwarts career (rather than moving on to Chaser or Keeper after he got his growth spurt and turned stocky), AND;

The last year that Gryffindor won the cup was seven years before the date that people were bringing up the subject, AND;

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People were bringing up the subject in Harry (and Ron's) first year, THEN —

Charlie had to have LEFT Hogwarts at least seven years before Ron STARTED. (Not Percy, Ron.) Charlie would be fourteen years older than Ron. Percy is four years older than Ron. Charlie would be ten years older than Percy.

And, to me it never worked. Because I just couldn't buy the kind of exaggerated hero worship that Oliver Wood had for Charlie Weasley unless Oliver had some reason to feel that he KNEW Charlie in his glory days. Knew him *at Hogwarts*. Didn't just read about it, wasn't just told about it by an older sibling or someone else after the fact. Charlie had *been* there.

I miss the days that you could theorize from what the characters told us about things and have some confidence in being able to believe them.



And it wasn't like it was that difficult to work out a plausible scenario which would allow for that. It is very easy to accept that Charlie was the Gryffindor Seeker for 5–6 years running and that Gryffindor took the cup at least once during those years. But Gryffindor doesn't have to have taken the cup EVERY year that Charlie was Seeker. We'd seen already that even though Harry is an outstanding Seeker, quite possibly better than Charlie, it wasn't until his third year that Gryffindor finally managed to take the Cup. I proposed that through injuries or sheer bad luck Gryffindor may have been edged out for the Cup in Charlie's later years at Hogwarts. For that matter, McGonagall's statement, made in Harry's 3rd year,

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that if they do not win the match it will be their eighth year in a row that Gryffindor has missed the Cup, already threw the total off by a year from Oliver's statements in PS/SS.

And, clearly that seems to be the case. Despite the miserable year for Gryffindor Quidditch in the academic year 1990-'91, Charlie Weasley had evidently just left Hogwarts the year before Ron — and Harry — started. They barely missed him. It was "the legendary Charlie Weasley's" very own suddenly vacant Seeker position that Harry was drafted into. And the Legendary Charlie Weasley's Team Captain's shoes that Oliver was trying to fill.

Maybe.

Wait for it.



Bill's last visit to Hogwarts "five years ago" from the vantage point of June, 1995 must now be assumed to have been to watch a game with the twins as the new Gryffindor Beaters given that they made the team in their 2nd year. That would also have been Charlie's last year at Hogwarts, the year immediately before Ron and Harry first went up to school. I now doubt that is what Rowling had originally intended by that statement, but that's what she had Bill say.

If Rowling had wanted to compress the six birthdays of the Weasley children into the smallest time period possible, AND to have it fit the way things fell out in the series, and to have it match up to what the Weasley kids have to say about it themselves, inside the story, she ought to have set it up according to the following progression.

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Optimum ages of the Weasley Children as of the opening of the series:

Ginny — 10 (Aug 11 birthday, 1981)

Ron — 11 (March 1 birthday, 1980)

Twins — 13 (April 1 birthday, 1978)

Percy — 15 (Sept-Dec birthday, 1975) Soon to be 16. He's slightly more than 2 years older than the twins, but well under three years older.

Charlie — 18 (Jan-Aug birthday, 1973). Two years older than Percy. Three years ahead of him in school.

Bill — 19 (Nov 28 birthday, 1971) Soon to be 20. Nearly two years older than Charlie.

Under this timeline, Percy, whose birthday is after Sept 1 would have been forced to wait that additional year in order to start Hogwarts, putting him three years behind Charlie, even though he is only two years younger. Bill's post-Sept 1 birthday would do the same and put him into the year immediately ahead of Charlie although he is close to two years older. In any case, Charlie's birthday needed to be after January 1 and before September 1. Percy and Bill's birthdays needed to be after September 1.

This would also mean that Bill had finished with the class of 1990, rendering his comment, made in June of 1995, of not having been back to Hogwarts in five years, into a reference to his own years there, rather than a possible visit to watch his brothers play Quidditch after he had already finished. And it is very hard to believe that this is not what Rowling had originally intended. Although the statements that she has given us since that time would seem to have thoroughly bollixed any possibility

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of retaining that interpretation.

This timeline would also have finally made some sense of Ginny's statement in CoS that she had wanted to go to Hogwarts "ever since Bill went." When we first heard it back in CoS, and most fans were postulating an exaggeratedly long age gap between Charlie and Percy, it had seemed that Ginny's comment had to be interpreted as careless phrasing of; "ever since Bill was there," since in Ginny's early childhood, Bill had always been at Hogwarts. But that interpretation would cast continuing doubt on Ginny's reliability as a source of future information throughout the entire series for it was a clear case of lying by exaggeration. Indeed, with too long a gap Bill would have been out of Hogwarts by the time Ginny was born.

But if Bill had not been able to start Hogwarts until September 1983, then there was every chance of an 11-year-old Ginny still having a vague, but real, memory of the day that the whole family turned out to see her "hero," her big-brother Bill off to Hogwarts on September 1 1983, when she was 2 years old, and of having wanted to go too.

Charlie, although born nearly two years later, would have joined him there the following year.



Well, all good reasoning apparently must come to an end; on top of the statement that Charlie was three years older than Percy, as of December 12, 2004, when Ms Rowling, followed up a notorious update to her website two days earlier, which had contained no fewer than four statements which absolutely contradicted either statements made in earlier interviews;



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information that she had given us in the text of the books; or which contradicted established scientific fact; she compounded the general confusion over the Weasley kids' ages by posting a birthday notice for Charlie Weasley. On December 12.

In order to have made such a sweeping number of clankers in a single week she must have either let the pregnancy hormones do the talking or the lady was deliberately messing with our heads. We had no reason at the time to believe that she is stupid, after all.

But she had now given Charlie Weasley a December birthday.

If Charlie Weasley was born in December of 1973, he could not have finished school before Harry and Ron started. Or not unless the statement of Percy being 3 years younger than Charlie and 2 years older than the twins is *also* wrong.

If Charlie was born in 1973 — in December — then he, like Bill, would have had to wait that extra year to be able to start at Hogwarts; he would not have been able to start until 1985, which would mean that if he sat the NEWTs, he would not have finished until June of 1992.

If, however, Bill was born in 1970 and Charlie in 1972, then they would have finished school in 1989 and 1991 respectively. But if Percy is indeed at least 3 years younger than Charlie and 2 years older than the twins, then Ron who is 2 years younger than the twins — which is amply supported in canon — would need to have been born in 1979. Meaning that Harry would have also had to have been born in 1979. Which doesn't work either. And there is still an overlap of time in which Charlie, Ron and Harry would have all been at Hogwarts together.

So clearly, if the above is true, Percy is not 3 years younger



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than Charlie, he is close to 4 years younger than Charlie. Or at any rate he was born in the fourth year after Charlie was. And was 3 years behind Charlie at Hogwarts.

Nor, if Charlie was born in December, would Ginny — who was born the year after Harry, have been able to plausibly say with any sort of veracity that she has wanted to go to Hogwarts “ever since Bill went” since that adds a year to the timespan between Bill’s first trip on the Hogwarts Express and Ginny’s. While an 11-year-old Ginny might quite believably have a faint, but genuine memory of seeing her favorite brother off to Hogwarts for the first time when she was 2, she is unlikely to have any clear memory of having done so when she was barely a year old. If Bill is 2 years older than a Charlie who is three and a half years older than Percy, even if he is born after September 1, he would still have started Hogwarts in 1982, some 2-3 weeks after Ginny’s first birthday.

Ergo; yes, she is now a liar by exaggeration (of course, having become more well acquainted with Ginny over the past two books, the news that she is a liar of any degree ought not to strike any of us as surprising); in any event, we cannot completely trust anything she tells us.



If we take a birthdate of 1980 for Harry Potter — which is sort-of confirmed by the Black family tapestry sketch, wherein Draco Malfoy’s birth year is stated as being 1980 — and a Hogwarts staring date of 1991, in order for Charlie to be out of Hogwarts before Harry and Ron start, he has to have started no later than 1984; and the only way Charlie can do that is if

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his birthday is before September 1, 1973. Ergo, according to our present information, if he was born in December, then he must have been born in December 1972. If Percy has been assigned an August birthday, he has to have been born in 1976, in order to be 2 years ahead of the twins.

In which case, now the statement of Percy being 3 years younger than Charlie and 2 years older than the twins, is simply wrong. Which is the only way this all works. It requires that we ignore at least one bona-fide statement of Rowling’s as being not worth the electrodes it takes to display it.

JKR has posted birthday notices for the whole Weasley family by now. Ginny’s birthday was stated as being August 11. Percy just made it in under the wire for his academic year with a birthday on August 22. Two weeks later and we would have had to adjust things based on the premise that Percy was not 2 years older than the twins, but only 2 years ahead of them in school. Which, frankly would have worked much better all round.

But, in any case, if we adjust Percy’s birthdate as well as Bill and Charlie’s according to the dates as stated on the official website, the official lineup on the kids’ ages at the start of the series now goes:

Ginny - 10 (Aug 11 birthday, 1981)

Ron - 11 (March 1 birthday, 1980)

Twins - 13 (April 1 birthday, 1978)

Percy - 15, (Aug 22 birthday, 1976)

Charlie - 18, soon to be 19 (Dec 12 birthday, 1972)

Bill - 20, soon to be 21 (Nov 28 birthday, 1970)

And Ginny is a liar by exaggeration. Bill started Hogwarts in 1982 when she was barely a year old, and she probably doesn’t

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remember the first thing about it.

And if Rowling is messing with our heads deliberately; then shame on her.



However, over on a discussion listgroup far, far away, this particular puzzle was being kicked around to somewhat different effect. I really do think someone over there may have been onto something.

Ms Rowling may indeed be messing with our heads. Or at any rate, she clearly isn't telling us something which we really need to be aware of in order to make sense of the rest of what she has told us.

Is there anyone here who is likely to be astonished by the prospect of JK Rowling not telling us something?

I didn't really think so.

In this case, since the whole issue of the ages of Bill and Charlie Weasley is so peripheral to the main story she may simply not consider it something that anyone needs to be aware of. (Although it **does** rather matter to people who want to write fanfic.) And it is information about professional decisions that she would hardly want to be criticized for appearing to support. She was already likely to catch enough flack over Harry's announced intention of leaving school to hunt Horcruxes.

Which is pretty much the same thing that turned up on the discussion list. Charlie Weasley may have left school early to wrangle dragons.

Quite possibly with Professors Kettleburn and McGonagall's blessings



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When you stop to consider it, positions at that Dragon Reserve in Romania are probably fairly prestigious. It's an international entity, probably administered by the International Confederation of Wizards, and while it is certainly hazardous work and there may be a degree of turnover, there cannot be all that many openings at any given time. In fact several years may pass between openings. And it really doesn't sound like the kind of field that requires a multitude of NEWTs. A bright, highly athletic boy like Charlie, with his Head of House and Care of Magical Creatures professors willing to write references, may have snatched at an opening as soon as one occurred, rather than take the chance of missing the wave, and having to wait an undetermined number of years for the next one.

And there was the issue of character as well. A boy who is both appointed Prefect AND Quidditch Captain is not a boy whose Professors entertain a lot of reservations about. You would expect such a boy to easily be appointed Head Boy in his year as well. But we know that Charlie wasn't. Now that one thinks of it, the omission seems rather odd.

Unless, of course, he simply wasn't there.

Let's make another attempt at an optimum lineup of ages at the start of the series with modifications according to what we now know of the kids' birthdays and what Rowling HAS told us about their ages.

Ginny – 10 (Aug 11 birthday, 1981)

Ron – 11 (March 1 birthday, 1980) one year older

Twins – 13 (April 1 birthday, 1978) two years older



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Percy – 15 (August 22 birthday, 1976) two years older

Charlie – 17 (December 12 birthday, 1973) three years older

Bill – 19 (November 28 birthday, 1971) two years older

Bill and Charlie would turn 18 and 20 before the end of the calendar year.

This lineup re-establishes some veracity on Ginny's part. It resolves the muddle about Bill's statement of it having been five years since he was back. It also finally sinks in that Rowling only claimed that Charlie was three years *older* than Percy. She did not actually say he was three years ahead of him at school.

He just was obviously no longer at Hogwarts by the time Ron started. We know that he was already in Romania by then. With the birthdays as listed above, Charlie would have only been two years ahead of Percy at school. Ron's first year ought to have been Charlie's 7th.

Which brings up a point that someone (else) on that listgroup mentioned. Ron never went home at all during PS/SS. And yet he says; "You should see the burns that Charlie got (from the dragons)." If Charlie had only just started at the Dragon reserve at the end of the previous school year he would have hardly had time to be home on leave where Ron would see his burns. He would have only barely had time to make the friends who came and picked up Norbert.

Added to Minerva's laments regarding the previous year's Quidditch team, and the twins' statement that they hadn't won, "since Charlie left," it really begins to sound as if Charlie Weasley sat his OWLs and has been out of Hogwarts for as long as Bill has.

Which brings us back to the Quidditch babble. Everyone

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may not all be talking about the same thing. There is babble about when Gryffindor last won the Quidditch Cup, and there is babble about when Gryffindor last won a match. From Minerva and the twins, I think it sounds very much as if the first year without Charlie, Gryffindor had a *terrible* year and never won *any* of their matches. Gryffindor hadn't won a match "since Charlie left."

The Cup, however is a different kettle of fish. It is easy to miss out on the Quidditch Cup, even in the face of some stellar individual wins during that particular season. Wood tells us at the opening of the PoA season that Gryffindor hadn't taken the Cup for 7 years. Depending on what he is counting back from might make a difference, but rationally it ought to count back to Charlie's 3rd year. Which was Oliver's 1st. We do not know who took the cup the year before that, and Oliver's memory wouldn't go back that much farther at Hogwarts. We don't know when Charlie became Captain, but I don't think we've ever heard of a Quidditch Captain who was younger than a 5th year. Since the office is the equivalent of Prefect, this would make sense.

So, hypothetically Charlie might have won the Cup for Gryffindor in his 3rd year, done some really fine playing in his 4th and 5th years, been team Captain (as well as Prefect) in his 5th year but still not won the Cup during it. And at the end of the year, sat his OWLs, and left school to wrangle dragons.

Or, just to be safe, perhaps he sat his OWLs, *started* his 6th year, turned 17 at the end of the Autumn term, and, being now of age, left Hogwarts and was off to Romania, and out of range of Molly's response to his career choice. Which would have left

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Gryffindor without a Seeker, altogether. No wonder they had such a rotten year.

And, Fred and George's dramatic "early" school leaving (to say nothing of Ron's) wasn't the first in the family, since Charlie had already set a precedent.

Actually that works for me.



The youngest (socially approved) estimate of any of the above lists of children's ages and birth dates would project Molly as some 19-20 years older than Bill. Which is a decent enough starting point for round two of the great Weasley age debate.

Which is to say, the probable ages of Arthur and Molly.

We know that they are close in age. Molly states that she and Arthur were dancing to one of Celestina Warbeck's songs "when we were 18." However, given that Arthur's birthday is in February and Molly's is in October, they would not necessarily have been in the same year at Hogwarts unless Molly is the elder of the two. Which is certainly possible. She seems to be inclined to talk down to Arthur as if he were younger than she. In fact, she tends to treat him as if he were one of her kids.

If Arthur is the elder, however, this would give him at least one year in which to land a job, establish himself, and to begin to advance far enough in his career to be able to contemplate supporting a wife and family by the time Molly finished school. And, regardless, Molly would have been 18 at the age of sitting her NEWTs. So, for that matter, would Arthur.

Even at that, there is no absolute certainty that they did marry as soon as Molly left school, although their elopement

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attempts to suggest it.

For, in HBP we finally learned that Molly and Arthur had eloped. There was apparently a flurry of that sort of thing during VoldWar I. We do not know whether Arthur and Molly's marriage was part of this flurry, however. The "war" was not openly acknowledged much before the mid-1960s, even though Voldemort's activities had probably started up somewhat before then. And by all accounts whatever Voldemort did that rendered himself unmentionable was not done until some time around 1970 according to Albus.

In fact their elopement opens up the possibility that Charlie wasn't the first early school leaver in the Prewett family, either. If Arthur was already out of school and Molly didn't see any reason why she had to sit in classes for another year when she was already of age, I could see the elopement being her reason not to return for her 7th year. She would have already been of age, after all.

Which raises the widely-held fanon belief that Molly got pregnant while at Hogwarts and that their marriage was effectively a matter of necessity.

I'm not particularly fond of Molly myself, but I don't buy that in the least.

And there is also no certainty that they started their family immediately, after marrying either. A woman with the kind of mind Molly Weasley appears to have would probably make a point of waiting at least one full calendar year after marrying before getting pregnant, just to put a dead stop to any spiteful gossip that a hurried marriage, or an elopement, might provoke.

A witch would have control over that kind of thing.

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Nor does having 7 children in 10 years mean that you start having them at the most inconvenient time possible, without a secure home in which to raise them or an income with which to support them. Nor is there any impression of self-consciousness over necessary haste on Molly's part about her justification for her and Arthur's elopement.

And, for that matter, if there is any group of people who would have *full* control over their own fertility, it would be witches. Molly has 7 children because she *wanted* seven children (or six, the twins may have been a surprise). And Arthur evidently did not object.

I'll admit it wouldn't suit me, but I wouldn't want 7 Horcruxes either.

And, at that, if Percy had been a girl, they might have stopped at three.

And waiting until Arthur got his first promotion might have also been agreed upon before starting that family. He was young, pureblood, intelligent, and popular. It wouldn't be long in coming, and, indeed, it probably wasn't.

In fact, being a married man was probably to his advantage regarding professional advancement in the Ministry.



That Molly and Arthur's eldest child was probably born in 1971, suggests that their marriage must have been fairly early in the acknowledged war years. Possibly before "Lord Voldemort" had transmuted himself into He-Who-Must-Not-be-Named. We also do not know of a specific reason for there having ever been any objection to their marriage on the part of either of

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their families to necessitate that elopement. But that does not mean that there wasn't one.

The Prewetts may have disapproved of Arthur's blood-traitor background (they very likely did, in fact). It is equally possible that the Weasleys disapproved of Molly's vulgarity (and apparent ignorance of any sort of proper conduct).

One member of the Prewett family, presumably "rich uncle" Ignatius, had married into the prominent Black family. Orion and Walburga Black may have been convinced that being a Black made one practically royalty, but it is unlikely that that viewpoint was shared by the Weasley family, and both the Weasleys and the Blacks may still have been smarting over the marriage of Arthur's parents which had gotten his mother, Cedrella Black, blasted off the family tapestry. The Prewetts' position on the matter has never been expressed. For that matter, even though we cannot map it on what we see of the tapestry, there may have been an objection to the fact that both of them were fairly closely connected to the Black family, which was already a bit too fond of marrying their cousins.

It is generally assumed, whether rightfully or otherwise, that the objection was to their ages. Which, if so, suggests that they may indeed have married young, and quite soon out of Hogwarts. It still does not necessarily follow that they chose to start their family immediately. We have no information regarding that issue at present. And it now appears that we never will.



Any specific dates pertaining to Molly and Arthur and their ages are pretty much up in the air, although at this point pro-

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jecting their ages as somewhere in the neighborhood of 45-50 seems safest. Rowling hasn't given us anything like an actual date to hang the exact ages of their generation on, although Bill's 1971 birth date at least provisionally nails Molly's youngest plausible age (assuming that she attended Hogwarts through 7th year and finished after sitting the NEWTs) as around 45 at the opening of DHs.

Toward the end of Goblet of Fire, Molly did make a comment about she and Arthur dodging the old caretaker, Apollyon Pringle. Which, if nothing else, solidly nails down the fact that she and Arthur first became involved with each other while they were both still in school.

In any event, given that the twenty or so years of Voldemort's first rise now seem likely to have been a period of escalating lawlessness, rapidly heightening social anxiety and a steady loss of confidence in the legitimate government, it is no longer altogether plausible that any consideration regarding an official "war effort" would have imposed a counter incentive to young Arthur and Molly against marrying the minute both were out of school and Arthur was holding down a steady job which would support him, a wife, and the beginnings of a young family. Indeed, theirs was clearly not the only elopement to have marked the period of Voldemort's escalating activities, even before the worst of his assault on the Ministry's authority. (The marriage of Andromeda Black and Ted Tonks is another suspected elopement during this period.)



A few people used to attempt to throw a spanner into the

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works by claiming that Molly and Arthur must have both left Hogwarts prior to Hagrid's expulsion in 1943, since they remember the groundskeeper who preceded him. A moment's reflection will show that this is unlikely to be the case.

The reference usually invoked in support of the theory is that of Molly "recalling at length about the groundskeeper before Hagrid."

That was all the statement says. There is nothing in that statement that either claims or implies anything other than that Molly came to Hogwarts before Ogg stepped down and handed the job over to Hagrid. It does not even contradict the possibility of whether Ogg may or may not have done so *during* Molly's time at Hogwarts. (It was an encounter with Filch's predecessor, the caretaker, Apollyon Pringle that left Arthur with scars he still has. Nothing to do with Ogg.)

In the first place, Hagrid was still a *child* when he started training under Ogg. Traditionally, Apprenticeships were contracted for a term of seven years. (Muggle apprenticeships, that is. Wizarding ones may work very differently.) Hagrid was expelled in June, 1943 at the age of 14. He wasn't even legally an adult until December of 1946.

Going by the terms of a traditional apprenticeship, the earliest that Hagrid could have taken over would have been around 1950. Which still sounds a little early for Molly and Arthur to already be at Hogwarts. Particularly in view of Bill's 1971 birth date. (I've always pictured Molly and Arthur as the equivalent to baby-boomers, born after 1945.)

In the second place, I seriously doubt that Ogg would have turned the job over to Hagrid before he'd been working with the youngster long enough to be sure that he wouldn't flake out

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in an emergency.

We are still reasoning from very scanty information here. Hagrid could have been Ogg's "assistant" for decades after finishing out his term as apprentice. The deal was that Ogg was to train Hagrid as his *eventual* replacement, not that Ogg was to step aside as soon as Hagrid was trained.



Our only solid piece of information for estimating the older Weasleys' ages that we have in canon is that it is necessary for Molly, at least, to have finished at Hogwarts before the Whomping Willow was planted prior to Remus Lupin and his cohorts' first year. With a November 1971 birth date for their oldest son, this would nail Molly's last plausible Hogwarts-leaving year as being the class of 1970. And given that we now know that Molly's birthday is October 30, we know that she had already turned 18 in the calendar year before she finished her 7th year. (If she attended for a 7th year.) Which if everything was done according to "respectable" standards (which Molly is positively strident in her championship of) would have her turning 20 just before Bill was born. Assuming that they started their family within the first year after they married. Which is still far from a done-deal.

If Molly was not out of Hogwarts until 1970 and sat her NEWTs that would *almost* put Molly into the same academic year as Bellatrix Black who is stated in canon as having been at Hogwarts at the same time as the Marauders and Snape, at least briefly. Molly however, is also stated in canon as having been out of Hogwarts before the Whomping Willow



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was planted in preparation for Lupin's arrival there. So that at least doesn't fit.

However, if Molly blew off her final year she might be the same age, or possibly even a year younger than Bellatrix, and quite possibly in the same year as Andromeda. Somehow, I find that harder to believe. It is easier to simply dismiss the birth dates on the Black family tapestry sketch, since they already conflict with actual information in the books in several instances. Particularly in view of Rowling's now-official endorsement of the 1960 birth date for the Marauders' cohort.

But this second Weasley age debate, however suggestive, remains unresolvable. So far, new information actually stated in OotP and HBP has only exploded the theory that Arthur and Lucius Malfoy were same-year Hogwarts rivals, which had certainly appeared within the realm of the possible up to that point in the series — certainly given behavior, on both their parts in CoS which suggested a long history of personal animosity between them.

But if Lucius Malfoy is 41 years old at the beginning of OotP, in September of 1995, as is stated in the DAILY PROPHET, then his time at Hogwarts would have overlapped that of the Marauder cohort, and Lucius would remember the planting of the Whomping Willow.

A marriage for Arthur and Molly taking place by the end of 1969 would still have Malfoy's time also overlapping theirs as well, however, although he would have been either 2 or 3 years behind Molly, and 3 years behind Arthur.

From the dates on the Black family tapestry, Bellatrix Black might have been in the year following Molly. But those numbers



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can no longer be supported inside canon. At any rate Bellatrix needs to have finished school no earlier than 1972 in order for her time to have overlapped with that of the Marauders, even if only for one year. Ergo: I think we must adjust our calculation to allow for Bellatrix being anything up to 2–3 years younger than Molly.

I find that I personally quite like the reading that Molly and Arthur finished with the class of 1969, myself. If Molly finished Hogwarts in 1969, then she would have been born in October of 1950, and started Hogwarts with the Autumn term of 1962, along with all the other kids born late in 1950 and the ones born between January and August of 1951.

Just like (if we can believe her quick-quotes quill) Rita Skeeter.

After all, there has to be *some* reason why Rita takes such a delight in picking on Molly's menfolk in print. She's been doing it for years. And it can hardly be put down to taking pot-shots at persons in exalted positions. The Weasleys are nobodies, even if they are purebloods.

Can you imagine Molly and Rita in the same year at Hogwarts? (Think: Draco Malfoy and Ron Weasley. Squared.) There is no reason to suppose that the foremost Gryffindor/Slytherin opponents of any given year are invariably wizards.

And one has to wonder just where Arthur fits into that scenario.

But once one admits the possibility that Rita Skeeter and Molly Prewett may have been old Hogwarts rivals, or opponents, or flat-out enemies, a whole lot of little things start falling into place.

In fact, the more you think of it the more likely it seems. We know what style of fighter Rita is. And we know that Molly is

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all too willing to square off against anyone she disagrees with. Fireworks wouldn't be the half of it.

Although it does make it difficult to understand why Molly appears to accept Rita's published statements regarding *anything*. I can see criticism of any of her menfolk setting off a flurry of nagging over "what people might think." But it certainly doesn't explain her taking Rita's word about anyone *else*.

However, this, too, is a thing of mere suggestion and possibilities, without direct canon support, or any future hope of it. Although the circumstantial evidence is mounting up...



Molly

By the time this collection went online in 2003, it was quite obvious to any reader of this collection that I break with the majority of fans, certainly the younger fans, in that I am not at all favorably impressed with Molly Weasley.

I'm not the only one, either. Especially when you ask Rowling's older fans. Most of us have met a number of Mollys in our time. Many of us have locked horns with some of them, too. It's never a pleasant experience.



In my own defense, however, I must point out that I was forced to have to grow up in a variation of her household. That was not a particularly enjoyable experience, either. My own mother was very much in the same style as Madam Weasley, and Molly's behavior dredges up some rather nasty memories. This is bound to color any interpretation I may put on Molly Weasley's behavior or her motivations. Other people's mileage may, of course, vary.

In Ma's case, at least some of the difficulties had to do with the proscribed and rather stifling "women's role" of the middle of the last century. That was a social contract which carried heavy hidden costs, even if it didn't bring society as a whole to a screeching halt. But for anyone other than the confirmed door-mats of the world, the fallout from the "nuclear family" tended to be just as toxic as any other kind.

Not that you could directly blame it entirely on a "male-dominated society," either. It was all far more complex than that. And whatever the underlying dynamics were, if you were a kid, particularly one who had been buried alive in the suburbs, your

Molly

perception was that it was the *women* who actively policed it. Particularly women like Molly. And Ma.

And you could never quite say for certain that things really were the way they were because that was the way the unidentified Powers That Be wanted them, or if it was just the way the Enforcers wanted them. Because keeping things as they were and keeping everyone under their thumbs made it easier for the Enforcers to keep order, so *they* got to be the ones throwing their weight around. After all, everything runs much smoother when people accept "Because I say so!" as an actual *reason*.

And, to be fair, it wasn't like the Enforcers weren't also enforcing themselves, as well.

I watched the same sort of voluntary self-suffocation re-enacted in the '70s by a number of my own contemporaries of similarly dynamic and aggressive temperament who had bought a particularly pernicious package which was circulating in my circles regarding "the female archetype," which one of them had discovered in a uni-level textbook somewhere and seemed to believe that they all ought to be using as a model for behavior!

Leaving aside the totally bas-ackward reading of what an archetype actually *represents* (i.e., the lowest common denominator applied to a specific group; a "stereotype" taken to the Nth degree), an archetype is an artificial construction, a flattened-out "mythic" generalization — and the antithesis of any hint of individuality or character. Trust me, you would *not* want to *be* one.

In my own social circle, there was one girl in particular who was exceedingly like Ma (*and* Molly Weasley), and watching her trying to put herself through those hoops was like observing

Molly

someone try to go about her daily business in shoes that were about two sizes too small. And of course she couldn't help but feel that someone ought really to be taking notice of the compromises and sacrifices she was making in order to conform to the pattern and give her some public credit for her efforts.

Which of course was a vain hope, since the mission statement was that she was a *woman* and should *naturally* fall into these patterns. The actual fallout, of course, was periodic outbursts of towering rage over what were really rather petty issues that had simply constituted one too many at any given moment. As a result she tended to come across as a rather unstable and essentially petty person, when she really *wasn't*. Just a misguided and wrong-headed youngster doggedly attempting to conform to a false premise.

Which has a fair possibility of being the problem with Molly as well.

But you would think that to be less likely to be the case in the wizarding world. That is, if anyone ever actually *thought* about what probably constitutes a wizarding "world." The Harry filter doesn't allow us the clearest picture of the proper "witch's role" (if any) in the modern wizarding world, but what we can see of it by squinting around the edges of that filter has shown women taking a very active part in all levels of their society.

Mind you, if Molly really is anything like Ma — and she sure sounds like she was drawn from a very similar template — she would have done brilliantly in almost any field that dealt with children. Ma was everybody in the family's favorite aunt. Hell, she would have been *my* favorite aunt!

But.



Molly

Only if the kids involved were not her own.

If she didn't have someone else to answer to as to what she was doing with those kids she lost all sense of proportion and you were a symbol, not a person. Dolores Umbridge went around much the same kind of bend once she got the bit between her teeth. Only *much* worse.

Unlike Umbridge, Ma wasn't an inherently nasty person — although she was a somewhat difficult one — but she just plain wasn't suited to actually be a 24/7 parent. Or at least not once the kid was past the age of 2 or 3. I think the only thing that kept me from being swallowed up, the way Ginny appeared to have been for so long, is that Ma put a Project on her agenda and went back to work from the time I was 3 until I was about 7 to finance it, leaving me with Grandma until dinner time.

Gran made any number of mistakes in a long career of baby-taming (she'd already raised six of her own), but at least she treated children as if they were people. Ma didn't. Neither does Molly. Molly treats children like colonies. With all of the tact and empathy of George III.

The situation at the Burrow is all the more intense in that Molly also home-schooled her brood, and, apparently, kept them from even mixing with the other *wizarding* kids in their own district. And there were others. We know of something like at least three other wizarding families with children of roughly the same ages living in the vicinity of the Burrow.

Ron, to all appearances, seems to have had no idea who Luna Lovegood even *was* until they were all thrown together on the train at the start of Year 5 — even though she and her widowed father also live in the Ottery St Catchpole region (as



Molly

do the Diggorys and the Fawcetts, all four families within walking distance of Stoa's Head Hill). Nor do the Twins show any sign of having ever been pre-Hogwarts playmates with Cedric Diggory, or the Fawcett's daughter, who must also be around the same age as the twins, having got the same idea to age herself up a little to enter her name in the TriWizard Tournament. To much the same result as their attempt.

With this in mind, perhaps the rather... *uneven* levels of socialization that we see in some of Molly's kids is not all that surprising.

Which also says something distinctly uncomplimentary about Molly's sudden and enthusiastic adoption of famous Harry Potter.

There was none of that overflowing warmth and welcome extended to poor little Luna Lovegood who lost her mother under extremely traumatic circumstances at the age of nine. Nor does there seem to have been any apparent aid and assistance offered to the girl's widowed father, either. Despite the fact that Molly had a daughter exactly the same age who might have welcomed some age-appropriate female company. And the twins were already in their 2nd year at Hogwarts when Ginny and Luna were nine. Molly only still had Ron and Ginny at home by then.



It must be admitted that Molly was initially rather good for Harry Potter. She was *exactly* what he needed at that point in time. But Harry's experience of Molly Weasley does not really stack up all that closely to the experience of her that is shared

Molly

by her own brood. Harry is not one of Molly's colonies. He is visiting royalty, yet even Harry was going off her style of the proper treatment of children a bit by Year 5.

And just what are the results of her own kids' experience?

Percy spent most of his young life trying to live up to her expectations for him. Her three youngest boys were still all climbing, hand-over-hand, up the more-macho-than-thou flagpole in self defense. Ginny was developing a fine talent for the devious and the underhanded in order to avoid showing up on Molly's radar any more than she could avoid, despite having what after the fact appears to be very much the same sort of aggressive, and domineering personality. That we saw not a hint of that personality prior to OotP says something rather unpleasant about a child who knuckles under to a bully *quite* so thoroughly — to the point of not even showing a trace of resistance. Of course this might just be due to the Harry filter. To Harry, Ginny hardly rated as a "real" person until she got in his face and told him off.

Frankly, by HBP Ginny was turning out to be a perfectly beastly girl with nothing even remotely nice to say, either to, or about, *anybody* other than Harry. Your stereotypical "mean girl" socialite, in short. I suspect that Bellatrix Black must have been in much the same style a couple of decades earlier, with, it must be admitted, much the same capacity for conspicuous and utterly devoted hero worship.

Ron was overlooked, consistently given short shrift and openly disrespected by his mother for years. Charlie and Bill both signed up for jobs in foreign parts about ten minutes after they left Hogwarts, and for most of the first 5 years that we've

Molly

known the family they only showed up at home for a flying visit once in a blue moon.

And the way Molly purred at Harry and then turned around to snarl at her own kids was just plain *nasty*.

And, up to the point that Ron was awarded his Prefect badge, just how often had we ever heard Molly address any day-to-day comment to *any* of her own children (apart from, perhaps, Ginny, or her deputy, Percy) that wasn't either an order or a rebuke?

Maybe once or twice in the first two books. And that's about it. And never to Ron.

By OotP it is also abundantly clear that it is Molly who wears the pants in that family. That public demand that Arthur back her up in a quarrel with a man who was at least technically her host was as ugly as anything she has ever said to any of her kids, not to mention being an amazing display of sheer ill-breeding.

As was her even more cringingly embarrassing display of publicly berating her husband in an open ward at St Mungo's in front of *strangers*; or her monumentally churlish behavior toward a prospective daughter-in-law who was actually a guest in her house. The woman doesn't seem to have the slightest idea of how to behave in public. It is little wonder that most of her kids are an unmannerly lot of boors and barbarians.

Yes, I would say that there is clearly more than one "class" of wizarding pureblood. Molly's everyday conduct is every bit as overbearing, and much more underbred, than Severus Snape's.

But then Snape has pretty thoroughly reinvented himself. Molly clearly does not think such efforts necessary.



Molly

Molly might be on the side of the Light (which I have never questioned), and her heart may be in the right place (for which there is also ample evidence) but she is a blatantly *vulgar* woman. And a lack of family funds has *nothing* to do with that.

While her husband somehow is not.

Or certainly not on the same scale.

Just where *is* Arthur Weasley in all of this? Up through OotP Molly clearly treated him like another one of the kids in any number of respects, and she runs the Burrow to suit herself. And he stepped back and let her do it, without apparent protest. But has he actually been crowded out of his own household? Ma was quite successful in crowding my father out. Completely. But, then, I was an only child.

Is Arthur even still a genuine presence in his own home, despite the Ministry job and any Order duties that hypothetically keep him away from home for such a large percentage of the time? He has clearly never been the classic "ogre Daddy" who punishes children as a second career once he walks through the door of an evening. And he clearly *likes* his kids. Or at least he likes his oldest two kids. But does he really have that much influence on any of them? We can see traces that he once at least had some. But none of his four younger sons have ever been seen to gravitate to his company or make a point of asking his advice. Indeed, the longer you stare at Arthur and Molly Weasley, the more they begin to look like Mr and Mrs Bennett. (And Percy could stand in for Mary Bennett any day of the week.)

In any household which Molly rules, Arthur and his Muggle gadgets are exiled to the garden shed, (you will take note that Harry has never particularly noticed any recognizable Muggle



Molly

gizmo inside the Weasley house). None of the kids seem to have been given the leeway to respect their father's fascination with Muggle tech, or even the job that supported them all, let alone share that fascination. I really do not think that Molly is anywhere near as friendly toward Muggles as her husband is. (One recalls that upon our first glimpse of Molly Weasley she was complaining aloud about the number of Muggles to be found in one of the main Muggle train stations of London.) She probably fully agrees with her husband and the Ministry that Muggles should not be subjected to nasty wizarding tricks. Not the least because such tricks would *call attention* to wizards. But I'd say that Molly's preferences regarding Muggles is to leave them strictly alone. In fact just to avoid them.

Arthur is a broader-minded, more tolerant and laid-back person than Molly — who is clearly a pepper-pot. And his kids do seem to at least listen to him and sometimes to remember a bit of what he has to say. We've had at least a couple of "my father says" moments from Ron and the twins over the years. But all of those statements were made some time ago. We've heard few of those lately. The only young person who now seems to ask Arthur's advice is Harry.

The twins consider Arthur's fascination with Muggle tech, and his Dream Job, spectacularly dull and I don't get the feeling that any of his kids seek out his company when he gets home — except, possibly Ginny, who is probably the apple of his eye, (assuming that Molly allows Ginny out of her sight) and even that is not made obvious.

At least Charlie and Bill do seem to be genuinely fond of him, and both spend more time with him than with their mother, when

Molly

they are actually around. And there is some residual respect for him from Ron on a personal level. But Arthur doesn't seem to have instilled all that many of his more "liberal" attitudes into his younger sons. Or his daughter.

Perhaps most tellingly; while I *could* readily imagine a teenaged Arthur Weasley cheerfully taking the piss out of Percy at his most pompous, I cannot envision even a *very* young Arthur Weasley spouting the sort of blatantly male-chauvinistic venom that we hear from Ron and the twins on a virtually daily basis, and yet we get no indication of what Arthur thinks of such remarks when he hears them spouting it. But I do notice that he doesn't make a point of correcting them.

I'm referring to the sort of pond scum the Weasley boys spew in every direction as a casual matter of course. If you aren't sensitized to that sort of thing it *might* fly right past you. But I lived through the '70s and I *am* sensitized to it.

What I mean, specifically, are the unprovoked slurs leveled at any and all females (simply for being females) that the twins gratuitously throw into whatever commentary is in progress without compunction — and with some presumed degree of hostility, or they wouldn't find it so necessary to do so.

All three of Molly's youngest sons seem to display the assumption that they have the right to make such comments and that any female within earshot has to just sit there and take it. These comments universally invoke the "brainless/useless female" stereotype and are the kind of comments that people have been calling men to account for since about 1972. And this simply isn't the kind of talk that seems to be widespread throughout the rest of the wizarding world, either. I've never noted it coming from

Molly

anyone who wasn't a Weasley male (or a Gaunt, or Tom Riddle himself). Not even from one of "those nasty Slytherins." For example: Malfoy is perfectly vile to Hermione Granger regarding her Muggle parentage. But he has never had a single word to say against her for being a *girl*.

Or for being a swot, if it comes to that.

The simplest demonstration that comes most readily to mind regarding the twins is the CoS "Must be a witch" quip thrown in by one of the twins when they first see that the new DADA teacher's required texts for the upcoming school year are, essentially, the complete works of Gilderoy Lockhart.

Which automatically floats the assumption that only a *female* teacher would assign nothing but books by an author who trades all too openly upon his charming smile. Despite the fact that at this point in the story they cannot be aware that the books are all lies, and that their author is a fraud who has not actually performed any of the exploits that he takes credit for in them.

As a matter of fact, that gibe turned out to be based upon false reasoning on all points and it was rapidly shown to be such. But the Twins still made a point of *saying* it, never retracted it, and I very much think they did it primarily to get Molly's goat. If called on such a statement they will whine at you that the comment was "just a joke." Of course it was. It was a mean-spirited and *hostile* joke. One of a series of many.

It is mildly interesting to note that they *do* sometimes seem to do their very worst in this regard in Molly's hearing. But, by almost every indication, even when Molly isn't around, those boys simply *do not* respect females, and they seem to openly resent Molly throughout books 2-5.

Molly

And Molly must take the lion's share of the responsibility for that. They did not learn that kind of conduct from Arthur. Although, like Mr Bennett, he does nothing to check them.

It is interesting to note that in book 6, once Percy, their chief rival for Molly's attention, is safely out of their path they suddenly seem determined to purchase her affections and, perhaps, to obliterate his memory, by making a parade of their success and showering her with expensive gifts. And the project seemed to be succeeding. Which was not in the least to Molly's credit. Or theirs.

On Molly's part, from Book 2-5 she did not act or speak to the twins as if she respected them, either. In fact, she already does not do so from very first time we met the family in Book 1. That Bill, by contrast, seems to be able to good-naturedly shrug off Molly's attempts to bully him with little effort suggests to me that when the kids didn't yet outnumber the adults in the household, Arthur may have had a greater degree of input.

Of course I also take the PoV that Molly and the twins all three simply have bullying natures (Ron, Arthur, and Bill, otoh, do not. One can't really tell about Charlie), it's just the way they all are, and there is clearly a battle for dominance in progress. This is not a popular reading, but there's been nothing in the series that would call it into question. Percy is another one who likes to throw his weight around, and he didn't get that from his father, either.

And, once Harry actually noticed her, we started getting loud and clear indication that this determination to dominate is also shared by Ginny. Stand by for catfights ahead. We haz them.

For several years I had a lowering suspicion that the Weasleys may ultimately have been intended to serve as a demonstration to Harry of one or other of life's nastier lessons. With a conclu-

Molly

sion that would probably be due entirely to their own actions. And I thought we were all going to have to be witnesses to the train wreck.

But no, the Weasleys merely ended up offering us yet another example of the fact that death (at least in Rowling's hands) is arbitrary, random, and unfair, and serves no purpose whatsoever.

Arthur and Molly do serve as a rather ominous cautionary example of how very poorly Dumbledore's supporters seemed to be prepared for another round with Voldemort, and the kind of tactics he was likely to employ.

Arthur's long indulgence in his own interests in all its good-hearted venality have not served his family well, and for all his intelligence, humanity and apparent understanding of principles he does not always seem to be able to keep his focus on the task at hand, or even to recognize when obliging a friend or accepting reciprocal favors may be stepping rather far over the line of any kind of professional ethics.

Molly has bullied her children unmercifully in the service of common wisdom but she has not truly prepared any of them for a coming conflict of the style in which they are likely to actually become engaged, and far too many of the conventional "wisdoms" she has bludgeoned them over the heads with for years are appallingly shallow. Or outright false. And her children recognize this fact, and dismiss her accordingly.

Inside the structure of the series I always thought we were going to have to watch Harry come to the conclusion that he can't skate through his own unique situation by trying to be "like" anyone that he has ever met or admired. Which means that even if the consequences of their actions are not fatal, he was going to

Molly

have to see the consequences of the different methods that all the people he looks to for guidance use for coping with the world, and realize that these methods would not work for him.

(Instead, he sat around on his hands, waiting for divine inspiration and honing his "hero's" facility for falling backward into the correct solution without explanation.)

But I really did think I had *reason* for my original conclusion. He had already seen that Sirius was hopelessly impulsive and that his temper got him into situations that were avoidable. But I'm not convinced he's learned the accompanying lesson even yet.

He had already been given a brutal lesson from Umbridge that Molly's exhortation to follow the rules doesn't have all the answers, and that there are people who can and will manipulate the rules to their own advantage and to others' cost.

I thought that he would probably also see that Arthur's good intentions and self-indulgence are no protection in a shooting war.

But it did certainly look to me as though for all that Molly's first career as a baby tamer started out very well, it's ending in a bit of a shambles. She needed a new job, and the one she was opting for seems to be that of designated mother-surrogate to Harry Potter.

It's not a bad call. Harry, not being one of her own kids, gets all the benefits and few of the disadvantages. Although by the age of 15 even Harry was less enthusiastic about the idea than he had been only a few years earlier. And there is more than one way to set oneself up as the mother-in-law from Hell.

But, I admit it. It's personal. I do not think highly of Molly Weasley..

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I have to say that I found it a rather interesting piece of symmetry in GoF that saw both Molly Weasley and the only son who has fully embraced her formula for living, both led up the garden path by their absolute confidence that the people in positions of authority are implicitly to be trusted, obeyed, and/or believed. Molly ends up deliberately trampling the feelings of a 15-year-old girl who had never harmed Molly or any of her family — and moreover, a girl that Molly really ought by that time to have known well enough to be able to summarily dismiss the ill-natured lies she read printed about her in WITCH WEEKLY.

And Percy, clever boy, actually managed to help expedite Voldemort's return.

Of the pair of them, I am far more inclined to cut Percy some slack, seeing that he is neither as old nor as experienced as his mother. But he was widely expected by the fans to pay a heavy price for that mistake before the end of the series. Nor was he spared any degree of embarrassment at the time. At the end of GoF he had been called on the carpet at the Ministry for not having detected the fraud. But that is nothing to the position he was in regarding what steps he ended up taking next.

In Fudge's Ministry, at the end of GoF, the official policy on the return of Voldemort is that the reports of the Dark Lord's return are a hoax.

Never mind that the Dark Mark was publicly conjured over the World Cup campgrounds the previous summer. Along with a blatant case of Muggle-baiting in defiance of the Statute of Secrecy. Even if Lord Voldemort *is* gone, you would think that the Ministry might conclude that some of his old followers are

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getting ambitious. Add that however exaggerated, the Potter boy had certainly witnessed **something** alarming.

But the Ministry has long been infested by pureblood supremacists and even some of Voldemort's actual Death Eaters were currently employed there — in key positions. And all of those Death Eaters probably *now* know that Percy not only accepted a promotion that had been engineered for him by Voldemort himself, but that he made himself officiously useful to Voldemort once he got it. He has established himself as a perfect dupe.

Never mind that after having (literally!) lived in the boy's pocket as his pet rat for more than half a dozen years, Wormtail would have known exactly the best way to word those communications from "Mr Crouch" to rouse the least possible suspicion. Finding Percy Weasley already established in Crouch's Department must have looked like a gift from the gods to Voldemort and Pettigrew. When offered, Percy gleefully took the promotion arranged for him, and (being Percy) you know that he threw his weight around the office on the strength of it.

The Ministry *also* appears to have recognized in Percy Weasley, a perfect dupe. From the Ministry's PoV, every Ministry employee who has a kid at Hogwarts knows that Albus Dumbledore believes Harry Potter's report of Voldemort's return. And Dumbledore heads the Wizengamot, which oversees the running of the Ministry.

And they *still* aren't having any.

One of Rowling's real strengths as a plot designer (at least over the first half of the series) was the ease with which she made it possible to trace a secondary storyline unrolling itself in

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the background of the main one. It is a pity that she abandoned this device when it came time to write the final couple of volumes, but she no doubt had other concerns (or was just plain too burnt-out) by then.

Upon examination, the campaign to diminish Albus Dumbledore's influence on the Ministry was probably drafted out all the way back in PoA by Lucius Malfoy for his own benefit. It is now fairly evident that over the course of Year 3 Lucius must have re-established connections with various former DEs currently employed at the Ministry, and, it is all but certain, he also managed to win Dolores Umbridge over to his own viewpoint that Albus Dumbledore's influence upon Minister Fudge was both something to be deplored, and something to be counter-acted. Or just possibly vice-versa. I cannot believe that Madam Umbridge had ever approved of Albus Dumbledore's influence over her employer. And, after losing his place on the Board of Governors, Malfoy already was bearing a grudge.

By the opening of GoF, Malfoy was ready to move his campaign against Dumbledore into its next stage by diminishing Albus's credit in the press. He was also ready to advance his own personal influence among the remnants of Voldemort's organization by rallying them together and deliberately taking the lead in a bit of Muggle-baiting in a public place.

It's not impossible that this demonstration was also staged for some purpose not so obvious. Perhaps not unconnected to media coverage in the international newspapers, which would have been on-site for the sporting event. But I won't speculate further on that possibility here. It's a good deal too uncertain.

In Year 5, Minister Fudge, with the backing of Lucius Malfoy,

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his own staff, and those members of the Wizengamot who opposed Dumbledore, chose to stage a "palace rebellion" and challenge Dumbledore on the issue of Voldemort's return, using the groundwork laid by Rita Skeeter in the DAILY PROPHET and other ww publications over the previous year. Indeed, Fudge manages to not only see Dumbledore removed from his position as Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, but to see him removed from the Wizengamot altogether. The shock waves from this cataclysm also see Dumbledore removed from the position of Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederacy of Wizards. Flush with victory, it remains only for Fudge to remove him from the position of Headmaster of Hogwarts as well, and Dumbledore will have no power base from which to operate. Or so he believes.

And then, as I'm sure Lucius Malfoy and Madam Umbridge were quick to assure Fudge, his position as Minister would be safe! Fish fuzz.

I think that if Dumbledore had not chosen to give Fudge enough rope to hang himself, you could not have pried him loose from any of those positions with a crowbar.

On the night of the Third Task of the TriWizard Tournament; June 24, 1995 it was made abundantly clear to Albus Dumbledore that Cornelius Fudge had been thoroughly "got at." He was no longer willing to cooperate and he was certainly no longer to be trusted. Dumbledore may be the most politically powerful wizard in Great Britain but he knows damned well that just removing Fudge from office is not going to solve the underlying problem and it isn't going to root out whoever has subverted him.

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Aa to the events of Year 5, we also have to factor in that Dumbledore really does seem to like to catch any wrongdoer in the act before witnesses before he will take any action whatsoever. This time he seriously miscalculated. Dolores Umbridge was a good deal more ruthless and less principled than he had anticipated, and he ended up having to give way, in order to protect the futures of a couple dozen of his students, not the least of them Harry Potter.

He did manage to prevail eventually, but it took all of Year 5, and it was a close run thing. Ultimately it was way too expensive. And it was probably already too late.



And, in the middle of all this, we have young “Weatherby” who has already gotten called on the carpet over matters regarding his former boss’s disappearance and reported death.

Anything that Percy does next, any action, in any direction, is going to make his reputation or his objectives look dodgy to somebody. With Dumbledore no longer in a position to be overseeing Ministry business, if Percy takes a stand counter to Fudge’s he is very likely to get shunted into a dead end position in the Centaur Liaison office, or, even more probably, to get himself sacked.

And Percy has spent most of his life preparing for a career within the ranks of the Ministry. He’s never considered *anything* else.

If he supports the Ministry’s official position, it is obvious that it will create a breach with his family, half of whose members already appear to want no part of him, and who all blindly support Albus Dumbledore in everything. Percy always sup-

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ported him too. Up to now. But, looking back, he’s no longer quite sure why. It’s not like Hogwarts under Dumbledore has ever been anything like as *safe* as everyone tries to claim.

Although he probably even considered the matter, it would probably be obvious what message he would be sending to Voldemort’s supporters, too — assuming that the DEs give a damn about a blood-traitor’s kid like Percy Weasley. And there is nothing whatsoever to indicate that they do. I think we may be able to safely dismiss any consideration regarding the DEs from Percy’s motivations. I also rather suspect that we can probably dismiss any considerations regarding Percy Weasley from the DEs motivations, too. Yes, he made himself useful to their master, once. So what? I think that small fry like Percy Weasley were completely off the Dark Lord’s radar (Post-DHs it is clear that the DEs couldn’t have cared less)

And, inside the Ministry, it is a bit too late for anonymity, he has already shown up on everybody’s radar. Everybody knows that, properly handled, he can make himself useful. To break with Dumbledore’s supporters and side with the Ministry will be tantamount to volunteering for exploitation. (At this point in time, to support the *Ministry*, however, is still a long way from supporting *Voldemort*. This is a distinction which appears to have escaped many younger readers.)

But, as I say, we had already been told that Percy has, for years, pinned *all* of his ambitions upon success within the Ministry’s ranks, with his mother’s full approval and active encouragement. Indeed, it was probably originally her idea.

And it really ought to surprise no one that supporting the Ministry is the path that he took.



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But you have to wonder why he was offered it. Yes, Arthur seems to believe that the position was offered so Percy could spy on his own family. But does that really make the slightest bit of sense? Who does Arthur think he is that the Ministry cares what he does in his private life? He isn't *known* to be a former member of the Order of the Phoenix. He *wasn't* a member last time. Sirius Black told us as much directly, assuming that we can ever believe anything we ever heard from *him*.

What makes a lot more sense is that Percy was offered that promotion to get him into the Minister's own office, for the purpose of reporting on *Harry*, who was widely known in the Ministry to be closely associated with the Weasley family. It would hardly be difficult for the Ministry to have set a watch upon Arthur right there in the Ministry offices, if they cared two pins about Arthur's doings. They didn't need Percy for *that*. But Percy could have been trusted to report what outrageous stories Potter might be spreading in the Weasley household. Percy's promotion was offered him at the end of June, or the beginning of July. Harry had spent a part of each summer with the Weasleys for the previous 3 years. Percy's moving out of the family home immediately after accepting the promotion immediately derailed this "cunning plan" if that is what Fudge's office had in mind by promoting him.

It wasn't until another 3–4 weeks later that Umbridge got her bright idea to settle the whole problem once and for all by sending out a couple of Dementors.

Percy was easily and understandably misled, once. But unless he has deliberately blinded himself, which is certainly not beyond his capabilities, he cannot be unaware that the

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last thing that a truly well-intentioned Ministry would do after the Crouch debacle would be to give him *another* promotion — to the Minister's own staff at that. To all appearances, Percy deliberately sold out.

But can one really blame him?

I mean really?

His family, upon the whole, has never fully valued him, while his employers may have convinced him that they do. And I really do not think that they are lying. An employee like Percy would be a valuable asset in any office. He was probably the most competent person on Fudge's staff, even if he has no imagination, and is still rather short on actual experience. Particularly once Dolores was off in Scotland making a nuisance of herself at Hogwarts. And, as for the people with whom one must needs associate; frankly, I do not really think there is all that much to choose between Madam Umbridge and the twins. And Umbridge, at least, does not treat Percy as a target.

She may even remind him of his mother.

And maybe, just maybe, I owe Molly a small apology regarding my low opinion of her ability to teach her kids the skills they need to get ahead in the world. Because a lifetime of deferring to Molly will certainly have taught Percy everything he needs to know to get whatever he wants out of Dolly.

In his place, I'd be tempted to go ahead and change my name to Whetherby, treat my mother to lunch once every few weeks, and forget I'd ever met the rest of that nest of vipers.

Still; appearances can be deceiving.



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However, by the opening of OotP I gather that it was all intended to be very much as it appeared. Percy chose the promise of professional advancement over his family's prejudices. And this in itself does not make him an enemy. The Ministry itself is *not* the enemy. It was just not equipped to solve the problem of Lord Voldemort. And was headed by a fool who had been all-too-easily convinced that such an action was not necessary.

Eventually, the Ministry is going to be stuck with the job of trying to put wizarding Britain back together again once somebody else does, however. And when that day comes, the Percys of the world will be invaluable.

Although I did suspect that he had a personal part yet to play in the story arc. And that part might be played inside the Ministry. It was anyone's guess what that part might be. It could have gone in any number of ways.

For example: given Percy's past experience with Crouch, wouldn't he be the most likely candidate for realizing that someone in the Minister's office is under Imperius, this time? We cannot be sure that this isn't what actually happened, either.

And for that matter; while Percy idolized Crouch, and managed to both like and respect Fudge (who treats his staff very well), I don't really get the feeling that he was particularly happy with Scrimgeour. Scrimgeour trampled right over Percy's feelings in pursuit of a public relations coup and Percy would have good cause to resent that. And we have no input whatsoever about what he might have thought of Thicknesse.

But we just haven't been given enough wool here, to really manage to spin a satisfactory theory from.

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Frankly, what I really think we have here is the residue of an abandoned plot element.

Rowling has since confirmed that the character who "got a reprieve" was Arthur Weasley. Arthur was supposed to die in the middle of OotP. Nagini was supposed to have killed him.

She claims that she just couldn't do it since he was the only "good" father in the series. Well it's a nice excuse. But I think she couldn't bring herself to do it because then people might have felt sorrier for Ron and his siblings than they were supposed to be for Harry. No one in this series was *ever* allowed to steal Harry's thunder (until Neville did it without even trying — possibly while Rowling's attention was elsewhere).

I don't think Arthur was supposed to have died immediately. I think that there might have been an emotional deathbed reconciliation planned between Percy and Arthur shortly before Arthur departed this life (Percy would have shown up at St Mungo's and the trio would have withdrawn to give them some degree of privacy and wandered up to the closed ward).

I think that Rowling ultimately and lamely transposed this scene to a pre-death-by-falling-masonry reconciliation between Percy and Fred. Which came out of nowhere, was completely out of character, out of balance, and just plain stupid.

Percy might very well abase himself and take all blame for the falling out with his father, but Fred and George were always the aggressors in their falling out with Percy, and for Percy to have to take full responsibility for that breach while the twins didn't even apologize was deliberately unjust. Partic-

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ularly since Fred's gratuitous death came out of nowhere, completely unexpectedly, and Percy's presence had nothing to do with prompting it.

We also still have another obvious artifact of the original storyline in Bellatrix's taunting of Molly in their final confrontation. "What will happen to your children when I've killed you? When Mummy's gone the same way as Freddie?"

Excuse me? Is that *supposed* to sound idiotic? Because it *does*.

Doesn't quite have the same swing as; "When Mummy's gone the same way as Daddy?" does it? Let alone that there seems to be little reason for Bellatrix to have even figured out that it is Fred who was dead at that point. *She* doesn't know the Weasley twins. For the record: I am pretty sure that the only reason that Fred died at all is so that Bellatrix could taunt Molly about *something*, and doing it over George's ear would have been pathetic.



But it is an interesting exercise to try to extrapolate what the original Percy arc in the story would have been had Rowling held to her original intentions.

It may have even included some form of The Redheaded Pimpernel theories which have been around ever since OotP.

I'm not convinced, but Rowling never explained how Percy knew to contact Aberforth Dumbledore the night the balloon went up. Or why Aberforth would have contacted *him*. His boss, Pius Thicknesse was suddenly off to Hogwarts, but this was the in middle of the night. He hadn't suddenly been pulled out of a meeting.

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Rowling had also never even established that Percy knew who the barman at the Hog's Head *was*. So just what was the connection there? Had Percy already been reporting the Ministry's doings to Aberforth? On whose account?

Yes, I do think that Percy would have been reconciled with his father in OotP.

I do not think he would have reconciled with the twins. Not then, anyway.

But that is an issue for a different essay at a different time. Or maybe not worth bothering about at all.



As for Molly; Molly's conduct in GoF was inexcusable. That Molly was able to unhesitatingly believe the kind of spiteful charges against Hermione Granger — a child that she *knows personally!* — let alone charges that were printed under *Rita Skeeter's* byline — yes, the *same* Rita Skeeter who has been sniping and sneering at Arthur (whom she dubs "Arnold") for years, absolutely boggles the mind.

But then Rita also publicly calls Molly's eldest a "long-haired pillock," leading Molly to try to bully the boy into letting her cut his hair — I'd say that Molly Weasley and Petunia Dursley have more in common than either lady would altogether appreciate having pointed out to them. To me this says that either Molly has long ago switched her brain off altogether and has become an automatic nagging machine, or she was always one of those Gryffindor Old Girls in the fine old Lavender Brown airhead tradition. (For which conclusion there is some support. Molly wobbles, forsooth!)

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...Or that at some point Rita managed to zap Molly with a gullibility hex when she wasn't looking and it's still in place! Rita's consistent pinching at the Weasleys has clearly been going on for a long time, and it has a thoroughly "personal" feel to it. Let's face it, Arthur is just too small potatoes to be a target on the basis of his position in the Ministry.

And, for whatever reason, one recalls that it was only after Hermione managed to shut Rita up that Molly suddenly stopped reading the DAILY PROPHET because of the lies it was printing.



As to Molly's nagging; so far as regards her own children, by this time there is probably just no pleasing her. By year 4 the twins don't even try (by HBP they've reopened their own negotiations with her — on *their* terms). Ron just plain avoids her as much as he possibly can, and for years Ginny seemed to be sleep-walking through a life brightened only by dreams of Harry Potter.

It has since been revealed that this last impression at least was a smokescreen. Little Miss Weasley is a clever little undercover operator on her own account, whose skills may be of considerable use before the series is over (ETA: No, not even that. She doesn't even seem to get any say in naming her own children). And Percy, poor boy, is the only one out of seven who bought Molly's package, without question, and just see where it got him.

And in the meantime, Voldemort, via Pettigrew, is in a position to know rather a lot of the Weasley's weaknesses.

There is an ugly pattern forming here. And I don't like the look of it a bit.

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We keep forgetting that Voldemort has access to up close and personal information on *all* of the Weasleys.

We've already seen that in addition to the Weasleys' demonstrated talent for getting in the way, Voldemort and his followers have repeatedly made a point of finding the Weasleys *useful*. Let's take a look at the record shall we?

Item: in Book 2 Ginny gets taken over by the Riddle Diary, opens the Chamber of Secrets, sets a Basilisk on her schoolmates and nearly trades away her life in exchange for reincarnating the Diary Revenant.

Item: in Book 3 we discover that Voldemort's servant has been living under their roof, as a part of their family for a dozen years.

Item: in Book 4 Voldemort and Peter Pettigrew hoodwink Percy into getting him to facilitate Voldemort's return. Fallout: Percy finally separates from his family. I really didn't think he would be coming back. Not as long as Fred and George were a part of it. I certainly wouldn't have.

Item: in Book 5 Arthur is bitten by a snake and was supposed to die of it.

Item: in Book 6 Ron is poisoned, having been put into harm's way by ingesting a love potion manufactured and sold by his brothers. The DEs find Fred and George's shop a useful source of tools and materials enabling their infiltration of the Castle. Bill is savaged by a werewolf as a result of that invasion. Note: the twins' do not bear direct responsibility for either Ron's poisoning nor Bill's disfigurement, but their products and marketing methods played a major contributory part in both incidents.

Item: in Book 7 George loses an ear. Dead Fred. Who knows what the original intentions were.

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And if we backtrack, Book 1: Ron suffers a head injury by getting swept up in the “Truth according to Harry Potter.” And in Book 4, he ended up at the bottom of the lake, unconscious. Percy was present for *that* debacle.

In retrospect, I’m not *that* surprised that Percy tried to advise Ron to distance himself.

As a final note on the twins; I’d say that regardless of what their defects of character might have been, they certainly rushed in where Ollivander feared to tread. Ollivander appeared to have voluntarily taken himself and his stock out of the equation. At least, we *suspected* that this might have been voluntary, although there was a nasty uncertainty about it, given that we had no indication that he ever did so during Vold-War I, even when it appeared to the average wizard-in-the-street that Voldemort was winning. This uncertainty turned out to be well-founded.

But, given the amply demonstrated willingness of the DEs to employ the Imperius Curse. The twins, otoh, to me looked like they were just all too recklessly and conspicuously “out there” being just as conspicuously *useful*. Can you really suppose that the DEs wouldn’t eventually get the idea that it might be nice to have exclusive access to their products?

Or, with the possibility of Imperius in the equation, how long before the items sold to the Ministry might start developing “defects.”

At least until the Ministry fell, and the issue was moot.

Well. It turns out that Rowling didn’t choose to go there. Didn’t choose to go anywhere like it. Might have been interesting if she had, but I suppose that there never was that much chance of it. She’ll kill them, or maim them. But she won’t dis-

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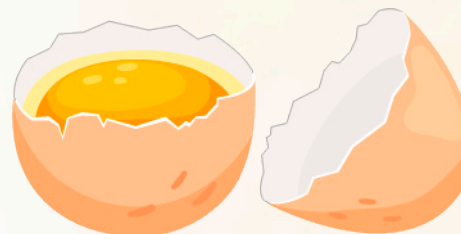
grace them. Just about none of her comic characters have ever had to actually deal with payback.

Still, I was beginning to think that perhaps the fans who blindly were predicting that it would be Percy who ended up helping the DEs were about 180 degrees off-target. And, whether the twins’ recruitment would be exactly voluntary or not, given their general viciousness, determination to humiliate others, and callous disregard for others’ safety, they would certainly have made outstanding DEs.

Evidently the current DEs, who are a very small-minded lot, were more blinded by the twins’ blood-traitor upbringing and apolitical outlook than I expected them to be.

And as an additional, wild-card possibility, I also thought that given the demonstrated policies and practices of the Ministry of Magic under Rufus Scrimgeour’s leadership on the subject of being seen to be “doing something” about the threat of Lord Voldemort, there was every chance for Percy Weasley (who had always gotten mad, and never gotten even) to finally be handed the opportunity for some payback by way of seeing his twin tormenters into Azkaban for some undetermined time.

In his place, with the Dementors no longer in charge there, I might have been tempted to take it.



Regarding Potterverse People

A Look at the Marauders As Well

While we're at it, let's take a closer look at the Marauders, too. Particularly the ones we've actually met.



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Once upon a time, I really did think that I owed it to the collection to include an essay on James Potter.

Unfortunately, I've never really felt much inclined to comply. Despite his son's fixation on the man, I can't really see James Potter as being particularly worth my attention. After all, it's not like we're ever going to have to deal with him.

However, given that he does appear to have been the "glue" that stuck that particular pack together, it makes sense to examine their overall gestalt with a bit more attention.



Rereading the eavesdropping scene in PoA a little while before the release of OotP, I belatedly found a that number of the details about that conversation were striking me as distinctly strange.

In the first place; it suddenly seemed extremely odd to me that Remus Lupin's name *never* came up, not even *once* in that conversation. Despite the fact that he was supposedly the fourth wheel of the Marauder's "vehicle," and despite the fact that he had recently returned to the school and was teaching there, as a colleague of three of the five people speaking, and, consequently, given the context of that conversation, wouldn't you think he might have been someone who could presumably be on their minds?

Particularly given that all of the three had been on staff throughout the Marauders' school days, and at least two of them are assumed to have been members of the Order of the Phoenix as well (we still can't be sure about Flitwick) and Minerva at least would have known of Lupin's condition. But



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for all the notice Remus gets in that conversation, he might as well never have existed. All things considered, that's fishy.

Second; I suddenly noticed that Cornelius Fudge seems to have known an awful lot about the Potters' private lives — despite the fact that was only a Junior Minister in the Magical Catastrophes Department back when they were killed. And it doesn't sound like this was something he only learned later. (*A Junior Minister? Only a dozen years ago? Just how old is he, and who was his patron? Someone must have expended a fair amount of influence to see him into the Minister's spot.*)

Was he a family friend of the Potters'? Did he pick this up in the course of the investigation of the wrecked house? Or was he one of Dumbledore's contacts in the Ministry and picked it up from the scuttlebutt within the Order? The Ministry and the Order did work together during that period, so he didn't need to be a member of the Order to have been in contact with it. But, then why is he informing Order members like Minerva and Hagrid — who one might expect to already know — of his knowledge now? Also fishy, although probably a fish from some other sea.

Most likely he was just trying to impress Rosemerta.

Third, and most to the point; everything that anybody seems to say about the relationship between Black & Potter; "double act," "inseparable," "you would think they were brothers," etc. really didn't sound at all like the kind of friendship that opens itself up to outsiders. Or, at least, not to outsiders on anything close to the same level of involvement as that of the two *insiders*.

In fact, what this relationship sounded most like, even back

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in Book 3, was Fred & George Weasley — and their occasional pal (and distant third) Lee Jordan. This comparison turns out to have registered with Harry as well, although we are not informed of this until he was a couple of years older, in OotP to be exact.

And it was at this point (shortly before the release of OotP) that I abruptly realized that if we are playing at the usual fanon game of shadow ghosts and generational parallels, in many ways it was not Remus Lupin who was Black & Potter's "Lee Jordan."

Remus was their *Neville*.

So just how did Black & Potter (and Pettigrew) treat their "Neville"?

Well? How does the current Trio treat Neville? It all depends on when you are talking about them and which one of them you are.

If you are Hermione, you take him under your wing and do what you can to help him get through the worst of his difficulties. You (probably) also tend to mildly bully and order him around for his "own good"

If you are Harry, up to the end of Goblet of Fire you gently brush him off when you can and are rather distantly kind to him when you can't. That a change was in the offing was telegraphed toward the end of year 4, and in Order of the Phoenix, we can see that Neville had finally begun to venture out of his shell. But while he certainly had Harry's underlying trust, insofar as any of the other students did, he still had a long way to go before Harry would automatically turn to him to get his input on matters of importance. And, by the end of the series, Nev-

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ille so totally outclassed Harry in the Leadership stakes that the whole issue had become moot.

And, if you are Ron, up to sixth year you mock him behind his back.



Taking this back 20-some years;

James pitched in and tried to find a way to help Remus through the worst of his difficulties. Not necessarily because befriending a Dark Creature was the kind of thing he'd been brought up to do, but it was a challenge, y'know?

Sirius leaped into the project with both feet — chiefly on James's account — but also because the project WAS such a wonderful challenge. And, besides, having a friend who was an honest-to-ghod Dark Creature that even his family would have been wary around (and loud in their disapproval of) was just So Cool.

Peter took a deep breath, and waded in as well, so as not to be left behind.

And Remus was eternally grateful.

But you will notice that until the Patronus coaching started bringing up the sludge at the bottom of Harry's memories, and the "ghosts" of Peter Pettigrew and Sirius Black started walking the halls of Hogwarts castle, Remus Lupin was putting as much distance between himself and "the old days" as possible.

For the longest time, I was not convinced that the relationship between those four friends had not gone rather sour after the werewolf caper, at least from where Lupin was standing. Before James Potter died, anyway. He already wasn't a bit

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comfortable with his "friends" discussion about his condition in the hallway after sitting the OWL, was he? Even though he was the one to play court jester and start making jokes on the subject.

Five years later, James and Sirius had suspected Remus of being the spy in the Order, after all. I'm not convinced they were all that subtle about those suspicions.

And for that matter; by that time Remus may have *been* spying. On the werewolves. For Dumbledore.



Another thing that I abruptly realized, and this was well before we were offered that trip into Snape's Pensieve, is that If the Padfoot/Prongs dynamic was anything like that of the Weasley Twins, the function that Remus and Peter performed in the Lee Jacobs position was pretty clearly split between them. Remus was the friend one turned to for quiet observations and conventional advice. For ego stroking and a willing second in one's most destructive mayhem there was no one more up for the task than Peter.

It also finally occurred to me that although James may have been the apparent leader of the pack, he may quite frequently have been playing George to Sirius's more reckless Fred. Raising the question of whether Severus Snape was simply Black & Potter's Percy?

With the revelations of OotP and HBP behind us however, and most particularly that of DHs, we have a bit more context to work from. Snape was not their Percy; not even close. He was not the "nearest and easiest target." He was also never some

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“shining example” to which they were compared and perpetually found wanting.

Severus Snape was the competition.

Or, *James’s* competition, anyway.

He was also a clear and present threat to their intentions. He was very much in their way.

And in DHs we also finally got the initial confrontation between them on the Hogwarts Express. It shifts our perceptions at least slightly.

Rowling seems to have left a fairly major factor completely out of the equation when she gave us the Prince’s tale. She was working inside a very narrow focus by then, but still. It’s enough to make one wonder whether she was trying to whitewash 11-year-old James (hard to believe since she seems to have gone out of her way to paint him as an irredeemable jerk every other time he shows up).

Point: we see an encounter between Snape, Lily, James, Sirius, and some other rowdy boys on the Hogwarts Express.

Even though Lily is determined to blame Severus for her falling out with Petunia — when *she* was the one who opened up her big yap and threw her knowledge of Petunia’s letter to Dumbledore in her face — she does still stick up for him against the boys who had been content to ignore her as she wept in the corner.

Next we get the Sorting, and see her Sorted into Gryffindor.

Then we leap *all* the way to 5th year with her nagging Severus for trailing after his own housemates, who she dislikes. (Admittedly, she probably has good reason to dislike them. They don’t sound likable. But she is completely overlooking the fact that they know where he *sleeps*.) The werewolf caper has (inexplica-

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bly) already taken place.

Excuse me, but we have one hell of a gap there (“Mind the Gap!”). Rowling has hustled us right past something that cannot have been an irrelevant factor over the course of years 1–3 or thereabouts.

James and his friends all seem to have come to school still solidly in the “Girls, ew.” phase of their social development.

Just what is likely to have been their reaction to having that little oddball of a Slytherin’s little “girlfriend” in their own common room? (They may have known where she slept, but they couldn’t get there.)

I think Lily had damned good reason to have formed alliances with Mary MacDonald and the other girls in Gryffindor. And I *don’t* think that she escaped James’s less than friendly attentions until he suddenly took it into his head to start crushing on her.

Even if I do think that James was probably enough of a braggart and blowhard that his “Don’t make me hex you, Evans.” was probably just flourishing. He probably *had* hexed her in their lower years. And she had definitely hexed him back (both James and Sirius were wary of Lily’s wand in the confrontation that we saw). She and Severus may well have hexed him *together*.

But we are completely missing the arc of *that whole story*.

At a guess, and taking Harry as a model, I would expect James’s turning point to be around the end of 3rd year, maybe 4th. And Lily’s status — which was already high in Gryffindor House just for standing up to him — only rose higher, as her girlfriends started realizing that he “liked” her. Which is probably when they started trying to talk her into dumping Snape, who they saw as holding her back.

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Lily wasn't about to capitulate to James on their say-so, but they did manage to convince her that Snape was a geek and a loser, and that if she hung out with him she might catch looser cooties. And eventually she started to believe them.

And it had blown completely past us that on that first sighting, Snape had shown up on the Marauder's radar as a long-haired sissy whose best friend was a *girl*.

And that he *let* her boss him around, too.

Someone who wants to write Marauder era fic could string together a decent, if somewhat tragic tale of a Light that failed there.



To digress: sometimes, the apparent shallowness of Rowling's imagination astounds me.

She gives us the Prince's tale. In which she depicts young Snape positively worshiping the ground Lily walks on — and Lily tacitly agreeing that well he should. And then she makes pronouncements in post-release interviews that Lily "might" have grown to love Snape romantically if he had renounced the Dark Arts. But she never shows us a damned thing to suggest or support it. And indeed what she *does* show us actively contradicts it. She seems incapable of depicting a Lily Evans who did *not* regard Snape with at least some degree of contempt and resentment, *whatever* the circumstances she chose to depict them in. It's almost as if the strain of attempting to show Lily behaving like an authentic *friend* to Snape was somehow disloyal to her memory.

The only conclusion I can draw is that to her they are all

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puppets and that even if grown Snape is sort-of real to her, young!Snape isn't. And Lily of any age *certainly* isn't.

I rather like the fanfic author Arsinoe de Blassenville's take on it (in her fic 'The Golden Age') where Snape's portrait informs Harry that he gave Harry only as many memories as he needed to for Harry to accept the message, and that he had kept all the good memories for himself.

Because Rowling, seems to have omitted to tell us *anything* of the real story.



According to Sirius Black, Snape had shown up at Hogwarts knowing more hexes than half of the 7th years. And let's all just keep in mind that one of those 7th years was allegedly "cousin Bellatrix."

I think that even if Bella and Co. actually were still in school when the Marauder cohort showed up (and that is by no means certain, since nothing we have ever been told by Sirius Black hasn't later turned out to be faulty in some manner) that probably this statement could have been just a little off-kilter in that Snape probably didn't actually know more hexes than the upperclassmen, but that he certainly knew a few different ones.

For the very good reason that he had invented some of them himself.

With Book 6 we now had clear evidence that Snape, unlike Hermione, was not merely a precocious little swot able to duplicate any textbook example he was shown. This was a highly resourceful and truly creative scholar with a real knack for the underlying theory of at least two of the school's core subjects.

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And an impressive level of control over his magic for a child his age. He was more than capable of showing other First years up.

(Of course, keep in mind that in HBP we were dealing with the über-Snape who really only seems to have existed in that one volume of the series. *And* unless by; “knew more curses than half the 7th years” Sirius was just talking about *swearing*. Given what we are all invited to believe regarding Tobias Snape, I *might* just about believe *that*.)

From where Black & Potter — who by all accounts were highly “inventive” types themselves — were standing, this was unacceptable.

Particularly given that the kid who was showing them up was also a scrawny, grimy, unprepossessing little commoner with a lower-class accent and a Muggle address (and, let it not be forgotten, a best friend who was a girl). From where they were standing this was just SO wrong, on so many levels.

Remus Lupin’s mealy-mouthed excuses to Harry, some 20 years later, that Snape was jealous of James’s Quidditch prowess, now comes across as highly disingenuous. Yes, I do think that jealousy was probably a fairly strong motivation in the ongoing Snape/Marauders standoff. And it probably went both ways. But I very much doubt that the jealousy was all, or even mostly, on Snape’s side. It also begins to sound very much as though Quidditch prowess was the *only* thing that James Potter had going for him that Snape might reasonably have been jealous of. At least in their early years. And Sirius Black seems not to have even had that.

Moreover, Snape, having been sorted into Slytherin, allegedly was almost immediately taken up by exactly the people who

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Black & Potter were most solidly aligned against; which is to say, Sirius Black’s *family*, and their circle.

And, really, by all accounts Snape was lacking any redeeming factors of physical beauty, charm, “couth,” or background to ameliorate the whole gawky, grubby, unprepossessing package. He had nothing of his own but his wits, his skills, his nasty disposition, and his clever best friend. And it was a couple of years before James started coveting *her*.

And ambition. Oh yes. Plenty of that. And he was prepared to put all of it to use. Sybill Trelawney calls him “a pushing, thrusting young man,” and even though Rowling has now painted him a Follower rather than a Leader, I don’t think ambition was something that he simply grew into as he got older.

And he soon had allies, or what passed for it. Fairly influential ones, at that. Just not necessarily ones in his own year.

He never had a chance.

If they were not to completely lose face, Black and Potter couldn’t afford to let him get away with showing them up. Severus Snape had to be shown his proper place!

Only; he just wouldn’t *stay* in it.



In retrospect, it is pretty clear to the reader that Sirius Black was the kind of personality which always needs to be “against” something. And his first line of opposition was always his own immediate family.

And given the general feel that we get from the Blacks’ home, and its whole Dark Arts-sympathetic ambiance it is hard not to see the younger Bellatrix as having been a general favorite

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of her aunt and uncle's. It is also difficult not to suspect that, being some 5–6 years older, Bella was not infrequently “put in charge” of young Sirius and exhorted to keep him out of trouble.

Given what we know of both Bellatrix and Sirius this sounds like a recipe for disaster.

And Sirius was as every bit as good at holding a grudge as Snape is. And James Potter appears to have followed Sirius's lead on this matter without question. Indeed, James was soon probably given good reason of his own to dislike cousin Bellatrix (they were also cousins after all), and to be determined to thwart her.

I really am convinced that if there ever was a foundation for those alleged “narrow escapes” from DEs that James supposedly had they were originally laid in Hogwarts, and were a direct result of letting himself be drawn into Sirius's ongoing war with his immediate family. Now that Rowling has endorsed the 1960 birth date it is difficult to see any way in which he and Sirius would have had *time* to have made such dangerous enemies otherwise.

And, in their first year, Snape allegedly was unwary enough to let himself be taken up by Bellatrix and her crowd.

Well, to be accurate, it was probably someone else in her crowd who took him up, probably over her objections. I doubt she ever had any use for the little commoner either. Not up to the standards of the Blacks, thank you. The Blacks, after all, *have* standards.

I'm pretty sure that they dropped him once they felt they'd picked his brains. And they probably didn't do it gently. But by then the damage to his reputation was done.

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And, I suspect that as Snape gradually ironed out his accent and began to mimic the airs and graces of his “rôle models,” and generally adopt some variant of the classic “Slytherin manner” this collected him no brownie points in the eyes of such top-drawer scions as Sirius Black (one of the *Blacks*, you know) and James Potter — both of whom remembered perfectly well the grubby little working-class “tyke” who had arrived on the Hogwarts Express their first year. Like much of the silver-spoon brigade they would happily deal with yobs who are content to remain yobs, but they despise social climbers. Particularly successful ones. And by Year 2 Snape had probably connected with Malfoy, who may have been no friend of Bellatrix's (a rival, in fact) but was no improvement, either. And, later, neither were Avery and “Mulciber.”

For that matter it doesn't seem to have impressed Lily altogether favorably either. She may not have been a card-carrying member of the silver spoon brigade, but it's easier to pose as Lady Bountiful when the yobs are *obviously* yobs.

And once Snape made peace with his Housemates — which is no more than she had done herself, although she doesn't appear to have chosen to remember that — and started tagging along after them, he was no longer slavishly following *her*.

Maybe it wasn't just James who had a jealous streak.



I have to admit that at the end of the series I feel sincere pity for JK Rowling's Severus Snape. He's a pathetic figure. Fortunately he isn't the fandom's Severus Snape. With DHs, Rowling has served up enough of a travesty (or, more properly, a

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detailed synopsis masquerading as a novel) that the whole production is easily dismissible by any fan who finds it anywhere from disappointing to flat-out unbelievable, and yet does not choose to simply leave the fandom.

But, really, it's bad enough that Snape was used and abused by both sides of the conflict. Then to have also had it thrown in his face that his hard work to preserve Lily's child as an atonement, was all in vain since the child was being raised to be martyred "at the proper time."

And just what was his reward to be? Not from Tom, Tom actually delivered on *some* of his promises. After all, advancing Snape's position suited Tom's plans. No, I am talking about his reward from Albus.

He was to end up with temporary ownership of the Deathstick. Which someone would be certain to murder him for. Sweet. Without ever clueing him in on that fact, of course. As if ignorance would be any protection. A pity no one thought to point out that Snape may have killed Albus, but he hadn't disarmed him. If so, Tom might have kept him around long enough for him to see the end of the affair. But, ghod forbid that Harry should have to actually change his mind about Snape and make some kind of amends to the man while he *lived*. (Btw; didn't Arthur Weasley live on for at least half an hour after his snakebite before he was even taken to St Mungo's? And *he* still survived. To say nothing about Harry who was *also* bitten by that snake.)



And his precious Lily, unconsciously, but I suspect deliber-

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ately, sabotaged Severus as well.

We've probably all had that kind of friendship at some point in our life. It's usually a situation where your parents have a friend, and the friend has a kid about your own age, and the two you are just supposed to be friends automatically, regardless. As if friendship were somehow hereditary. It's the "Proximity Rules" theory of friendship. Never mind whether you actually *like* one another. That's immaterial.

So you hang around together, and you get along okay, You make allowances, and you call yourselves friends. But you aren't, particularly. Friendly acquaintances, perhaps. It certainly doesn't go very deep.

Except; Lily was Snape's *only* friend. And he desperately *needed* a friend. And it's not like he had any basis for comparison.

On Lily's side... well, Lily had magic. She had a *lot* of magic. She had a remarkable degree of control over it, too, and she *loved* having magic. And Snape was the only person who gave her a loud, clear message that having magic was *okay*. He was the only other magical child she knew, and she was bright enough to know that just having magic didn't mean that she had to be like *him*.

I rather think that a "nice" little girl like Lily would have found a young Snape odd, and — probably — somewhat disturbing. But he was the *only* wizard around, and she found the association both helpful and informative. She also probably felt more than a bit sorry for him over what was clearly an unhappy and unsupportive home situation that she could recognize *wasn't his fault*. And even though he was odd and aggressive and tended to be a bit nasty, he wasn't ever aggres-

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sive or nasty to *her*. So she was always reasonably kind to him. Few people were.

Of course, once Lily got to Hogwarts, and made other wizarding friends, and she learned that yes, he really *was* odd, even for a wizard, and that other *wizards* found him disturbing as well, he gradually became an embarrassment. For that matter, once he started ironing out his accent and some of his manners, he became even more of one, since it was harder to excuse the association as his just being a charity case that she felt sorry for. The only other explanation for keeping him around which would have held up is that she *liked* him. And, when more closely examined, she really *didn't* particularly.

But a “properly socialized” young girl doesn’t just dump a childhood friend simply because he isn’t “cool.”

He has to give her a reason.

So she nagged him. She nagged him about associating with the very people that he was more or less *forced* to associate with, people who knew where he slept, and who would have probably hexed him in the dormitory if he broke ranks.

If he had obliged her by counter-attacking, and turning it into a shouting match, that would have been the end of it, *and* the friendship. But he didn’t. He just kept trying to *justify* himself and draw lame comparisons to the people *she* was around every day. She had probably been fishing for an excuse to wash her hands of him since some time in 4th year. He didn’t manage to give her one until the very end of 5th year. By that time she probably resented him like mad.

A true friend wouldn’t have dumped her oldest chum over his once having called her an ugly name in a quarrel with someone

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else. (Did Rowling mean to imply that he had known her for close to 7 years and they had *never* gotten into a name-calling quarrel? Because that’s how it comes across. Just how likely is *that* from what we’ve seen of *either* of them?)

No. Not unless she was looking for an *excuse* to do that.



I — as of 2024 — feel that I am duty bound to insert yet another file into the folder. Which may shed some light on some of the generally bad behavior on display.

I recognize that this is long overdue, but I am still a bit reluctant to comply, given that it entails matters regarding an actual person, rather than just a fictional construct.

But it is fairly widely agreed, across fandom, that one of the main (although not the only) sources contributing the character of Severus Snape was the late John Nettleship, a chemistry teacher in Rowling’s secondary school.

A fairly large number of Mr Nettleship’s characteristics and mannerisms were sufficiently recognizable from Rowling’s depiction of Severus Snape for his family and friends to identify the “homage,” and for the fandom to have grabbed onto it to the point that Rowling was ultimately forced to admit it.

This being the case, there are numerous articles posted regarding Mr Nettleship online. I will not quote from any of them extensively, but I will direct you to one of them, written by a long time fan, Whitehound, whose tribute was approved by the subject’s surviving family.

http://members.madasafish.com/~cj_whitehound/Fanfic/A_true_original.htm

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It is clear that the gentleman had any number of quirks. Indeed, a fair number of Mr Nettle's associates regarded elements of his behaviour as "odd." The author of the article suggests the possibility of borderline Asberger's syndrome.

And, I reiterate, sufficient elements of his behaviors and mannerisms were easily recognizable to his family members and associates in the depiction of Severus Snape.

There is no question but that either one of these individuals were "high-functioning," but if such a possibility is admitted, high-functioning does not equate neurotypical.

Nor would it be the only example of such in the Potterverse. Ghod knows, my suspicions regarding neurodiversity in the Dumbledore family has been online for the last dozen years.

However, if this possibility is accepted, it adds a tremendous amount of context to everyone else's behavior toward Snape.

And of course the wizarding world makes no allowances for neurodiversity.



If so, Lily was out of her depth, and finally gave up.

That in itself is nothing to disparage her for. And it's not like she was being given any help from any of the adults at Hogwarts, either. But being determined to place him in the wrong before shoving him away in public, and refusing to accept an apology for what he knew he *did* do wrong was manipulative and unjust.

But if she *had* accepted his apology he would have continued clinging, and she was just plain done with that.

And, if we accept this reading, the Gryffindor brat pack were handed a knee-jerk reason to target him from the get-go,

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regardless of what House he would have been Sorted to. That it was Slytherin just made it worse.

And the Slytherin elite saw any number of unwelcome or embarrassing disadvantages to having him, until he started showing sufficient potential to be worth exploiting.

The staff, at best, might have regarded him as prematurely "eccentric." But I tend to doubt that there would have been much "at best" in evidence.

Obviously any individual theorist or fanfic writer's mileage will vary.



Fanon tradition until fairly late in the series, held that "the Marauders" were a team of four under James Potter's leadership.

Post-OotP it began to look like fanon tradition was ever so slightly off the mark.

Another fanon tradition that it occurred to me to call into question is the assumption that Dumbledore openly favored them. At least more so than he did Severus Snape.

Did he? Did he *really*?

I certainly cannot see much convincing evidence of it.

He was certainly willing to throw Sirius Black to the Dementors forever and not even *try* to discover whether he had really murdered Pettigrew and all of those Muggles. He readily and publicly claimed to believe the Ministry's contention that Black was capable of betraying the Order and the friend who was as close as a brother.

With that in mind, I'd have to say that he couldn't really have known those boys very well, and just maybe he didn't particu-

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larly *want* to know them any better than he had to.

Post-DHs we realize that Albus Dumbledore was a pretty cold, and selfish specimen. If, that is, we *accept* DHs.

And they *were* bullies, after all. *Popular* bullies to be sure, but, still, bullies. Albus Dumbledore may take bullies in his stride, but he doesn't necessarily approve of them.

And he really doesn't take a lot of interest in the school's students as individuals. Or, not until Harry came along. Harry has always been an exception.

What is more, it occurs to me that it is damned odd that, apart from Madam Rosemerta, nobody, from drinking buddy Mundungus Fletcher right up to Dumbledore himself, ever questioned that Sirius Black was capable of that kind of treachery. Even people who must have known them better than Dumbledore did. I think that — just maybe — they all knew a loose cannon when they saw one.

And even after arranging for Black's escape in PoA, if you go through everything Albus ever said about Sirius Black (and there isn't much) over the course of PoA, GoF, OotP, and HBP, and you look at it with any degree of detachment, you will see that there really isn't the slightest indication that he held Sirius Black in any degree of affection, for all that he acknowledged Black's importance to Harry, and was scrupulous to give the man whatever credit he was due.

Well, hey, he does as much for Cornelius Fudge and Rufus Scrimgeour. That's just good manners.

And I suspect that if we took that back to square one and Book 1 and applied the same sort of detached view to everything that Dumbledore has ever said regarding James Potter we

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might discover the same scrupulous determination to give credit where it was due, and not the least scrap of personal approval.

I am beginning to think that we have been projecting other people's enthusiasm, and Harry's willingness to view his father through rose-colored lenses upon Albus Dumbledore and assuming a partiality which did not actually exist.

Which, until we learned about Albus borrowing the invisibility cloak and not giving it back, or Bathilda's tales of Albus and her nephew Gellert, I thought might explain James's otherwise rather unaccountable reluctance to accept Dumbledore's offer to be his Secret Keeper.

It may still have something to do with it.



Hagrid, on the other hand, clearly thought very highly of James Potter. But then Hagrid has a pronounced partiality for "interesting creatures." Hagrid also has never, over the course of the entire series, had one bad word to say against Severus Snape (not even after the events of HBP, or certainly not in our hearing), and he had an exaggerated veneration for Albus Dumbledore. It is quite possible that Harry unconsciously drew a straight line between two points and assumed that Hagrid's opinions would have reflected Albus's. The readers certainly did. I no longer think that plays.

Filius Flitwick and Minerva McGonagall are coming from a somewhat different direction. Both of them can easily be deflected from the main issue of character by their admiration of good spellwork. And Black & Potter, whatever else you might care to say about them were capable of excellent spellwork.

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For all that both Flitwick and McGonagall were perfectly well aware that the two were troublemakers their cleverness went a long way toward excusing all.

And none of them would have been willing to tell tales out of school against James to Harry. What would be the point? Doesn't the poor boy deserve a father he can be proud of?

Lily, on the other hand, seems to have been deeply valued by all of her teachers, without reserve. Perhaps it was Lily who was the one who was all but universally beloved. People may have considered James still a bit of a jerk who was chiefly welcomed on her account.

But I think that we may be making a big mistake, when we assume that Dumbledore's obvious favoritism toward Harry was foreshadowed by a similar favoritism toward James. Because we really have no real evidence to support it. We have all been taking something for granted which I think perhaps we ought not.

No, Sirius was not expelled for his part in the werewolf caper.

Dumbledore probably never knew the whole truth of what that stunt was all in aid of, but he could hardly have overlooked the fact that there might have been a history of being out-of-bounds on the nights of a full moon, on all of the Marauder's parts. Still, he couldn't necessarily prove it. And in the course of the incident it was clear that the kids had become familiar with one of Dumbledore's secret arrangements which he had no wish to see revealed to the public. And from where Albus was standing, Dumbledore was very much *obliged* to James for having managed, at some risk to himself, to prevent an outcome that would have ended in an incident that couldn't have been hushed up. And anything like an expulsion would have



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raised unwelcome questions.

But I'm not convinced that James was actually rewarded for it, either. We've never been directly told that he was. Not even that he was awarded House points for that daring rescue. Unless James was awarded exactly enough House points to make up for the ones that were stripped off Sirius for mouthing off about the willow, so that nobody ever noticed. But that's another fanon assumption. It's not in the books.

And, yes, he eventually allowed James to be appointed Head Boy. We've been invited to assume that the appointment was James's reward. I cannot say with any certainty that it wasn't. But I really do suspect that James might have become Head Boy simply because he was the best candidate for that particular year. When you stop and think about it, as Deputy Head, Albus had allowed Tom Riddle to be appointed Head Boy, too. It's not necessarily a mark of personal approval.

And Lupin had already demonstrated that he wasn't even an effective Prefect.



As for James's undisputed leadership within the group; it now looks like there may have been a good deal more complex undercurrents mixed into the interpersonal relationships between James Potter and his cohorts than fanon tradition can readily accommodate. And a lot of their known behavior becomes a degree easier to understand if we suppose that it was not really a quartet, but a pair, plus one, plus one.

We don't really get the impression that Peter and Remus spent a lot of time hanging out together when James and Sirius were off



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on some devilment of their own, do we? And, James, for all that he was the acknowledged leader of the group, only led as long and as far as was subject to Sirius's approval. It was Sirius who led from behind (Slughorn would have recognized *that* method easily enough, it's rather a specialty of Slytherin House), leaving the chief responsibility to James — who was perfectly willing to shoulder it. And they all understood this without ever saying a word on the matter. Which makes sense of some of the more confusing subsequent actions of this group of Hogwarts friends.

For one thing, if James Potter wasn't the absolute and undisputed pack leader, as well as the brains of the outfit, Sirius Black's over-the-top declarations of guilt and remorse when we first meet him in the Shrieking Shack finally makes a degree of sense. Although you still can't say much for Black's emotional stability, he no longer comes across as an amateur tragedian indulging in an exaggerated sense of self-importance which reduces his friends' deaths to being all about him, but as a trusted advisor in anguish over bad decisions that have needlessly cost his followers their lives.

If James was not the undisputed leader, it also offers some explanation of why Remus was out of the loop. It had been *Sirius* who suspected Remus of being the spy — and what had been Pettigrew's contribution to that belief, I wonder?

And then once Remus started hanging out with the other werewolves...

It also makes a hell of a lot of sense as to another reason why the Potters did not take Albus up on his offer to serve as their Secret Keeper. They had never been favorites of his. Moreover, the four of them had thoroughly hoodwinked the Headmaster when they

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were no more than schoolboys, and they had not forgotten it.



This particular interpretation also offers us a hint regarding my first observation of that conversation between the three teachers in the Three Broomsticks.

Remus Lupin was not mentioned in connection to the Black & Potter show because, in the first place, he was always a little outside their charmed circle of two. And, in the second place, apart from his medical condition, I suspect that the staff were inclined to dismiss him as being merely high average, both intellectually and magically. A likable child. Nothing out of the commonplace.

This interpretation, if nothing else, adds a little additional depth to our reading of Remus's pointed kindness to Neville Longbottom in the face of Snape's publicly demonstrated antipathy. Neville is another child who is generally passed over as unremarkable.

Neville has a couple of superior advantages of character over Lupin, however. Remus admits himself to be singularly lacking in the ability to stand up to his friends. And, indeed, every time we meet him over the course of OotP the impression of his weakness in this respect increases. He ends up coming across as a classic "co-dependent" facilitator. And, although this perception of weakness was somewhat toned down in HBP it was back in spades in DHs.

Neville has already amply demonstrated that he does have the quality of being able to stand up to his friends, along with a good deal more social maturity in purely social situations

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than either Harry or Ron seem to have — at *any* point in their development. One can pity Remus, very easily. But his inability to bring any degree of influence to bear upon his friends, even when he can see that they are indulging in self-destructive behavior (as Sirius was throughout OotP) has cost him, and them immeasurably. It may well have contributed to costing them their lives.



It shouldn't really need to be pointed out, but I suppose it does: the Black & Potter show and their friends really were *not* the Trio. Most of the fans' early determination to try to re-cast them as the "Trio plus one" simply does not hold together. Indeed, if the seven of them, all at the age of 15, were to be dumped together in some AU limbo, you get the distinct impression that James, Sirius and Peter would have mocked the Trio unmercifully. All of that *earnestness!* And Hermione-baiting would become every bit as much fun as "getting" Snape, and not nearly so dangerous. Hermione, after all, is not actually vicious. And Remus would have pointedly looked the other way while they did it. And tried to excuse his inaction to them all privately afterwards. In hopes that they might still manage to *like* him.

Up to just about any point in canon everyone still seems to be being grossly misled by Harry's startling physical resemblance to James, assuming a similar resemblance of character. This is simply not an accurate reading. It is clear to anyone who went on the trip into Snape's Pensieve that Harry is just plain *not* like James. Harry is oh-but-definitely his mother's son (which is not

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altogether a recommendation). He only *looks* like his father.

That physical resemblance actually served an essential purpose to the plot in PoA. But it seems only to be serving as a distraction since then, and I eventually began to wonder just what it was consistently distracting us *from*.

I was unable to come to any solid conclusion.

The resemblance was certainly distracting *Harry*. Despite the fact that Harry has been told upon more than one occasion that it was his *mother* who defeated the Dark Lord the first time; the only time he ever asked a question about his mother in the first five books was in the aftermath of the trip into Snape's Pensieve, when he wanted to know whether his father had somehow forced her to go out with him. He still had yet to ask anyone anything whatsoever about her *character*.

Which is probably just as well, since she seems to have been a shallow and self-righteous little piece. Frankly, she and James Potter deserved one another.



Of course, it is obvious to the reader that at least part of Harry's reluctance to ask anything to the purpose was probably a long-term effect of having been raised by the Dursleys, whose motto seems to be "don't you dare ask questions." (I now rather wonder whether the oh-so-insisted-on Dursleys' blood relationship to his mother may have given him something of an aversion for the subject.) But, really, the kid was nearly 16, it was about time he asked somebody *something*. But, no. Instead, all anyone had to do was pluck the same old harpstring about how much he looks like his father and he was distracted from

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the subject for another whole book.

In Book 6, Harry finally crossed paths with someone who had nothing *whatsoever* to say about his father, but who was willing to shower him with glowing recollections of Lily. To this reader such a reversal was most welcome. It was well and past time we were given something to reason from, *there*. Harry, however, doesn't appear to have been especially willing to even stick around and listen.

Which also raises the question of just who, apart from Lily, was really involved in the "Slug Club" during the Marauders' Hogwarts years. Given their supposedly "exceptional" cleverness, and their family backgrounds, James and Sirius would certainly have been eligible for "collection" by Horace Slughorn. But I rather suspect that they might have been no more attracted to the prospect than Harry was. Certainly not given that Bellatrix had undoubtedly been a member in good standing in her day. And Malfoy *certainly* had been in his.

No. I think that not even with the added attraction of "Evans" would James Potter have considered becoming a part of the Slug Club. Or not, perhaps, until 7th year.

And if Snape was involved, not even then.

But that's another subject, for some other essay.



And in any case, where the modern Trio's disregard for the rules of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry tends to be an exercise in excessive "earnestness," those four Marauders of 20 years ago were not slipping out of bounds in an attempt to right great wrongs or discover essential truths; breaking the

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rules for the "greater good," as it were. They were a classic pack of reckless little scofflaws out for thrills and the opportunity to pull off some amusing mischief.

For all that they were probably an engaging pack of young rascals, they were doing nothing admirable. Having taken the necessary steps to assure their own personal safety, they were recklessly and irresponsibly endangering everyone else's. That of innocents' most of all.

It is clear to me that Remus Lupin, at least, heartily repents just about every hour of that behavior by the time we met him. Indeed, I would have said that it is Lupin rather than Snape who constituted the "eternal penitent" of the series — until we got force-fed the Prince's tale.

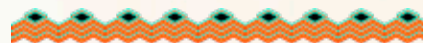
Lupin had at least something of substance to be penitent *about*.

There was certainly no air of penitence about current era Severus Snape. At least not in public. I'm still not sure he truly needs one. He certainly isn't the only person in the series to have made a disastrous mistake by the time he was 20. And *he* at least chose to try to do something to attempt to make up for it.

But even Lupin doesn't seem to have ever twigged to it that for all that he may look just like his father, Harry really isn't all that much like James in character.

And I was sure that eventually, certain people were going to have to realize that. And not all of those people were named Snape. One of them, in fact, is named Potter.

Not that Rowling seems to think it ever needed stating in plain language.



Man's Best Friend

This one covers a number of side issues pertaining to Sirius Black and his family. Interpretations which developed over a number of years.

Some of it is repeated, although not verbatim in the essay concerning the House of Black.



There's absolutely no question about it; Sirius Black was a highly attractive character to the readers. Especially on first acquaintance. And he remains one of the most compelling in the entire series. At least over the first two thirds of the story arc.

I have not the slightest hesitation about making that statement. Sirius Black fully captured the readers' imagination. Charming, yes, charismatic, yes. Brave, oh undoubtedly. I don't wonder in the least that a teenaged Harry Potter so deeply admired him.

But could you really trust him? As in *rely* on him? Was there any actual *substance* there?

More to the point, could you have trusted him *not* to get some bright idea after the big planning session is over, and all the communal decisions agreed upon, and then to foul up everything for everybody else by going off half-cocked on some "cunning plan" of his own? Had he even finally learned *that* lesson?

To all appearances, the answer to that is; no, probably not.

If anything became cringingly obvious to the reader over the course of OotP it was how woefully inadequate Sirius Black was turning out to be, compared to all of Harry's hopes and

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expectations of him.

But then we were *supposed* to notice that, weren't we? The whole point of that big reveal was that there really wasn't anyone that Harry could truly count on other than himself.

At second glance, it turns out that Sirius Black was also a harbinger of things to come. Of very unfortunate things to come, in fact. By which I mean Rowling's tendency to arbitrarily apply personality transplants at whim to her characters each time she reintroduced them. On reflection, Sirius Black seems never to have been the same man twice.

We could accept this easily enough between PoA and GoF. It seemed reasonable to suppose that someone who had been so close to the edge as the fugitive we watched Harry help to escape from Britain at the end of PoA might have managed to make at least some degree of recovery in the months before we saw him again mid-way through GoF.

But it was screamingly obvious that something had gone very wrong for Sirius Black between the point that we saw him in Hogwarts's hospital wing at the end of GoF and the opening of OotP about six weeks later.

Because it was only six weeks that had passed between those two points for him. Not three years as it was for us.

In fact, by the time I had finished working my way through Order of the Phoenix, I was seriously wondering whether there might have been a genuine thread of inherited mental instability running through that whole family for the Dementors to have worked upon. By the time we meet her, Bellatrix Lestrange was certainly exhibiting every single trait that had ever caused the fans concern about her cousin Sirius over the

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"three year summer" just past, and when you factor in the behavior of the portrait of Madam Black, I mean really, what else *can* you think?

And let us not forget Madam Black's (we do not know how many times removed) cousin Araminta, (not shown on the Black family tapestry sketch — or at least not by name) who was actually out lobbying to legalize Muggle-hunting, at some point in the last 150 years!

While we're at it, neither is Narcissa Malfoy averse to enacting the drama queen's guide to living, and she doesn't have a recent stint in Azkaban to excuse her, either.



Plus; so long as we are on the subject of cousins, given that Madam Black's image was perpetually shrieking about the mudbloods, halfbloods and blood-traitors polluting the house of "her fathers," one was forced to conclude that the lady was probably an acknowledged member of the Black family long before she ever married into it. And just how long has that kind of thing been going on, too?

Well, the Black family tapestry sketch, released in February 2006, confirmed that Sirius Black's parents were indeed 2nd cousins. But it revealed no other obvious cousin marriages that we could recognize. Still, the Black family's degree of inter-relatedness with just about every 3rd wizarding family that we've ever heard of raises the possibility that some of the Black family spouses listed may well be cousins of some degree whose connection is to earlier generations of Black daughters, whose descendants the tapestry seldom names.



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And then, in 'HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE', Rowling went over the top and handed us the Gaunts. Who seem to demonstrate every one of the disturbing traits exhibited by the Blacks — all taken to about the Nth degree — in a classic illustration of the concept of "degenerate."

And who, like the Blacks, followed the practice marrying cousins and of naming half of their children after the stars in the sky. (Merope is one of the Pleiades.)

Which raises the question of just who the Gaunts — or maybe the Peverills who the Gaunts claim to have been connected to — considered worthy enough to marry when there weren't enough cousins to go around, back in the days before they lost their fortune and were still able to support their taste for grandeur.

Back in the days when other wizarding families still considered them "eligible connections."

Or... maybe celestial names — which are typically mythological names, so we can never be sure of the context — like botanical names, are just a wizarding thing.

But. Still.

You do have to wonder.



However, as long as we are on the subject, Sirius Black, man for all purposes:

There was one of those pop-psych books published in the early to mid-'80s called 'THE DRAMA OF THE GIFTED CHILD'. I never actually read the book itself, but the basic premise was paraphrased to me by a friend who had. Acto the summary I



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got, there is a type of gifted child who is so quick, and so good at reading other people's expectations that they become virtual mirrors, always reflecting back whatever the other, or series of others, want to see. This kind of individual spends so much time segueing from rôle, to rôle, to rôle, that they have no deep awareness of who they actually are. Only of whom they can convincingly "be."

I cannot speak with any authority regarding the more detailed picture explored in the book itself, but that capsule review is certainly sound enough to be able to recognize it when one sees it in action. Or at least to recognize it *eventually*.

Because I did once know someone very much like that. Despite the lady's obvious intelligence, there was no "there" there. It was rather disturbing actually, once you finally realized it. And that particular individual strung people along so deftly that a lot of them never did realize it. Very bright, very talented, enormous personal charm, but there was no "center." This lady could change rôles like most people change shoes. But none of the rôles were precisely "her." It was only on those occasions that she chose not to exercise that enormous fund of personal charm that the essential lack of a "center" became noticeable.

In such a case one cannot really make any clear statements about the individual's "underlying character." For you have never actually met it. What you see is only an impressive display of their network of coping mechanisms.

But the definition as stated above works very well when you use it as a yardstick to measure up any number of fictional people. For example, it works extraordinarily well, as

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applied to the adolescent Tom Riddle once he had entered the wizarding world. (It does not apply at all to the current Lord Voldemort, nor, apparently, to the young Tom Riddle of the orphanage, who had clearly never exerted himself to ingratiate himself to anybody.)

And almost as well for what we were shown of Sirius Black.

Not that it is a good idea to run away with that comparison. For two very bright children to have hit upon a similar method of coping with the world around them in widely different, but basically uncongenial, circumstances some 40 years apart in time, and worlds apart in situation, is hardly all *that* remarkable. And there is not the slightest evidence to support the assumption that two or more individuals with the ability to construct similar systems of coping mechanisms are remotely similar as individuals. For one thing, maladjusted and contrarian though he may have been, Sirius Black does not seem to be a sociopath.

What is more, while the basic coping style used may have been very similar, the results of their efforts were pretty widely divergent. As were their methods. To say nothing of their motives.



In addition to not being a sociopath, Sirius Black was also not a Legilimens. I suspect that he was possibly a *potential* Legilimens, given how seamlessly he was able to react to what other people wanted from him. But he appears to have never been introduced to that particular branch of magic as a boy nor trained to refine the skills that it requires, even though I believe he may have possessed them. By all indications, he did

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not know that legilimency even existed until some time after he had escaped from Azkaban and taken up residence in his family's home. I'm inclined to think that it was Remus Lupin who filled him in when Albus brought up the subject of teaching Harry Occlumency.

I suspect that Sirius "read" people more or less by instinct, not through any conscious or magical analysis. And he only bothered to read selected individuals, not everyone he met. And once he had read them, and classified them, he didn't bother to do so again. This was a mistake. People change.

From what we observed of Black's conduct — which we have to remember that we only saw after 12 years of up close and personal exposure to Dementors — he seemed far more wrapped up in broadcasting his own impressions and opinions than he was in reading and re-evaluating those of others. And, in such cases as that of Pettigrew, or Barty Crouch Sr, when he tried to go back and consciously interpret what he had previously observed — after the fact — his interpretations were usually likely to be incomplete, when they were not simply wrong.

But he did start out life with an instinctive ability to read others' expectations and desires, and like most children who have such an instinct, he used it to try to get, and to keep, the upper hand in his dealings with the world around him.

Which, of course, started with the dynamics inside his own family.



I'd also suspect that Sirius Black was the kind of child who accepted any good times as his due, but that, once thwarted, was an instinctive contrarian. Deliberate orneriness was his



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first response to being told "No," — or to getting a baby brother who diverted attention away from himself.

He was only about three years old at the time (adjusting the dates on the Black family tapestry sketch to comply with the information as given us in canon), so we should cut him some slack for that. But his family doesn't seem to have handled the situation with any kind of finesse. He rapidly figured out that he could get all the attention he wanted by doing and saying what he *wasn't* supposed to. And proceeded to do so.

His habitual response to his surroundings became a consistent and extreme reversal of whatever was telegraphed as desirable behavior. And his parents, who seem to have been a very rigid, narrow-minded couple already set in their ways when he was born, never figured out how to do an end run around this behavior.

The bottom line was that he learned that being a "problem child" got attention. Once established, this behavior pattern would have only solidified over time. He used that extraordinary instinctive ability to read what his parents wanted in order to give them back exactly the opposite.

This is just so obvious from everything that we were shown. And it all too soon was extended beyond merely dealing with his immediate family. It was eventually applied to all authority figures. If he was told "don't do this" He would immediately do exactly that. If his parents told him that a particular sort of person is beneath contempt, he would move heaven and earth to find exactly such a person to hang out with. And always as conspicuously as possible. His whole statement to the world was "You're not the boss of me!"



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It's little surprise that, despite his family history and expectations, he deliberately got himself sorted into Gryffindor. I very much doubt that Harry was the first child to put the Hat on mentally shouting "*Not Slytherin! Not Slytherin!*" It's also small wonder that he immediately struck up an intimate friendship with a boy from a family who openly abjured the Dark Arts. Yet who nevertheless turned out to be a 1st cousin, once removed, through their mothers. Yes, that's right. If the Dorea Potter on the tapestry sketch is James Potter's mother, she was also Sirius Black's great-aunt. Even though *well* downstream of canon closing Rowling seems to be trying to pretend she never actually told us that. (Well, in all fairness, she never actually did, *in canon*.)

I originally thought that in his first trip on the Hogwarts Express, Sirius had been stuck in a compartment with his cousins (*If* we are prepared to accept his statement that "the Lestranges" actually were still at Hogwarts at the same time that Snape — and he himself — were, then Bellatrix was starting her 7th year, Andromeda her 6th, Narcissa, probably, her 4th) and all of their friends who chattered on about Slytherin House and how it was superior to all the other houses, with the clear assumption that of course Sirius would also be sorted into Slytherin.

Upon which he became determined not to be anything of the sort.

Well, no. It turns out that Rowling went for the cheap and obvious there. He met James Potter on the train and they hit it

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off at once. It isn't even clear whether they were already aware that they were related, however distantly.

Black comes up at the beginning of the alphabet. Unlike Harry, Sirius wasn't being influenced by the fact that this, or that, or the other kid was sorted into any particular House ahead of him. But he knew his family's expectations that he join them in Slytherin, and demanded to be sent elsewhere. Most probably into whichever house that Bellatrix had been most contemptuous of. Until we got confirmation that he and James had already made contact and he knew of James's intentions to be Sorted into Gryffindor, it was amusing to think that he may have demanded to be put into Hufflepuff, and the Hat told him that Gryffindor would be a better fit.

And, as I have stated elsewhere, I am also fairly confident that it may have been Sirius who was determined to draw attention to Severus Snape, and effectively tagged him as the "appointed enemy."

And if he didn't do it immediately, he would have done it as soon as it was clear that Bellatrix's crowd had taken Snape up to pick his brain and learn his hexes. If James had already "ta'en a scunner" at Snape — which we now know is likely — Sirius was quick to egg him on.

Sirius, at his best, was very good at sizing other people up, even if he wasn't, in the main, the best overall judge of character. Because the fact of the matter is that he got things wrong. Repeatedly.



He got *obvious* things wrong. Severus Snape is not the only

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character we have watched blind himself with his own biases. Sirius Black was also an expert at it.

Point: He tells us that his parents were not Death Eaters, despite the fact that their politics were supposedly identical to those that Lord Voldemort claimed to stand for.

Point: he tells us that his parents threw every available knut into layering protections on their home over the whole time that Voldemort's star was rising.

And he never put 2+2 together?

He never asked himself why his parents — who supposedly agreed chapter and verse with Lord Voldemort, were doing everything in their power to protect themselves from him? Well? Who *else* were they hiding from? The Ministry? Hardly. They had connections to the Ministry.

And this would have been something that Sirius had to have seen them doing before he left home around 1976. Because he certainly had no real contact with his family after that.

He also never questioned that his parents would be pleased when his younger brother got roped into the DE organization. (Which he is almost certain to not have actually known about until after his brother's disappearance/death in 1980. His brother, after all, was still in school at that date.)

Does his parents' actual behavior *viv-a-vis* the DEs suggest that they would have been pleased?

It sure doesn't suggest it to me.

What it suggests to me is that Sirius's particular branch of the Blacks had some reason to feel a desperate need to avoid Lord Voldemort and his followers. With absolutely no way of determining who those followers were.



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And this much Sirius did realize, unconsciously. He describes their situation perfectly to Harry in OotP. He also had every reason to know that the world "isn't divided into good people and Death Eaters." And he also had no excuse *not* to know that a person can be the very worst sort of a narrow-minded pure-blooded prat *without* being a Death Eater. But he doesn't seem to have ever actually applied this awareness to his interpretation of the actions of his own parents.

His interpretation of his own family seems to have been limited to setting them all up as straw men and pushing them into a position representing whatever stance was directly opposed to his own.

Consequently we do not get any kind of an objective reading of any of the older Blacks. And we could certainly use one.

And, while Sirius may be our best *available* viewpoint, his is not a particularly *good* viewpoint.

For one thing, he doesn't seem to have understood his own younger brother's character at all.

And he completely dismisses that of his grandfather — who was the Head of the Family. And who outlived just about everyone else in the family other than himself!

Yes, that's right, Sirius Black's own parents, Orion and Walburga, were never the heads of the family at all. Orion Black's father outlived them both.

And all Sirius had to say of his grandfather is that he bought himself an Order of Merlin first class by giving a lot of gold to the Ministry.

I rather tend to suspect that there may be more to be said of the man than that.



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And while we are at it; where on earth did he come up with that fairy tale about stupid young Reggie who got roped into the DEs, got cold feet and was killed for it?

Because if Kreachur is telling the truth — and he was ordered to tell the truth, by his rightful Master (Harry by that time) — that is absolutely not what actually happened.

Even better; where did *Remus Lupin* come up with the additional information to support it?

Well, okay: theories 'R' us.



We have no reason to believe that the tapestry is not magical in nature.

Even if it was originally maintained by charms manually applied at the birth, marriage and death of each family member it is likely that some form of automation was eventually retrofitted in. Quite possibly this was an application of the same form of monitoring spell which was developed for the Hogwarts Quill in order to record the births of all magical children within its sensory range. (Suggesting that someone in the Black family back at the time, may have been involved in the Quill project. Yet more ties to the Ministry, there)

It automatically records the deaths in the family as well.

Well, *something* certainly does.

When you stop and think about it for a few moments you realize that this pretty much has to be the case. Walburga Black died in 1986, no one in the family lived in the house afterward



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apart from Kreachur, and yet the tapestry continued to record all the subsequent deaths in the family.

Even if old Arcuturus had paid a visit to the house, which he still owned, to record his cousin Pollux's death in 1990, his own death in '91 as well as those of his daughter Lucretia and his cousin Cassiopeia in 1992 have also been recorded. Either these deaths were recorded manually by their cousin Callidora Longbottom (whose death is *not* recorded on it) or the tapestry senses a lost connection and lists death dates automatically.

It's possible that it tracks marriages and descendants automatically as well, which is one of the reasons why those family members who are disowned get their names blasted off of it. The Head of the family doesn't *want* the tapestry recording those particular marriages and descendants. (Short-sighted of them.)

Bringing us to Reggie.

I rather suspect that one evening his death was quietly recorded on the tapestry for his mother to see the next time she looked at it. Or possibly his father, we never found out for certain whether Reggie outlived his father or not. But the fact that Reggie signed up with the DEs at all tempts us to assume that he did, and signed up after his father was dead.

Once that bombshell was deployed there would have been much (ultimately unfruitful) speculation of just what had happened to him. Kreachur was not asked, and he was not volunteering information.

I had originally believed that Reggie's announcement of having signed up with Lord Voldemort may have sent off a domestic explosion, leading to Reggie's discovery that his new Master was



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a halfblood, and any number of other possibilities which were well within the scope of the directions that canon might have taken us. And for that matter, such a reading is still not contradicted. But it is also possible that he kept the whole thing under his hat, and it was only after his death that his mother went through his room and found his Voldemort scrapbooks.

Walburga must have made a leap of intuition that her baby boy had gotten roped into the movement, leading to his untimely death.

And she would have told her father-in-law because, if Orion was already dead, Regulus had been the heir. And even if Orion was still alive at that point Reggie was *still* the presumptive heir. The *only* presumptive heir by her accounting.

But none of them knew the details, or the truth of the matter.

However, that would have left Arcturus in a quandary, since the only other living Black male other than his cousin Pollux, was Sirius, who had been disowned when he ran away from home some 4 years earlier.

I think Arcturus contacted Sirius and informed him that he was reinstating him as his heir — whether he wanted to be or not — he was the last of his name and it was his *duty*. And then filed the requisite paperwork with the Ministry to that effect.

Quite possibly at that point he had passed along the fact that Regulus was dead and that he had evidently gotten swept up in this Lord Voldemort person's nonsense. Which no doubt was what killed him.

Sirius spun a story together to make the facts fit.



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Remus was convinced, anyway.

sigh

Our problem with Remus is that he is just so *very* suggestible.

Put him in the parlor and let a **bang** go off in the street, and then tell him that there was a man with a gun out there, and the next thing you know he will be telling people that he saw the man with the gun and reporting where the bullet went.

Tell him it was a truck backfiring and he'll be telling people what company's truck it was, and what it was carrying.

His friends must have found this ability just so terribly useful back in their school days. All they had to do was spin him a plausible terrididdle and he would lie his head off to cover for them, with total sincerity, perfectly convinced that what he was telling people was the unvarnished truth.

For that matter, the fact that Regulus was still in school at the time he died opens up the possibility that the report of his death to the school may have set off any number of student rumors, and Sirius may have got hold of one of those. But we'll never actually know.



Sirius could certainly be charming as bedamned. We saw how he charmed his way right past Harry's defenses, and Harry opens himself up to very few people.

I think that Sirius probably charmed James as well. And made a preemptive strike against any Dark family associations that might work against himself in the future by providing James with an outside enemy who was "obviously" a fledgling Dark wizard that they could both oppose with impunity. To wit,



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one Severus Snape.

It didn't hurt that (in both their families' regard) Snape was a dirty little social climber of the very worst sort.

There may or may not have been any such potential family associations to have worked against Sirius. James turns out to have probably been connected to the Black family himself through his mother. Indeed, he was more closely connected to Walburga's side of the family than to Orion's, if the tapestry's Dorea Potter was his mother. Bella's grandfather Pollux, would have been James's own uncle. And her father Cygnus, his 1st cousin.

Pettigrew, who is probably rather better at sizing people up than Black — when he puts himself to the trouble to do it — fell into line immediately, despite possibly having had his nose put out of joint by any sudden transfer of James's attention from Peter to Sirius. And Lupin, who I suspect had already learned to project friendly reserve to all new contacts was probably every bit as charmed as James. For years.

There may have been a minor bit of jockeying for position between James and Sirius over their first year at Hogwarts, and a lot of jockeying between Sirius and Peter throughout most of their time there, but Sirius had far more invested in conspicuously making the son of a Dark Arts-opposed family his bosom friend than he had in being the pack leader, and he never considered unprepossessing little Peter any kind of real competition. Soon enough the mystery of why Lupin was called away every few weeks caught their attention, and everything settled into the basic pattern that continued for the rest of their Hogwarts years.



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But there was something “missing” there.

I suspect there probably had always been something missing there. We are still trying to get a grasp on a character which had probably always defined himself largely by what he was against, rather than who he was. Added to which, the Sirius Black we finally met was severely addled by his stay in Azkaban. And never got any sort of counseling to offset it.

And at least part of the deterioration between what we saw of him in GoF (when he was temporarily channeling his “wise counselor” mode) and when we next see him in OotP is perfectly understandable.

He's back in Azkaban. Albeit without the Dememtors.

In Azkaban you endlessly relive your very worst memories.

Okay, what were likely to be a 22-year old Sirius Black's worst memories? I doubt that he spent the entire 12 years *only* reliving the night he discovered the Potters dead and the morning that Peter Pettigrew (of all people!) tricked him, with humiliating ease, and left him holding the bag.

If that's what he even realized had taken place. I'm no longer altogether convinced it was.

Because, for all my determination NOT to underestimate Peter Pettigrew, I think I may have managed to do it after all.



It wasn't until February of 2007 that I realized what it was that we had all been overlooking since 1999.

And why Albus could point out that Sirius Black had not



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really acted like an innocent man.

He wasn't one. Not altogether. Or, not in his own reckoning, anyway.

Sirius Black believed that Peter Pettigrew was dead
He believed that he HAD killed him!

He may or may not have believed that it was whatever he had done that killed a dozen random Muggles as well, but he certainly believed that he had executed Pettigrew.

Executed. Not murdered. There is a difference.

That's why he stood there laughing and didn't resist arrest.
That's why he sat there in Azkaban for a dozen years.

Can you honestly believe that he would have stayed there for five minutes after he discovered that the Dementors couldn't recognize him when he was a dog if he had known that Pettigrew was alive, and running around loose?

He honestly believed that he had *killed* Pettigrew!



Let's go back and take another look at the night the balloon went up: This segment is also repeated in the "Abandoning Ship" essay which is concerned with Pettigrew.

DHs doesn't go into it. In DHs we only get a glimpse of what was allegedly in Tom's head that evening in 1981. Actually, it's far more likely that what we were shown is what was in Tom's head on the evening in 1997 when he was on his way back to Godric's Hollow in response to Potter having sprung the Bagshott trap. And that he is now thinking only of his own recollections and interpretations of what he now is convinced is what he *ought* to have done 16 years earlier. Not what had actually happened.

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Absolutely none of which lines up to what we already were told by Albus in canon (indeed, it so completely contradicts everything that Rowling had ever told us about that night, in any part of the earlier canon that one concludes that Tom has convinced himself of an entirely different scenario. In short, the whole interlude in DHs is an hallucination. We get no indication of what his followers were up to. But none of the rest of this is contradicted.

Let's try this on for size:

Godric's Hollow: Voldemort has killed James and followed Lily upstairs to kill Harry. Peter has followed his Master at a slight delay and is lying in wait for Sirius to show up. We do not see this in Tom's memory. But it was clearly always a part of *Peter's* plan that Sirius should die that night and be blamed for betraying the Potters. Voldemort probably approved it, too. That would have left his agent Wormtail in place to do further damage. The war wasn't over yet, after all.

The trap had already been set. Sirius had arranged to check on Pettigrew that evening. When he found Pettigrew gone, he was expected to hurry off to Godric's Hollow to check on James and Lily. He was supposed to run into an ambush at Godric's Hollow. Peter probably had expected him to Apparate, not spend a lot of additional time flying there on the motorcycle.

When it all went boom, Peter was stuck. I don't know whether the explosion that allegedly damaged the house was really that much of an explosion. Or whether there was even an explosion at all. The damage to the house could have been Peter's contribution to the overall confusion.

It seems to have taken a while for the emergency crews to

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show up. But there was enough disturbance to tip Peter off that something unexpected had happened. Even if only an unaccountably bright green flash and a sudden silence.

Peter ran upstairs, found a dead Lily, a live Harry, and *allegedly* no Dark Lord in sight. Just Voldemort's wand lying there. He panicked.

Peter had nothing against Harry. And even if Peter did know why Tom wanted the child dead — which isn't at all likely — Tom is gone, so that doesn't *matter* any more.

Realizing that if Tom is not there to protect him, he is now going to be hunted by *both* sides, he grabs Voldemort's wand and makes a run for it.

Well, now that we know the house is still standing he could have gone back for the wand at any time. But I still think he took it then, or it would have been confiscated by the Ministry. He probably later hid it in the Weasley's attic.

Indeed, he may have blown out the wall and vanished Tom's body himself, so that once someone *did* come, They'd discover an unsolvable mystery, and draw their own conclusions..

Once he gets to safety and calms down a bit, he realizes he's botched things in his panic. He should have stayed put, killed Sirius when he showed up, and "discovered" the bodies in the morning, (or let the emergency crews discover them) and continued to let Sirius be blamed for it all, as originally planned.

Although that would still leave at least one DE, his contact at the Ministry, who knows about him still at large. But in any case, he didn't do what he needed to do when he needed to do it. This won't work. He has to disappear.

So he thinks it over and moves the ambush script to Siri-



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us's own doorstep. He gets his props together (no one seems to be questioning where that heap of bloody robes came from. Animagi transform with their clothing — and their wands — and Peter was fully dressed when Sirius and Lupin forced him to change back in the Shack. Yet there was a heap of bloodstained robes at the site of his supposed murder.) He cuts off a finger, heals it, stakes out the area and takes his Animagus form, either complete with his props, or near to where he has concealed them. When Sirius finally gets home the next day, exhausted from his all-night search for Peter, Peter takes his own shape drops his props, yells: "How could you!" and detonates whatever it was he detonated, changes back and scampers into safety. He may have hoped for Sirius to be killed in the explosion, but he erred on the side of timidity and wasn't quite close enough.

Sirius tells us that his handle on sanity was knowing that he had NOT betrayed James and Lily. He doesn't actually say *anything* about not killing Peter. I think he believed he had. He believed that it was serving justice to do it — vigilante justice, but justice all the same — and he may have also believed that he *deserved* to rot in jail for having done it.

Which means that he didn't just stand there like a lump while Peter blew up the street. He had thrown *something* at Peter, at the same time Peter set off his own explosion.

Between the two of them, it's no wonder the street blew up! Peter may even have even had a good idea about what Sirius was likely to throw too. They'd been allies for years, and he knew Sirius's taste in aggressive magic. He may have taken some kind of specific protective precautions, and at least would have tried to be sure that his own curse was going to be some-



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thing Sirius would have thought that he was responsible for. What *else* is the point of faking your own death?

By the time we caught up to him in the Shrieking Shack, Sirius had had a year to figure this out, and the certain knowledge that Peter had survived. But I think he really *hadn't* realized that Peter was alive until he saw his picture, with the Weasleys, in the PROPHECY, the summer before. And then he knew that he had been tricked and was convinced that Peter was responsible for *everything*.



And as of 2024 another piece of the puzzle clicks into place. It's another element that no one has been taking into account. This one concerns Sirius Black's degree of sanity, and another contributing factor which may be distorting the issue.

Part of the problem is the lack of balance in the depiction of Peter Pettigrew, who is forced into human form, after being a rat for a dozen years, and is *remarkably* functional despite it.

Sirius Black has been a dog for a dozen years.

Indeed, given that the Dementors affected him noticeably less when he was a dog, he no doubt *trained* himself to think ever more *convincingly* like a dog. And escaping Azkaban hasn't changed that, for he is still *living* as a dog.

He's *still* thinking like a dog.

He hasn't been safe enough to try to relearn to think like a man.

Which has done *nothing* for his impulse control. Nor for his overall mental processes in general.



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And in any case; I suspect that quite a bit of the 12 years spent in Azkaban was mentally spent back in his parents' house. He has few happy memories of that house. And by the opening of OotP, he is trapped in it.

And by the time Harry joins him at #12, he is fully aware of that. Because no one lets him forget it.

He knows that he is in disgrace with the entire Order, and is effectively under house arrest. With Lupin parked there to keep an eye on him. And what is more, everyone in the Order that we see *treats* him as if he is in disgrace and under house arrest. (The Weasley twins and Snape even taunt him with it.)

He is there, under guard, to make sure that he *stays* exactly where Albus put him.

Albus enabled him to flee the country some 14 months earlier, and I think that Albus had advised him to stay away, to sit this end of the war out, and not meddle. Albus would see to it that he was exonerated once it was over. Albus wanted him OUT of the country and out of his hair. The *last* thing Albus Dumbledore wanted was Sirius Black in a position to mess with his arrangements. He'd definitely learned that lesson.

Instead, Sirius sneaks back into the country, against Albus's orders, and is faffing about Hogsmeade as a dog. I don't know whether we got any clear information in GoF as to when during the year Albus discovered that he had Sirius Black underfoot again. Black may have contacted him. Or Aberforth may have alerted Albus that; "that dog is back. Stealing newspapers." But Albus certainly knew about it by the night of the 3rd task.

So what was Albus to do with him, now that Black had demonstrated that he couldn't be trusted to follow orders, other

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than to park him at #12 where the rest of the Order would keep an eye on him, and hope for the best.

I mean, really, The Order of the Phoenix was not a new creation. It probably already *had* a headquarters. Albus just used his breech with the Ministry and the Prophecy scam as an excuse to move it into London and park it at #12 Grimmauld Place.

Unless, of course, their headquarters had been the house in Godric's Hollow. Which was possibly even Albus's *own* house in Godric's Hollow, loaned to the Potters as a sanctuary. The same house where his own mother and sister died. We were never told one way or another. But whoever owns it clearly doesn't want to use it. Or to let it be used. And, as a perpetual "war memorial," it won't be.



The whole screwup over the way the Sirius Black affair was handled in canon is one of those things which becomes far more comprehensible under one of the Evil!Albus scenarios. Even the Chessmaster!Albus reading can't quite make it play.

Yes, Albus already had good reason to hold a grudge against Sirius Black. He'd fouled up Albus's plans more than once.

And, yeah, I strongly suspect that at the time Sirius probably did make the grandstanding; "it's all my fault" speech, and may even have taken it to extremes with the; "I killed them (with my bad advice)" statement which would have been taken as a confession. The Sirius Black we met does have a tendency to take the stance that everything that happens is all about him.

But hustling him off to Azkaban without even a pretense of a trial smacks of ulterior motives. There is no way that that was

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not deliberate.

The reader, of course, is expected to believe that everyone accepted that it had to be Sirius, because Sirius was "one of the Blacks," and that no one could imagine that it had been Pettigrew. Which would suggest that Remus was off somewhere, with credible witnesses, and not in a position to have attracted suspicion.

Of course the fact that Albus — or someone in the Order — had allegedly already largely narrowed down the possibilities to the point that they were convinced that their spy was one of the Potters' associates, rather than the Longbottoms' or someone from any of the other groups, also contributed to that interpretation. The Potters' "group" simply wasn't that big.

Indeed, when you stop and think about it, it's far from unlikely that outside the of Marauders own little circle, James or Lily may *also* have been under strong suspicion by various of the other Order members, and were only removed from such suspicion by; a. having been the ones to be murdered, and; b. Lord Voldemort was defeated in the course of doing it.



One of my correspondents posed the possibility that if it was James, or more probably Lily, who was the one most under suspicion at the time, whether that might have contributed to the uncharacteristically harsh reception that Snape got when he turned up and told Albus that the Dark Lord intended to kill them. That perhaps Albus might have believed that this was an attempt to deflect suspicion from Tom's spies.

That reading... actually doesn't play half badly. Admittedly,

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the initial harshness might just possibly date back to the fact that Albus probably blames Snape every bit as much for the werewolf debacle as he does Sirius. He'd had *plans* for that educated werewolf.

But the harshness we were shown continues longer than what in itself would explain if Albus actually credits the information he's being given. Besides, one of the few qualities that Tom has in abundance which Albus lacks, is paranoia. For all that Albus knows that he has any number of enemies, it never seems to occur to him that any of them might be capable of doing him any real damage.

After all. He holds the Elder Wand.

It's glaringly obvious that *neither* of that particular pair of Leaders seem to actually trust their followers. But where Tom flatly doesn't trust their loyalty, and demands frequent demonstrations of it, Albus appears to be incapable of trusting his followers' competence. Given the caliber of some of those followers, I can't really be all that surprised.

However, it is not impossible that by the time Snape showed up with his warning, Albus may have been having second thoughts regarding his "clever plan" of cultivating James Potter, on the basis of his possession of the Cloak. He'd managed to hand off most of the responsibility of overseeing the Order to Alastor Moody, for keeping the members all occupied and under the impression that they were accomplishing something. And the Order *had* probably turned up at least a few bits of useful information over the time that it existed. But in the end, the Order was proving to be a drain on his resources, and was losing him allies. Neither of which

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he could hardly be pleased with.

And for that matter, the Order hadn't really succeeded in its secondary objective. Yes, Potter respected him as Leader, much as he had as Headmaster, but he didn't seem to regard him as a friend, confident, and certainly not as a mentor. *And* if not he, then *one* of his associates is playing for the other team.

In short, by the time the Potters were dead, Albus Dumbledore may have resented Sirius Black's position in James Potter's confidence every bit as much as Peter Pettigrew did.

I wouldn't go so far as to say that Albus ever consciously wondered whether he might do better at cultivating an unquestioning minion by starting over with the child, but it really does seem like he did the absolute minimum to protect the Potter family. He did advise the Fidelius, and he did offer to be the Secret Keeper, but once that offer was refused, he talked James into loaning him the Cloak, and left them all to their fate.



Sirius may not have been the first member of his family to have been claustrophobically parked at #12, either. We had already been told that at some point during VoldWar I Sirius's parents had thrown every knut into laying security spells upon their house. Sirius remembers this himself, so he would probably have seen it as a child, around the time of Tom Riddle's return to the ww after his first, voluntary exile, and his public adoption of the persona of "Lord Voldemort". Indeed, well before "Lord Voldemort" had managed to render himself unmentionable, sometime around 1970.

Upon Tom's return, some time around 1960, give or take

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about 3 years, no one in wizarding Britain had ever heard of “Lord Voldemort” — apart from a small, select number of schoolboys some dozen years earlier.

More than a dozen years before “Lord Voldemort” ever made his first public appearance, Orion Black was still at Hogwarts. He’d have been sitting the OWLSs around 1945. He may well have been a Prefect, and was certainly a member in good standing of the Slug Club.

Along with the current Head Boy, one Tom Marvolo Riddle. Slughorn’s favor may have cooled considerably after Tom’s 5th year, but I rather doubt that he’d have gone so far as to eject the boy from his club. That cooling off might have been noticed by other members of the Club, however.

Orion Black may have known exactly who “Lord Voldemort” was. Or, rather, he knew who he had once been.

And yet, *actio* Sirius, he didn’t get swept back up to join the rest of Riddle’s followers upon Riddle’s return.

Why not? What changed? Was Orion simply not considered a good candidate for murder and mayhem? Or did Orion simply decline the offer — back at a point that it was still possible to refuse? What had Orion, or his branch of the family learned about Tom Marvolo Riddle in the interim?

Well, we don’t have any direct information on that subject do we?

Just a couple of hints. But we do *have* those hints.

Hint: Arcturus Black, Orion’s father, had Ministry connections that were good enough for him to have learned exactly when a generous contribution to the Ministry exchequer would garner him an Order of Merlin, first class.



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Hint: Before Morfin Gaunt’s death, Albus Dumbledore was actively campaigning for his release from Azkaban on the grounds that he had not committed the murders for which he had been imprisoned.

Dumbledore has to have provided *some* sort of evidence to support that claim. And given Albus Dumbledore’s fetish for provable evidence, whatever he provided had to be pretty convincing. Or at least highly suggestive.

Maybe something like a recovered memory, with a translation from the Parseltongue?

It’s worth considering, anyway.

And if it is anywhere close to being on-target, then Arc-turus and Orion Black now knew that former Head Boy and Hogwarts’ social leader Tom Riddle was a halfblood, a thief, and almost certainly a parricide. Any of which would be ample reason not to get involved in anything he might get up to.

We don’t know about the rest of the Black family. Particularly after the film designers changed Cygnus’s dates on the family genealogical tapestry from 1938-1992 as in the original version of the sketch as it was released to the web in 2006, to 1929-1979 mirroring his cousin Orion’s. We don’t know where those numbers came from, but the HP Lexicon seemed to have been willing to adopt them without reservation. In any case it puts Cygnus Black into the same Hogwarts year as Orion. And Alphard possibly in the same year as Riddle.

That Alphard left a legacy to Sirius after he ran away from home and went to live with Alphard’s aunt and her family, despite her husband’s well-known opposition stance to the Dark Arts would tend to suggest that Alphard may not have



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had any use for Riddle either. Or it may just indicate that he wanted to take a posthumous slap at his sister, Walburga.

But we don't know about his brother, Cygnus. We do know that Cygnus married one of the Rosiers, and we also know that at least one of the Rosiers was among the first-generation DEs.

I doubt that Orion and his father would have been overjoyed when Sirius was out defying Death Eaters shoulder-to-shoulder with James Potter, but they would not have regarded him as being in any danger of being swept up in Riddle's train, and it seems not to have occurred to them that Regulus might be in such danger, until he after had actually joined up. And I was sure that that can't have come as a pleasant discovery, either. Whether he did so before or after Orion's death, we cannot be certain due to the confusion over the relevant dates on the tapestry sketch. Whether the discovery that he had been swept up in the DE movement was made before or after Regulus's death I do not know, either. But since it seems likely that he did not sign up until the year he lost his father, and his grandfather did not still live with the family. This suggests to me that it could have been a nasty surprise that only came to light after his disappearance, and his death was recorded on the tapestry.

I think that Sirius was way off-base in his expectations there. Kreacher knew about Reggie signing up with the DEs, but Reggie's parents may not have.

And, by the end of 1980, both Regulus and his father Orion were dead. (And if the film designers are to be taken at their word, Cygnus was as well.)

And Sirius seems never to have considered his father's death (the same year that Reggie joined the DEs) suspicious? Or even

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possibly related? Odd that. Clearly we're missing something.

As, probably, did he.

(Unless — as is always possible — it was just a bright idea that hadn't yet occurred to Rowling, so she didn't link it into the story.)

However, for the circumstance of being stuck in that house to have had that much of an effect upon Sirius after only six weeks? That's strange. Kreacher may be a soul-deestroying little tick, but he is hardly a Dementor. Something else has to be going on here. And, while we watched, Sirius's disposition, judgment and behavior only get exponentially worse as the year progresses.*

*Long after the fact one must consider the apparent mental health of both Kreacher and the portrait of Madam Black, and reconsider possible long-term affects of proximity to some of the artifacts on display in the parlor. Or one of them in particular, anyway. One wouldn't think that would apply to Sirius, given that he threw all of those artifacts out. Yet his mental health continued to deteriorate.

Later we discovered that Kreacher had rescued the Locket from the rubbish and hidden it in his nest. Which was off the kitchen. Bringing it into even *closer* proximity with the house's residents and guests. As I state elsewhere, despite Molly Weasley's cooking, I suspect that moping, sulking and quarreling gradually became the primary occupations of Albus's Order.



And, hot off the Internet, is a reading, turned loose several years ago in a posting on the LiveJournal of a fan going by the

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name of LydiaLovestruck which holds the distinction of being one of those cases where somebody manages to put into words a convincing summation of all the details that everyone has already observed for themselves, and acknowledged, without ever quite connecting the dots. The original post was deleted, but a rewritten and reposted version was later available. I don't know whether it is still possible to find it. My search of the remaining postings from this Lj appear to be only related to the owner's own fics.

Her theory floats the elegantly simple suggestion that Sirius Black may very well have been an alcoholic.

It's an absolutely brilliant rendering of the probabilities. It gives us one solidly workable explanation for any number of otherwise inexplicable details that we tripped over in OotP.

And there is certainly enough canon evidence to support the theory on display throughout the course of OotP to consider it a definite possibility. It was made abundantly clear to the reader that Sirius was drinking.

Stuck in Grimmauld place, which hadn't many more happy memories than Azkaban, with no occupation, unable to leave the house even in his Animagus form, in disgrace with Dumbledore, and the Order keeping him under guard, he seems to have spent an inordinate time in his mother's room with Buckbeak.

Drinking.

Heavily.

We saw the erratic behavior, we saw the mood swings, we heard the deliberately hurtful comments, we watched the irresponsibility, listened to the gratuitous quarrels. Yes, going stir-



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crazy from cabin fever might about explain it. Not having lost the habit of thinking like a dog might certainly contribute to it. But out-of-control drinking explains it so much more easily. And we saw him drinking. We noticed it even through the Harry filter. We just never quite registered how *much*.

But we sure registered the deterioration of his personality. All of which was absolutely to the classic AA template defining an alcoholic. Even if the overriding cause for his taking that particular route was clinical depression as an obvious response to the direction his life had taken. That reading works, too.

Very soon after Phoenix was released, quite a number of fans had noted a scene in chapter 18 (fairly early in the book) where, soon after arriving at Hogwarts, Harry is mulling over a part of that year's overriding problem while he was supposed to be reading his Herbology textbook, staring uncomprehendingly at a passage listing several mood-altering herbs which were said to produce hot-headedness and recklessness.

There was, initially, a considerable amount of discussion on the fan boards as to whether Kreachur might in fact have been poisoning, or drugging Sirius with these plants to explain his behavior, which, even that early in the book, was already highly disturbing to both Harry and the reader. The discussion eventually petered out from lack of any kind of clear evidence or confirmation, but the fact that Sirius was *drinking* explains the situation much more convincingly than the possibility of his being drugged by his House Elf.

This reading may even go a long way towards an explanation for the otherwise inexplicable dirty looks Molly Weasley was shooting in his direction from the very outset of the book,



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and her repeated determination to cut him off at the pass and reduce any influence that he might try to have upon Harry.

Being Molly, the effort simply comes across as yet another attempt to lay down the law to somebody, stake a personal claim on Harry, and a determination to pick a fight with her host. Which, by this time, is no more than what we expect from Molly. But it is also perfectly in character as a well-intended but socially inept woman's attempt to protect an impressionable teenager from falling under the influence of a drunkard.

Sirius's behavior in PoA was mostly consistent with a man living rough, half-starved and on the run from the law, gradually, but by no means completely, recovering from 12 years' exposure to Dementors. In fact, being forced to focus on the bare necessities of survival itself may have been more beneficial to him at that point than otherwise.

In GoF for all that he made only a couple of appearances it is clear that he is in far better emotional and mental shape than he had been the year earlier. He may come across as perhaps a little too smug about the rightness of his own values, and he cannot resist a certain level of gloating over the downfall of Bartemius Crouch Sr, whom he has every reason to hate, but he comes across as rational, and is even making a concerted effort to be broad-mindedly fair, even to Snape.

In OotP we see him drinking. And we see him acting like a drunk.

Either this was a recent development, or it is an old problem that has resurfaced and he has fallen heavily off the wagon.

Regardless of the cause, he definitely seems to be engaged in drinking his grandfather's cellar dry.



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(Which also says something rather unflattering about Severus Snape's degree of emotional maturity, as well as his monumental pettiness, in doing anything so futile as to allow himself to be drawn into a pissing contest with a drunk.)

And, while it may be a little premature to come right out and state for an absolute fact that the canon version of Sirius Black was an alcoholic, we've certainly been shown ample indication to fear that he was a good way down the road to becoming one.



In OotP we were also given at least a few other hints that the wizarding world may be a good deal laxer about alcohol usage than the Muggle one. And it has also been generally noted that the view on alcoholism in Europe is not so... *focused* as it is in the United States.

Not to mention that Europe never considered alcohol production or abuse to be a serious enough problem to have ever adopted anything like a Constitutional Amendment mandating Prohibition in response.

To be sure, we have had comic drunkards in the storyline before. Both Hagrid and Trelawney are solidly in that tradition. But by OotP the tradition is no longer only being played for laughs. Mundungus Fletcher might have been pure comic relief a book earlier. Here, he is simply dodgy. And Sirius Black is becoming a source of considerable concern.

And — as Ms Lovestruck pointed out — a tendency to alcoholism does often seem to run in families. Sirius Black may well have learned to drink at his mother's knee. Literally at his mother's knee. He certainly fell into a pattern of doing it in his



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mother's room.

And when you stop to consider it, those hysterical outbursts and tantrums to which the portrait of Madam Black treats everybody in earshot, really are every bit as plausible to be coming from a drunkard as from a madwoman.

Indeed, it isn't all that much of a stretch to postulate that those ravings of being under siege by mudbloods, halfbloods and blood-traitors may well be less symptomatic of the DEs than the DTs.



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Well after the character assassination mill that Rowling chose to run former Professor Lupin through in DHs (both literal and figurative), I'm not sure how many fans are likely to still have that much interest in him.

Indeed, many readers were probably inclined to drop him with a thud and an "Ew," after that amazingly sanctimonious confrontation in Chapter 11. If, that is they were among the ones who found it credible in the first place. It was poorly handled to say the least.

He didn't really make a much better impression when we next saw him in Chapter 25 announcing his son's birth, and he was summarily disposed of in a gratuitous, offstage death only revealed after the fact in Chapter 33. We haven't a clue as to what he was doing with himself over the course of the book. Although he did make at least one appearance on Potterwatch.



It isn't that any of Remus Lupin's myriad spinelessnesses came as a surprise, mind you. That much had been being telegraphed from the day we first met him. But in DHs we seem to have gone from being offered a delicately-shaded portrait to a crudely-drawn cartoon without a lot of warning.

And, raise your hands everyone who is convinced that Rowling killed him off for no better reason than so he could make the fourth of Harry's "honor guard" on his suicide march through the forest. He served absolutely no purpose there. Anyone else we have seen die over the course of the series would have done it as well. And Tonks's death was even more gratuitous and dismissible.

For the record; I think you are all on the right track. But



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that isn't the only reason why Rowling killed him. Not really. She had another reason. Not necessarily a better reason. But a different one.

Rowling *claims* that Remus and Tonks were the two people who she had not originally planned to kill off. But with her track record I am not sure that I believe her.

And I certainly don't believe that she went into DHs not *fully intending* to kill them, either. They were obviously (from the vantage point of 20/20 hindsight, of course) set up to die from the minute they first appeared. Tonks glowing with happiness flashing around her wedding ring (in the fine old tradition of soap opera ingenues who, I am informed, always automatically tempt fate by daring to declare themselves to be happy), and Remus's hangdog look. You immediately wonder what was behind that whirlwind marriage. Did the Weasleys pounce on him, roll him up in a carpet and not turn him loose until he said "I do"?

From that moment we all might have guessed that they were both goners if you were looking for that sort of clue. But one might have expected the whole thing to have been handled with a little more dignity, and to not have it feel quite so gratuitous. Because it totally wasn't handled well.

Their deaths certainly didn't end up serving any legitimate purpose.

However, from where Rowling apparently was coming from those deaths were both absolutely necessary.

As necessary as the endless camping trip from hell and the months and months through the middle of the book where it was clear to everyone reading it that *nothing* was *happening*.



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Rowling had to drag the story out until she could get that baby born. (Admittedly, no one has yet suggested that she was deliberately tying the pacing of that book to her *own* pregnancy.)

But apparently all of our sitting around and spinning our wheels through the whole book was required to create another symbolic war orphan.

And, the minute Little Teddy arrived she finally buckled down and finished off the story. (Even though she could scarcely bother to even mention little Teddy except for an off-screen cameo part in the «spits» epilogue.)



Still, I feel as if I really owe it to the collection to include a study devoted to former Professor Remus John Lupin.

After all, I have an article regarding Black and Potter. I speak about Sirius Black on his own, as well. I speak (at great length) concerning the possible motivations of Peter Pettigrew. I touch upon Lily, and her face-off with the Dark Lord. I also discuss the Pensieve expedition and the timing of the werewolf caper. I play around with the question of what James Potter did for a living. I even have a lengthy sub-collection of articles all regarding Severus Snape. Surely Mr Lupin should also be considered a suitable subject for examination.

Unfortunately, Mr Lupin never seemed to agree with me.

It is very clear that former professor Lupin had no desire to submit himself to my examination, or to that of anyone else. I finally began to suspect that he may have had a very good reason for this reticence. And he (no doubt most politely) would have requested that the Red Hen keep her overly large



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beak out of other people's business, thank you very much.

For, try as one may, almost any serious attempt to "read" Remus Lupin seems to ultimately end in an exercise in self-hypnosis; virtually all attempts at observation either immediately or inevitably run up against his smooth, solid wall of polite, respectful, and utterly impenetrable, reserve. Eventually you have to ask whether this is any kind of an accident.

It certainly proves to be a far more effective method of self-concealment than Severus Snape's practice of building fortress-like walls to retreat behind, and then making himself conspicuous by striking intimidating poses from the battlements. We know even less about Remus Lupin than we did about Severus Snape (although certainly more than we knew about Pettigrew), but somehow it does not occur to most readers to wonder whether there is any mystery to be solved about him.



Although it's obvious that there is. And a fundamental mystery, it is, too. The following segment is repeated almost verbatim in the essay on 'The Werewolf Caper', since it is also pretty central to the aftermath of that incident.

Nobody has ever served up any convincing reason for why Albus would have gone out on a limb on behalf of the Lupins' kid. We're completely lacking any kind of a reason or motive there. Of course, given the debacle that it turned into, it's easy enough to see why he wouldn't have done it again for any other lycanthropic kid. Once was quite enough, and I suspect that he heartily regretted it, although he'd never have come out and admitted as much.



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Of course we were handed the whole werewolf backstory early enough in the series that no one particularly cared about why, at the time. The big reveal in the shack needed a backstory, and what we were given served beautifully for the purpose.

But even just a couple of books farther on you find yourself beginning to go; "Wait a minute..." and once the 7th book is out and we get to air the Dumbledores' dirty laundry, you're stuck wondering; "What was he trying to accomplish?" Because DHs's Albus would have definitely had a *reason* for anything he put himself out on someone else's account for. And bringing a werewolf to Hogwarts to be educated alongside the rest of the WW's kids, entirely on his own say-so, is putting himself out on a limb to a degree that seems totally mystifying.

And, yeah, a number of fanfic authors have postulated that Albus was somehow beholden to Lupin's parents. But that just reads as a retcon. We've got enough of those already, and no one is ever likely to consider it acceptable as remotely approaching canon, anyway. My fellow traveler Swythyv hypothesized that Albus might have done so on Nicholas Flamel's prompting. That would play, since if there ever was anyone who could have convinced Albus to do anything he didn't already want to, it might have been Flamel. But then you would have to account for why Flamel would have recommended it.

What's needed here is some kind of excuse that can be extrapolated from something that's actually in the books.

Although...

Given what we have since been told regarding Fenrir Greyback and his alleged intentions of turning as many kids as pos-



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sible, and raising packs of young werewolves, separate from wizards, as his own little empire of outcasts, one could spin a kinda/sorta plausible theory that Albus wanted to publicly demonstrate that one of Greyback's victims could still be educated, and become a contributing member of wizarding society.

Albus's influence was still at a high point at that time, after all. He might have been able to carry the matter off if presented as a *fait accompli*.

And every subsequently educated werewolf would have reason to think very highly of him.

Even if he limited his campaign to *juvenile* werewolves. Ones infected as innocent children with no reasonable way of anyone trying to claim that they were already unrecoverable.

(DHs! Albus might have even hoped that they might regard *him* as their pack leader.)

And he quite possibly chose Remus because his parents *hadn't* simply thrown him out once he'd been infected. They were still trying to raise him themselves, and were intending to educate him at home. We don't know how common that was. Albus might not have had a wide selection of possible candidates.

And he would undoubtedly have chosen the most docile of the few he found.

We don't know that Lupin was Greyback's first victim, but he seems to have been turned fairly early on. Indeed, before the Ministry was even admitting that they were at war. And, for that matter, the war was only really just ramping up by the time the Marauder cohort started Hogwarts. Voldemort seems to have rendered himself unmentionable around 1970. The Marauders started Hogwarts in '71.



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It probably *would* have made a rather nice piece of propaganda for Albus, and by extension, the Ministry, to — after the fact — reveal a perfectly civilized, educated young werewolf (an ex-Prefect, no less), with friends from good families and a supportive family of his own, who had no wish whatsoever to run off and join a pack of violent outcasts.

Even though Albus had left it rather too late. He had no way of knowing whether the war would still be waging by the time the kid finished school. But then, Greyback was already a problem, war or no war.

But, of course, that potential coup would all depend upon the experiment being a success. One educated poster boy werewolf, with no dangerous consequences to anyone.

No, on consideration, I'm not at all surprised by Albus's willingness to throw Sirius to the Dementors and lose the key. He hadn't been *able* to do that when Sirius was in school. He'd have had to explain why, and he couldn't very well do that without losing all of his influence, probably his job, and quite possibly found himself sitting in a cell right next to him.

And he was very beholden indeed to James Potter.

I don't think Albus much *liked* being beholden to other people. Particularly not teenagers.

One has to wonder just how much effort Albus actually put into protecting the Potters (as opposed to spouting fine-sounding platitudes). For that matter, even leaving aside the possibility that by that time he knew the Potters to be Peverell descendants, just how much of a surprise was it for him was to realize that the damn Trelawney prophecy might even apply to the Potters.



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And just what kind of vibes was Pettigrew picking up to have him trying to line up protection for himself from the other team as well.



That habitual reserve is also probably a good part of the reason why there was a sub-set of fans who were absolutely convinced that Lupin was Ever-So-Evil, and who, now that Voldemort was back, had been called back to heel, and would ultimately betray Harry and the trio, and be revealed as a traitor at some point in the last book of the series. Not simply because they were determined to float whatever unlikely theory shows the most promise of “bang”, and were twisting perceptions to comply with it, but because they really believed this.

I did not agree with them. I rejected all Evil!Lupin theories pretty much out of hand. From what Rowling always had to say regarding Lupin they were unequivocally bogus. Plus, she never *wrote* him as evil. She wrote him as *weak*. That he might let somebody down in a major way, I could readily believe (and indeed he did, his own wife in fact), betray them to an enemy, no.

Throwing suspicion his way, however did not seem inappropriate. Lupin was clearly NOT being straight with us, or with Harry. He WAS hiding things, and he had learned the art of selective and incomplete truth-telling from a master. Albus was a master at that particular art.

But forcing him to wear the traitor hat and stand in the corner is excessive. That little circle already had its representative traitor in Pettigrew, and the demands of the story did not

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require two of them. Or at least not two of the overt variety. For that matter, given the monster of an agenda that Rowling had already assigned herself for Book 7, playing the traitor card on Lupin's behalf, would have been very much superfluous to the requirements.

But I think I can see a little of where these fans may have gotten the idea. There was a singular lack of enthusiasm about Remus Lupin's service to the cause of the Light.

In fact there was an overwhelming lack of enthusiasm about Remus John Lupin altogether. There was no “fire” there.

JK Rowling told us once that Remus is about the only teacher at Hogwarts she would want to see teaching her children. A fair enough assessment, for he seems to have been a supportive teacher who was actually good at teaching. She also tells us that Lupin's problem was that he wanted to be liked. In most cases he managed to succeed at that goal. Or, at least until other people discovered what he was. And he did not appear to have the confidence to expect their liking to survive that discovery. He had probably been too often disappointed.

There is certainly no reason to beat the bushes looking for obscure causes for the oddity which was Remus Lupin. The fact that he had been a werewolf from early childhood is ample cause in itself. Until the advent of Fenrir Greyback, and his predilection for children, most werewolves probably did not become afflicted by this curse until much later in life, after their basic character had already been formed. Remus was not so fortunate. He was infected early enough that the very core of his personality is shaped by the fact of his being a werewolf. And Lycanthropy, although it may be somewhat controlled

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in the Potterverse, in virtually every cultural mythos which includes it, is an incurable curse.



Which brings us to the recurring question of what the condition of lycanthropy “signifies” within the Potterverse.

I am not altogether convinced that it signifies anything other than itself. Despite the impulse to read symbolism, analogy, or metaphor into every aspect of traditional folklore, it seems entirely possible that it’s “purpose” in the Potterverse serves merely to provide yet another example of a fundamental injustice, serving to illustrate yet another of the myriad corruptions and bigotries running rife in wizarding society. It may very well have no specific “codified” meaning which flags it as the intended analog to any Real World condition or disability.

I could, of course, be wrong about that.

If the condition of lycanthropy is intended as a parallel of some actual Real World disability, there is no shortage of candidates. Fanon seems to be split pretty much equally between identifying the curse of lycanthropy with either AIDS, or more broadly applied, with homosexuality itself, or, conversely, as a blanket identification of persons who have a history of recurrent “mental disorders” such as schizophrenia.

In the Potterverse there is the additional element that — when you stop to consider the matter — you realize that the majority of lycanthropes are almost certainly infected Muggles. Wizards know to stay indoors on nights of a full moon in areas where a werewolf has been sighted. Muggles, in their enforced ignorance, are sitting ducks. And, moreover, are apt to con-

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sider the light of the full moon romantic.

The reading of the condition as signifying AIDS is probably the underlying cause for much of fanon’s determination to interpret Remus Lupin as homosexual. There is no genuine support for this interpretation in canon. Nor, did we ever get any. This particular reading is clearly irrelevant to the story which Rowling chose to tell.

— Although one has to admit that the conduct and motivations of Fenrir Greyback makes it irresistible to summarily dub him “Werewolf Zero.”

The second option is broader and more flexible. There are a host of mental/emotional disturbances which can adversely affect an individual’s quality of life. Some of these conditions are cyclic, and their recurrences are a real issue in attempting to address the problem. With some of these imbalances the safety of the patient, and, indeed, of others in contact with him may become a compelling issue. And, most of such conditions traditionally carry considerable social stigma, regardless of the fact that they are typically not communicable (except through inherited tendency). Quite a few of these maladies have in recent decades been determined to have an organic basis, which can be at least partially controlled by medication.

Which introduces a secondary consideration, possibly relevant, related to the sometimes uneasy relationship between such a patient and his medication. It is a fairly widely known problem regarding persons who have been diagnosed with such conditions that a great many of them repeatedly get themselves into difficulties because they do not take their meds.

To people who do not suffer from such conditions this may

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seem inexplicable. If a medication exists which can mostly-reliably stabilize such conditions to the point that a person who has such a condition can live a mostly "normal" life, why on earth would they not take it? Are they afraid of the side effects? Can this possibly be due to pure forgetfulness?

Most indications are that it is not. The sticking point, in many cases seems to be that while under such medication, the subject does not feel like "himself?"

Which is a whole other can of worms, one which I would rather not try to explore in detail in this essay.



While we are at it, maybe it is time to take a closer look at some of our own assumptions about werewolves. We actually got quite a bit of information over the course of HBP regarding them, and about Remus Lupin. Information that stretches all the way back to the events of PS/SS.

WOLVES are pack animals.

There is NO compelling reason to believe that werewolves are as well. They definitely aren't such in any form of folklore that includes them that I've ever heard of (this statement does *not*, I will concede, apply to the many various works of contemporary fiction which *do* propose it. Fiction is not folklore). Instead, in folklore, they are almost uniformly "lone wolves"; outcast, solitary, *unnatural* — and they hunt alone. Fenrir Greyback's "mission" to *create* packs of werewolves is completely counter to anything that can be found in traditional folklore.

Indeed, it is a *perversion*. That there apparently *are* "packs" of werewolves in the Potterverse is an indictment of the ww's

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refusal to offer anyone afflicted with lycanthropy any viable means of support. These are not animal packs. These are human support groups. Wizards just *call* them packs. It's a slur.

In addition: there *are* no natural wolves in Great Britain outside of zoos. Not unless someone is keeping one as a pet. In Britain, wolves were eradicated in the wild some at point in the 18th century.

Ergo: for all that DADA classes seem to expect students to be able describe the ways in which to distinguish between a werewolf and a natural wolf, for any practical purposes anything that looks like a wolf which one is likely to encounter on the night of a full moon in Britain is almost guaranteed to be a werewolf.

Unless, of course, it's just a large stray dog.

Well, in DHs, after the whole big buildup of HBP one might have expected to see the werewolf thread followed up on and *used* for something, wouldn't one? Even if only to let the trio have a close call during the endless camping trip. (Which at least might have been marginally exciting.)

But, no. Werewolves turn out to be yet another of the list of disposable plot devices. At least this device was used in two books rather than just the usual one. Because once we got to DHs, the whole issue of werewolves was completely dropped. Nothing, and I mean *nothing* in DHs appears to have taken place upon a night of a full moon. Ergo: the only werewolf we ever identified in the whole book, other than Lupin, was Fenrir Greyback. Who is a nasty piece of work, but hardly constitutes a national emergency in himself.

Which also calls into serious question the usefulness of were-

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wolves as allies. If you give them the wolfsbane potion they lose the edge of frenzy and blood-lust that their condition inflicts on them, and if you don't, you certainly cannot fight alongside them. Plus, they are only useful *as werewolves* on the nights of the full moon. And if they are for the most part infected Muggles, what use are they to wizards at any other time?

So, apart from producing that nice kick of atavistic fear, what practical *use* are they in general? Even if they were born wizards, unless they were bitten as adults they haven't been trained, and they cannot cast spells while the "wolf" has control of them anyway. Wolves do not perform magic.

For that matter, Greyback may say that he is determined to make more werewolves, but what does he do with them? Apart from Lupin himself, we hardly ever heard of them until OotP. So there clearly can't have been *that* many werewolf attacks or werewolves being made until Voldemort's return offered them some renewed protection. I really don't get the picture that Greyback is a particularly effective villain. He is a nasty, but completely impractical dreamer. Much like Riddle, himself.

Oh, well, yes, I suppose *some* people have been bitten in the 13–14 years Voldemort was out of commission. I suspect that the victims were nearly all Muggles and the attacks never showed up in the DAILY PROPHET. Left to themselves and operating without Voldemort's sponsorship and protection the werewolves are more sad than they are a threat to all wizarding society. It is Greyback himself that is the real problem, and while he may be cunning he is not intelligent. Or even clever.

And I really do suspect that the band (not pack, not really) splits up on the nights of their transformation. The fact that

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the blood-lust frenzy allegedly had Lupin biting and clawing himself when isolated/confined strongly suggests that if they caught sight of each other while transformed they would get into fights. Possibly fatal ones.

If werewolves do not hunt in packs and are likely to attack each other in the absence of human prey, then Fenrir's "pack" may make a habit of separating during the full moon in order to keep their own casualty rate down. Consequently there is no way for any of them to monitor the activities of each other during the full moon. And they would be in no mental state to do so in any case. No one is keeping a tally of how many people each of them has "turned." I think that Lupin's assumed lack of victims (which is regularly called into question by the Evil!Lupin crowd) would have gone unnoticed or just brought him into line to be taunted as a wuss. Which, in all fairness, he is.

Lupin states that he had a hard time infiltrating the group. I should think so. He is educated, he had managed to "pass" among wizards for an extended number of years. Someone had clearly gone to a lot of trouble to enable him to reach his potential as a wizard (presumably Albus, but we still have no official hint of why). That ought to have made Greyback very suspicious indeed if he remembered biting Lupin as a small boy. It probably took months if not years before the rest of Greyback's followers trusted Lupin for anything. I seriously doubt that Fenrir tried to recruit him. It's more likely that when he showed up, he had to petition Fenrir to let him stay.



Which is where the information reaching back to PS/SS that

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I mentioned above comes in:

In PS/SS, 11-year old Draco Malfoy's protest over being sent to serve a detention in the Forbidden forest at night was that there were *werewolves* in that forest. And Argus Filch did not disabuse him of that belief.

AND in HBP we finally are told that the supposed leader of the werewolves is a Malfoy family friend. So wouldn't Draco be assumed to *know*?

Even though I suspect that the claim that Greyback is a "friend" of the family is a gross exaggeration, it does sound very much like Fenrir's band may well have their camp in the Forbidden Forest!

And, if so, there may not have been all that many new werewolves made over the entire 20–30 years or so that he Greyback has been running about loose. There are not a lot of Muggle settlements anywhere near the Forbidden Forest, and the local wizards know to stay indoors on nights of the full moon.

I also suspect that these days there are perimeter spells on the forest side of the Hogwarts grounds. They probably only activate after sunset. Or are cast manually on the nights they are needed. But I can easily believe that Riddle may have once suggested that Greyback set up camp in the forest, just for the nuisance value such a camp would represent.

And I doubt the Centaurs would have been enthusiastic about a band of werewolves setting up camp on their turf, either. Much Tom would have cared. He'd have found the ongoing friction amusing.

For that matter, werewolves are probably not the top of the food chain in that forest, either. I certainly wouldn't want to

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tangle with an angry Thestral, and there is a herd of about 100 of them. Not to mention that the scent of blood *attracts* them.

To say nothing of Aragog and his children. The werewolves may have learned to give Hogwarts a wide berth. But there is certainly more than one reason why it is called the *forbidden* forest.

Raises the whole issue of four little scofflaws frolicking about out of bounds after curfew to a whole new level doesn't it?



Which brings us back to Lupin, and the Wolfsbane Potion.

I seriously doubt that Remus Lupin had ever had access to the Wolfsbane Potion before he arrived to teach at Hogwarts. He tells us himself that the potion is a recent development, and at another point in the story, he tells us that not all potions brewers are able to produce it. Such circumstances are likely to render its cost well beyond the means of Remus Lupin, whose poverty is probably the first thing one observes of him.

No. Access to the wolfsbane potion, and the use thereof, was something that Albus Dumbledore offered Remus — in fact insisted upon — in their negotiations over his taking the DADA position. Consequently, Lupin only first started taking the potion in his middle-30s, long after his personal coping mechanisms to his condition had been formed and set.

And what *about* that job offer, while we're on the subject? Given that just the year before Dumbledore had accepted Gilderoy Lockhart's application — reportedly because he had no other offers — even knowing that the man was an unconscionable fraud, just where would you rate the probability that Remus

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Lupin had suddenly, oh-so-conveniently, had a brainstorm and applied for the position off his own bat? "Gee, no one will offer me steady paid work because I'm a werewolf. I guess I'll go give Dumbledore a sob story and teach little children at Hogwarts!"

I really don't think so.

It was Albus who sought Remus out and *offered* him the position. And probably had to put at least some degree of pressure into convincing Remus to take it.

And Remus knew perfectly well why he was suddenly being offered respectable employment by Albus Dumbledore. He may not have been as "exceptionally clever" as James Potter or Sirius Black. But he was certainly bright enough to connect that particular pair of dots.

Dumbledore was suddenly offering him a job because Sirius Black had just broken out of Azkaban. Sometime in July. (Harry didn't get the newspaper clipping with the picture of the Weasleys until the eve of his birthday. Sirius's picture was being shown on Muggle television by the next morning. Poor old Errol allegedly had to carry the newspaper clipping — and the sneakoscope — all the way from Egypt.) And Remus was well aware of his heavy obligations to Albus Dumbledore.

But the wolfsbane potion is *foul*. And if it really is based upon wolfsbane, then it is based upon a substance which is highly toxic to humans, and he must drink it while in human form. Not to mention that the potion is also a new development about which any long-term effects may still be largely unknown.

It is impossible to determine whether taking the potion is something that Dumbledore insisted upon, but is so foul that Remus really would rather not, or whether he really was grate-

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ful to have it provided, but desperately *wishes* that the provider just wasn't Severus Snape.



Which brings us to our next point.

Over the course of PoA we were shown a lot of evidence regarding Severus Snape's loathing for Remus Lupin. It is not as easy to determine Lupin's disdain and contempt for Snape.

Only just enough to see that it was there.

There is a pronounced passive-aggressive quality about Lupin's interaction with Severus Snape over the course of PoA. Despite their mutual history, or perhaps, because of their mutual history, Lupin cannot be unaware of the horror, the atavistic fear that underlies Snape's loathing for him.

And yet he would *not* drink the damn potion in the man's presence and let him set his mind at rest. Which just strikes me as... cruel. Or at least a piece of spiteful pettiness on every bit as high an order as any of Snape's own.

And, while we are on the subject; just what about that positively inspired bit of passive-aggressiveness which volunteered the suggestion of decking a confidently anticipated Snape-boggart out in granny drag? That particular stunt stands in absolutely perfect symmetry to Snape's suggestion that Malfoy throw a snake at Potter at the single meeting of the dueling club the year before. Particularly when you factor in the long-reaching effects upon the objects of these two exercises. Clearly, in the Potterverse, what goes around, certainly *does* come around.

Three years later, Lupin had evidently rethought the matter, and had reluctantly admitted to himself that Snape is not all

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bad. That, in fact, Snape had him at his mercy throughout that year at Hogwarts, and done nothing more than sneer at him (until he gave Snape good reason to do more by omitting to drink his potion when he needed to).

Even if this was only because he was under Dumbledore's eye, Snape had done Remus no harm when he had ample means to do so, and he could have easily made it look like an accident. But it is by no means clear that this reflection ever reached the forefront of Lupin's mind, *during* that year.

And we certainly never got any response from Remus over Harry's little epiphany that the reason that Snape dislikes Lupin is because he believed Lupin was in on Sirius's "joke." Although Snape himself confirmed it. Nor did Remus make any effort whatsoever to soft-pedal Sirius's flat statement that "He deserved it."

For years we all thought it unlikely in the extreme for Lupin to have knowingly agreed to take any part of such a stunt, but there was clearly more to that incident than we had been given any viable hints to expect. And in the end, Rowling didn't even show us the incident itself in Snape's Pensieve.

And, for the record; I now think that Snape was absolutely right. Lupin was in on it. Further examination of that incident can be found in the essay of 'The Werewolf Capers'.



Which raises the side issue in that; as miserable a git, and as thoroughly nasty a piece of work as we have always been led to regard Severus Snape, from the minute we first heard of the werewolf caper, we had also been left alone to conclude that

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whatever Snape deserved, he *didn't* deserve to be set up in a situation where he might be savaged by a werewolf. Rowling is not at all averse to trying to bully her readers about how they ought to think about her characters, yet somehow, on this matter she has let us make up our own minds. And, as regards this particular incident, the vast majority of readers have always somehow found themselves on Snape's side. Even if reluctantly.

Snape's personality alone was certainly not reason enough for the werewolf caper. But we were very carefully never shown anything of Snape's behavior related to this incident.

[An insertion here regarding the revelations of Book 6: so far as the werewolf caper itself goes, we are forever doomed to waiting. But we definitely had another shoe fall regarding the hazing incident from our Pensieve junket in OotP. Doubled and in spades. Our initial impression of a completely unprovoked attack by two against one has now been recast by the Snape-haters as "giving Snape a taste of his own medicine." Nevertheless, I doubted that such a simple reversal was showing us the whole story either. It is now abundantly clear that on James's part, at the very least the whole incident was both premeditated and done in an attempt to put Lily Evans's under obligation, as yet another ploy in a sort of pigtailed-in-the-inkwell schoolhouse romance. Although why he should think that it would impress her favorably to gratuitously attack the little geek she's always let trail after her like a tantony pig, I do not know. ETA: well, I think I know now, but that's also gone into in the essay related to the werewolf caper.]

And as an insertion regarding the revelations of Book 7: words fail me. Well, actually, no, they don't. *Polite* words fail me.

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Another contention which I hold regarding Remus Lupin is that at some point probably between November, 1981 and September, 1993 Lupin discovered — or had pointed out to him — and made a point of learning something of the obscure branch of magic known as Legilimency.

All of the evidence suggests that neither he, not the rest of the Marauders were aware of this branch of magic during the final days of VoldWar I when the Order knew that someone close to the Potters was a spy. But there is ample evidence over the course of PoA to suggest that he had learned it by the time he showed up at Hogwarts to teach in Harry's 3rd year.

I am not convinced that Lupin is any kind of master of it. Or that he uses it particularly often. But he knows what it is, and he gets by. And his sphere of competence is definitely at the Legilimency end of the scale rather than the Occlumency end. His early experience would have clearly given him a greater degree of motivation to discern others' intentions concerning him than it would to cause him to fend others out of his head in self-defense. And he knew enough, after a year of locking horns with the man, to be able to state with conviction that Snape was a "superb Occlumens."

And; about those statements; it takes more than one reading before it finally penetrates that in the entire course of PoA, the statements made by Remus Lupin are — almost without exception — so reasonable, so balanced, so objective, that you are left knowing absolutely *nothing* about what he *personally* thinks or feels on just about any subject whatsoever.



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Oh, well, yes. You can safely conclude that he doesn't like Dementors.

But that's about it.

He does so fine, and so expert a job of transmitting the completely fair, "non-biased" reading of every subject under discussion that you never get any honest feeling for what his own stand on it is. He fills you in on the accepted "PC" viewpoint of every issue. But he rarely comes out and tells you that he actually *agrees* with it..

For example: he tells us that he is very lucky to be working alongside Professor Snape, since there aren't many wizards who are up to making his potion. But that is hardly information that clues us in on what he may actually *feel* about the situation. He certainly doesn't come across as being particularly delighted by it.

And while we are on the subject: despite the overall impression of his always relating the most trustworthy, fair, reasonable and balanced viewpoint that is available, it is from Lupin that we have gotten a couple of the wildest, most distorted and thoroughly misleading statements in all canon!



Our biggest problem with Lupin is that he was never anywhere so well put together as he appeared. This was a very damaged man. His whole life had been warped out of shape by the fact that he was infected with lycanthropy as a child.

Yet on the surface, although reserved, he functioned very well. He was polite, civilized, just terribly "politically correct" and rational.



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But the minute he got upset he was apt to pop out with some wildly exaggerated statement or claim which was positively ridiculous, when closely examined, or a statement which simply makes no sense.

To wit:

A rather puzzling line of reasoning which raised its head after the release of PoA and carried us theorists off up a blind alley (where we were later mugged by newer canon) followed a progression which goes:

If Remus Lupin's statement that; *"It wasn't thought that I would be able to attend Hogwarts. But then Dumbledore became Headmaster..."* was an indication of just when Dumbledore became Headmaster (i.e., just before Lupin and the rest of his cohort started Hogwarts) then the timing of all things related to Tom Riddle suddenly became highly suggestive.

Lupin and his friends, from the information finally put in writing in DHs, can now be determined to have been around 21 years old when Voldemort was first defeated, on the night of October 31, 1981. Consequently, they would probably have started Hogwarts in September of 1971.

However, until the Black family tapestry information hit the web in early 2006 (most of which information later turned out to be useless), we were all forced to calculate from rather mushily stated website and interview information which strongly suggested that the Marauder cohort was born a year earlier than it now turns out it was, which led me, and quite a few others, to the belief that they had started at Hogwarts in September, 1970.

By the time canon was closed we were left having to com-

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pletely dismiss the dates on the tapestry in order to make the events tied to it conform to the dates we were given in the books.

However, this assumed coincidence in timing set off an initial flurry of possibilities. In the first place it fed comfortably into Dumbledore's statement in the first chapter of PS/SS that the wizarding world had had little to celebrate for the past eleven years. From which we had reasoned that Voldemort's first rise had begun some eleven years earlier, or, around 1970, coinciding with Dumbledore's appointment as Headmaster.

If Dumbledore had only just become Headmaster in 1970, what had he been doing since 1945, one asked? Either defeating Grindelwald had been no big deal, and despite being "famous" for it, no one made a great hero of him over the matter and he had been blamelessly teaching at Hogwarts throughout the intervening 25 years, under either Dippet or a succession of other yet unnamed Headmasters or Headmistresses; or; defeating Grindelwald really was a big enough deal that he was offered, and had accepted, some other job, somewhere else, only returning to Hogwarts as Headmaster, for the academic year beginning in September 1970.

In OotP we were shown a precedent for this kind of thing, with the example of a former Headmistress of the mid-18th century who went directly from her former post as a Healer at St Mungo's hospital, to being Headmistress of Hogwarts. (I suspect that this is actually a clue to the fact that St Mungo's is a *teaching* hospital, as well as some other possibilities, but have touched upon that in one of the 'Foundation' essays.)

Which left us all wondering whether Voldemort only chose to surface once Dumbledore was safely occupied at Hogwarts,

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rather than in some more potentially dangerous position somewhere in the Ministry

Unfortunately, much of this reasoning had to be abandoned in the wake of additional new information also given us in OotP, which made it clear that Minerva McGonagall was hired at Hogwarts, for the spring term which began in January of 1957, taking what had been Albus Dumbledore's original position. In the middle of an academic year, no less. This hiring would have taken place *at least* a full year before Lupin and the rest of his contemporaries were born. The dates on the Potter's tombstone in DHs also eliminated this line of reasoning. Even the oldest of the Marauder cohort at Hogwarts would have been born no earlier than the autumn of 1959.

That Minerva was hired in the middle of an Academic year suggested that there had been an unscheduled turnover in the senior Staff during the previous school Term. It does not seem likely that Professor McGonagall was originally hired to teach any subject other than Transfiguration, and we already know that Albus Dumbledore had been serving as the Transfigurations master in the school a dozen years earlier. Ergo; one automatically assumes that Minerva was hired to fill Albus's former position which had fallen vacant.

This presented a strong inference that Albus Dumbledore had succeeded Armando Dippet as Headmaster at this point in time, 1956–7. This supposition was tentatively confirmed by the glimpse we got in HBP which shows Dumbledore newly installed as Headmaster with the snow falling outside the windows.

However, in HBP we were also given information which

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suggests that both of these conclusions could in fact be faulty. There is now some possibility that Albus had spent a few years as the DADA instructor before his elevation to Headmaster, and that Tom was applying for Albus's former position.

The chances that Tom Riddle did not return to the wizarding world until the Marauder cohort was ready to start at Hogwarts now looks highly unlikely in the face of Cornelius Fudge's statement in the first chapter of HBP that the Ministry has been trying to catch him since the mid-1960s.

We were half right, however. The beginning of Voldemort's first rise did apparently coincide with Albus Dumbledore's appointment to the post of Headmaster of Hogwarts. But that fact now seems coincidental rather than significant. At this point there is nothing to suggest that Tom Riddle only chose to return to the wizarding world once Dumbledore was Headmaster. Indeed, discovering upon his return that Dumbledore was now Headmaster may have come as a rather nasty shock, and upset his already laid plans.



As to the now clearly inaccurate statements made by Lupin which inspired this line of reasoning; first, from the "meta" standpoint, I believed that this might be an indication of a minor shift in intention on the part of the author. Rowling had hammered out her original outline for the series nearly a decade earlier, and the basic outline had not changed. But much of the "infill" between the headings and subheadings probably had, and I thought that this was one of the things that did. She may have originally intended that 11 years for some purpose. But

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she had either never been able to fit the rest of that piece of background into the story, or at some point during the 3-year summer, she modified the backstory for some reason of her own, leaving it dangling, and we were left just having to deal with it. Consequently, for the purposes of trying to re-establish some level of internal continuity, we now need to ask whether Lupin's statements are mere colloquial sloppiness, deliberate obfuscation, or an honest misunderstanding.

The first is possible, certainly, although it would be disappointing. No one but the "Remus Lupin is Ever-So-Evil" crowd can see anything clearly to be gained by the second possibility. But, there is some reason to suspect that the third reading could be the case. It is entirely understandable that Remus's parents had assumed that after contracting lycanthropy he would be barred from attending Hogwarts and only learned differently when they responded to his Hogwarts letter with their regrets explaining why he would not be attending. And rightfully concluding that such a concession would not have been made under Headmaster Dippet.

It is also not impossible that *whatever* the purpose of Albus's "experiment" in the education a juvenile victim of lycanthropy might have been, it wasn't something that only occurred to him when he was informed that there was one after the Hogwarts letters for the incoming class of 1971 went out. *If* I am correct that the experiment was set up in response to the activities of Fenrir Greyback, and his alleged aims — which in retrospect must have been given some degree of publicity at the time, and were causing something of a stir — Albus might have devised his campaign to combat this particular threat, and gone looking for

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such a child. Possibly well in advance of the year the child would be scheduled to begin attendance. That Remus was a werewolf does not appear to have been general public knowledge, but if there had been a report in the Prophet of a werewolf attack on a child, even if the child's name was not publicized, Albus would have been able to follow whatever information there was in order to determine who that child was.

And to contact the child's parents about the opportunity to take part in this experiment. Remus might well have been told that arrangements had been specifically made for him, well before he was old enough to be receiving a Hogwarts letter.



However, on another occasion; Remus also unhesitatingly backs up Sirius Black's story that his younger brother had joined the DEs and been murdered on Voldemort's orders when he got cold feet and wanted out. Remus not only backed it up, but added the touching detail of Regulus only having managed to evade the DEs for less than a week before he was killed.

Except that anyone who has read chapter 10 of DHs and now knows the official story on the death of Regulus Black is aware that Sirius's whole account of the affair is a complete fabrication. It never happened. Voldemort never ordered Regulus's death. Reggie never ran off dodging DEs. The DEs never killed him.

And yet Lupin backed him up.

What now appears to have happened is that Sirius was told that his brother was dead, and had probably gotten swept up in the DE movement. Then strung a story together that made

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both pieces fit, and Remus bought it.

And then embroidered it when he passed it on. All the while believing that what he told people was the truth.

It is, therefore, perfectly within reason to suppose that young Remus may have come by his impression that Dumbledore became Headmaster "just in the nick of time" quite by error. For it is certainly more likely that Lupin would be under a mistaken impression as to the exact details of the arrangements made on his behalf than that Minerva McGonagall would be mistaken about just what year (or decade) she became a teacher at the school. Or even that Tom Riddle delayed his return to the wizarding world until 1970.

If we are prepared to accept this, we may very well have also been handed what is now a strong hint that Remus Lupin was not necessarily our most reliable source of information. Despite the fact that he may have appeared to be, and indeed, usually was entirely sincere in what he chose to tell us.



Nor is this the only instance where Remus Lupin's statements appear to be shown to be grossly inflated and manifestly untrue. We were handed another even more blatant example in the form of another statement made early in OotP wherein Lupin assured Molly that "last time" the DEs had outnumbered the Order members 20 to 1.

This statement is positively ridiculous. It is also quite obviously false. Harry Potter saw every surviving Death Eater at liberty in Britain, if not all of Europe, show up at the graveyard in Little Hangleton (barring those three famous no-shows

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and the 10 still in Azkaban) a scant two months earlier, and there were only about 40 of them. We were told that Ron and Hermione have met about 20 Order members, although they suspect there may be more. 20 to 1? Give us a break!

Nor can I see any reason why Lupin would choose to deliberately lie about something which has already been shown to the reader to be so completely out in left field. The obvious conclusion is that, wrong as it might be, Lupin may have sincerely believed this to be the case.

For that matter, and given the same bit of eyewitness evidence, why is Sirius Black talking about armies? The wizarding world does not maintain standing armies. 40–50 Death Eaters does not constitute an army. Although it may constitute a mob.

What seems far more plausible is that small groups of Order members may have been being attacked 20 to 1, or at least by some other grossly uneven odds.

Even though, a couple of books further downstream, Voldemort is turning out to have had rather more "troops" than we had been led to believe by the end of OotP, their total still did not add up to 20:1 against a couple of dozen Order members, and until the Battle of Hogwarts, he never seems to have deployed them all at once.

It is this kind of statement that by HBP had me rapidly backpedaling and reevaluating all of Lupin's statements regarding the quintessential cleverness of James Potter and Sirius Black. They may have been "exceptionally clever" unto Minerva, and they probably were cleverer than Lupin, who comes across as solidly "bright-average." But I'm not convinced that they were universally the brightest students in the school, as Remus

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seemed to believe. Or, if they were, it was only in specific subjects, such as Transfiguration, not across the board.

I then (i.e., OotP–HBP era) came around to the viewpoint that the purpose (if any) of these discontinuities was to hint that the whole issue of the threat of Voldemort and his followers was grossly inflated by public perception, and that we had all been locked in a wardrobe filled with a pair of old cloaks and all of the Emperor's new clothes.

And, by the time we had worked our way through OotP, my respect for Remus Lupin had also taken a considerable slide.

To be sure, he was a bit more forthcoming once he was no longer in a position where he may have felt obligated to treat Harry as much as possible like every other student. I have not forgotten that he never approached Harry to volunteer the information that he had once known Harry's father. Harry had to virtually pry that info out of him. But he was clearly unequal to the task of deterring Sirius from the worst kind of self-destructive behavior. He, far more than Harry, must have recognized the amount of drinking Sirius was engaged in, even if he probably still would not have been able to keep Sirius from joining in on the raid on the DoM.

On this account at least, I think I probably ought to cut the man some slack. What Remus Lupin and Sirius Black were most probably sharing over that year of the Return of the Scam was not a homosexual love affair, but an all too "practical lesson" about living with clinical depression.

And generally failing to meet the challenge.



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Or, as is looking ever more likely, Remus, in common with the rest of the Order, was saddled with the thankless job of having to effectively babysit Sirius, who was in disgrace and under house arrest for having disobeyed Albus's orders, sneaking back into the country after Albus had engineered his escape, and told him to keep away.

And, over the course of OotP it became progressively more clear that in the matter of raw intelligence, Sirius Black really was smarter than Remus Lupin. But Remus had much better judgment, immeasurably more real world experience, and the ability to learn from it. Which was something that he rarely made the point of "making a point" of. The man was incredibly averse to taking the lead in any way, shape, or form. Even his teaching style had been to stand on the sidelines and suggest ways in which the student might solve his own problems. (I hope Tonks realized this. She would be much happier in the long run if she realized at the outset that the post of "leader" in that relationship was up to her.)

And in short, Lupin all too easily fell right back into the patterns of adolescence, where Sirius led, and he followed, without protest and without question. Despite the fact that over the ensuing years, he was now probably far better qualified to be a sound leader. No, Remus Lupin was not "brilliant," but he was a "sadder but wiser" man than Sirius Black.

Which I would say is to a great part due to the ability he perfected of disengaging himself from all that surrounds him. Including the issues that are in immediate play, the personalities of his companions, and even whatever expectations he may have regarding them. And the life that he led did not

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encourage him to attempt to cling to any of them. Or indeed to anything much at all.

He left his position at Hogwarts the moment his condition was publicly known, voluntarily, without protest, expressing neither anger nor regret. I suspect that — despite the pride he must have taken in a job in which he knew that he had performed well; despite the novelty he may have welcomed in the chance to live an almost normal life, with respectable employment on a level that he had certainly never known before — he was not altogether sorry to shake the dust of Hogwarts from his feet. He has made a point of consistently giving the impression that he repented every moment of the folly and recklessness that he and his friends had engaged in there. I'm not at all convinced that he was all that glad to be back. And he did not expect that his halcyon would last. Once the axe had fallen, he would no longer have to wait in expectation of it.

And at the end of OotP, we see him watch the last friend of his adolescence knocked through the Veil with the very same lack of protest, anger or visible grief as when Severus Snape had snatched away his best crack at a normal life in a fit of spite.



And then we come to Book 6, and my respect for Lupin began to recover somewhat. For we saw that some personal development of Remus Lupin seemed to have had taken place between books 5 & 6. I think that by the time we caught up to him again, at the Burrow, Remus had taken the time to process just what he learned in all those endless hours of "standing guard over/sitting with a troubled friend" during Year 5.



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And I think that having had a year-long ringside seat of the wreckage that the years and the Dementors had made of Sirius Black forced him to face a few hard truths. Because I think that he'd had to admit to himself that it wasn't just the years and the Dementors' that had accomplished it. The seeds of this ruin had always been there.

James, I originally thought, had realized this right after the werewolf caper. James really was originally presented as a clever boy. I thought that the "new leaf" that he had turned over during 6th year, was largely composed of reigning Sirius in, for his own good, without letting Sirius realize that he had acquired a "keeper" (no such luck, James turns out to have been a prat to the end)..

But at that point in my theorizing, I had still suspected that Remus was, understandably, deeply hurt by the werewolf caper and had withdrawn from Sirius somewhat, and never could quite feel the same degree of trust for the friend who had so betrayed him. By now, of course, I suspect that the end of that incident was no such thing. But I still don't expect that he was particularly "happy" about the prank, even though the four of them got exactly what they wanted from it.

I think that part of his lack of strong reaction to seeing Sirius fall through the Veil was that watching him do it was not without some degree of relief. By the end of Year 5, after watching Sirius deliberately self-destruct for months on end, I'm not sure Remus believed that Sirius really still *had* a future.

And for all that he was cleverer than Remus, Sirius's judgment had always been biased and faulty. And I think that Remus had never admitted it to himself until then. I don't think



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that Remus's speaking up in Snape's favor at Christmastime in year 6 was something that he would have been *able* to do during PoA, or even OotP. The realization that Snape had had him in his power for a year and spared him, was not something that was so obvious to him at that time, since he had still been in the "idolize James and Sirius" mode, and even with the fact of the man *right there* in front of him, he still accepted their remembered evaluation of Snape pretty much unquestioned.

Not that Snape's obvious hostility helped the situation at all.

By Year 6, he is finally willing to try to move beyond James's and Sirius's reading of the man and form his own opinions. Indeed, Remus Lupin is finally being forced to step out of James's and Sirius's shadows. But he is still unwilling to step out from behind his own protective wall of reserve.

Plus, for that matter, now that the last friend of his adolescence was beyond recall, the only person left from those days who is still on the same side is the previously despised Snape.

Even the enemies of one's childhood can be precious in a way. Lupin probably couldn't have convinced himself that he and Snape would ever become friends, after the sort of history they shared but I think that he was indulging in building some form of castle in the air that one day there might have been some form of concord between them. In short, Remus Lupin, who refused to ever take the lead, was shopping about for a new "leader." And Snape was beginning to look like a viable prospect.



For that matter, we have been handed another mystery here. We do not actually know for just how long Remus Lupin had

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been engaged in spying on Fenrir's band. The shabbiness that characterizes him was already noted on his first appearance back in PoA. How do we know that he had *not* been recalled from this undercover work at the beginning of Year 3?

For that matter, who taught Remus Lupin Legilimency, and why? Was it in preparation for going undercover with his "peers"? Could he have been he wandering with werewolves as early as 1980-'81? Is that why Sirius was so quick to suspect him of being the spy?

And, no, I am beginning to think that Lupin had never told us, or the kids, the unvarnished truth at any point since we met him.

Insofar as their contrasting relevance to Snape — who is central to the entire story arc: Pettigrew is the "mirror," the one who crossed over in the opposite direction. Lupin is the "shadow" whose path is parallel. And we now know that Lupin was another of Dumbledore's spies.

Although Lupin's job was not the same *kind* of spying as Snape's. The werewolves have no access to sensitive information. What Lupin was more likely to be doing was monitoring their activities and movements. He was wearing his Jane Goodall hat, with the significant difference that he really was one of the creatures that he was observing. Monitoring the werewolves was probably a matter of periodically drifting in and out of their camp, making himself known there, and becoming accepted as a member of the group.

And letting Albus know their movements and activities. It wasn't the kind of sensitive information that Snape was hunting for, but if the camp moved to an area closer to a human settlement Albus would presumably know to tell someone to take

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measures before anyone was attacked rather than afterwards.

Day-to-day surveillance is probably something Albus can entrust to one of his little silver instruments. But such instruments will not place themselves, and Fawkes is far too conspicuous to be deputised to do it. Lupin could have concealed the transmitter in the camp. It is pinpointing their location, and Lupin checks on it periodically, moving it at need.

I do rather think that Remus Lupin was serving as Dumbledore's eyes on Fenrir Greyback since the final years of Vold-War I, and throughout the entire time that Voldemort was out of commission. So right there, much of his official story starts looking about as plausible as the "likely story" of Snape's remorse and Dumbledore's forgiveness having not taken place until Snape actually started teaching at Hogwarts.

Stop and think. Greyback was at liberty that whole period, and he was not lying low for fear of being swept up with the rest of Voldemort's supporters. For that matter, I suspected he was probably not even a real Death Eater at all. (Tacitly confirmed in DHs. He was no more than a hanger-on.) And he could be accounted as a bonafide ally of Voldemort's, not a follower. Voldemort was out of commission for nearly 14 years, while his organization deteriorated in his absence. Greyback spent those years digging in and potentially increasing his "following." And he was just too dangerous to be left unobserved, even if he didn't know anything regarding Voldemort.

Ergo: Lupin *had* a job all those years. Dumbledore gave him one. His shabby poverty is a part of his *cover*.



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Indeed, given what we now know of Albus, it seems unlikely that he would have put himself to the effort of arranging for Remus's education at all unless he had a designated use for him. Even if his original plans had to be abandoned.

In fact, with the Spy+Mirror+Shadow dynamic in place, I would not have been surprised to learn that Albus made his initial suggestion of an alliance to both Snape and Lupin in the aftermath of the werewolf caper. Both of those young men were at serious risk of being made use of by the enemy. We now know that either Albus or Rowling dropped the ball on the Snape end of that possible development. But we still do not know that it doesn't apply to Lupin.

Lupin (as Albus might have been led to believe anyway) had just been given a vile demonstration of the fact that the people who did not shun him, were capable of trying to use him. With or without his consent. Which would have led to a discussion of how Lord Voldemort was making use of werewolves in the course of the war. And I'm sure that Greyback's name would have come up in that discussion.

Indeed, I think that was the point that Lupin was finally told the truth about the werewolf who turned *him*. That he was not an unfortunate sufferer who lost control of himself. But that he had stalked and bitten Remus *deliberately*, because Remus's father had offended him. i.e., Remus was already being "used," as a weapon against people he cared about, by someone who was not his friend. Albus would no doubt have learned the story while making arrangements for the boy's education, and would probably have gotten the permission from the boy's parents to tell him if he felt the situation should demand it.



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Lupin wasn't as bright as Sirius, or Snape, but he was not stupid. Albus laid it out to him that Lupin was going to have severe difficulties in the wizarding world because of his condition, through no fault of his own. Albus would have also mentioned that there was no current way for him to monitor the activities of Fenrir and his band.

I think that Albus did not ask for a decision at that time. But he made it understood, that if Lupin chose to turn his circumstances to account in the war effort, Albus would try to protect and support him.

In Lupin's case I suspect the support was at least partially financial. His cover as an unemployed outcast dictated that his living expenses be necessarily low, but I suspected that the contents of his Gringotts vault, or possibly a Muggle bank account, were in somewhat better shape than could be otherwise accounted for. Albus — or at least the Albus we *thought* we knew — would have seen to it that he at least had enough to cover any real emergency.

What I suspect actually happened, is that Lupin tried to go it alone for a year or so after finishing school. With very much the results that Albus had cautioned him to expect. Eventually he would have contacted Albus to ask just what his duties would entail.

Albus would have laid it out, and warned him that it would be dirty, dangerous, and extremely unpleasant. He would need to infiltrate Fenrir's band and gain their trust. He was not to attempt to interfere with their plans or activities, not to call attention to himself at all, but he was to report back so Albus and his allies could monitor the group.



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Don't make a decision right now. Think it over. Lupin did. He's a Gryff. What do you think he decided?



And he probably started at it before the Potters were killed, possibly before Harry was born, and perhaps (disallowing the possibility of Albus being determined to keep tabs on James Potter, because he was aware that James was a Peverill descendant), even before the Order was formed. In fact Remus may have been the one to bring the Potters and their friends into the Order.

He probably didn't know about Legilimency then, or if he did he was so far out of the loop by that time he learned that he never got the chance to fill James and Sirius in on it. Or, it is also possible that he felt he needed to keep that ability secret, even from the other members of the Order.

And his time spent with the werewolves may be the real reason why Sirius thought he was the spy. He was off living in the enemy's camp. Coming and going as if he belonged there.

After all, while I suspect everything Lupin told Harry about infiltrating the werewolves was probably literally true, he never says anything which would pin down just when it happened, did he? It could have been all the way back when he was 19 or 20.

And he knew what he was getting into. Dumbledore would have pointed out to him what he was in for over the long haul. But Lupin is a Gryffindor. He would have been quite willing to turn his condition into an asset in the war.

Close to 20 years later, he is a bit bitter about it. Unlike Snape, who — at the same earlier point — could expect to be



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free once Voldemort was truly dead, there is no escape from lycanthropy. And Fenrir's band is not going to disappear even if their leader gets captured or taken out of commission.

I really cannot think of anything inside of canon which would conflict with this reading and it does explain some of the contradictions.

It also explains one really good reason why he was so determinedly trying to give Tonks the brush-off in Year 6. That complication interfered with his mission.

A mission which may well have ended with Dumbledore's death. Maybe once he was free of it he was willing to give Tonks a hearing.

But I have not forgotten that in one rare burst of complete subjectivity, we heard him state, in the Shrieking Shack, that "it had all started" with his being bitten as a child. Had that not occurred, he claims, "none of this would have happened." And that was probably the wildest and most outrageous statement we had ever heard from him until that bizarre confrontation with Harry in DHs.

I am certain that even if Remus had never been bitten, even if the werewolf caper with Severus Snape had not taken place, Lord Voldemort would still have continued to attempt to dominate wizarding Britain, and that it is entirely probable that James Potter would still have managed to get mixed up in it. And Peter Pettigrew would still have betrayed them once he was convinced that Voldemort was going to win.

Nevertheless, although like both Severus Snape, and Sirius Black, Remus Lupin was a profoundly damaged man; he was not without some strength, nor without some protection. He

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did not lack for physical courage. He was just totally averse to leadership, or to taking any kind of sustained responsibility. In fact he was even worse about that than Albus was.

But he would faithfully follow whichever leader he chose.

It seems to me that Remus Lupin's was the outlook of a man who had been so hurt by life, that he could no longer dare to try grasp at it. But he still managed to function within his own society, in the face of almost overwhelming odds. In fact, he functioned rather better than some others who started their lives with far greater advantages.

He was neither incapable of satisfaction, nor of humor, nor had he set himself above being pleased. And his life, such as it was, had still managed to provide him with sufficient flashes of happiness that he could produce a Patronus; although he cautioned us that he was no expert in battling Dementors.

But I do not know that he would have ever truly recognized Joy.



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This isn't the first of the Pettigrew Essays.

From quite an early point in the series, my attention had been drawn to Peter Pettigrew, because it was just too easy to dismiss him. Which I suspected would be unwise.

Well, there was indeed a boatload of significance regarding trust and betrayals lurking under the surface. But in the end, it wasn't Peter who ended up delivering it. No, in that regard, I'm afraid that Mr Pettigrew got himself thoroughly upstaged.



The Little Man upon the Stair (That Everyone Forgets is There)

For quite a while there seemed to be a very good chance that Peter Pettigrew might turn out to be one of the most dangerous characters in canon.

No such luck. Which is rather a pity, really. There would have been a lot more potential *bang* to that scenario than the one we got.

(Which, by the way; can you explain to me the reason why Peter's silver hand murdered him for not going ahead and attacking Harry when the one overriding order for all the DEs over the entire year is that they were not to attack Harry? That Tom was supposed to kill the boy himself? No. I can't either.)

I was all the more disappointed because most Potter fans were just so very willing to overlook or dismiss any such possibility, since Pettigrew was so thoroughly unlikable.

Even Snape — long before the revelations of HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE — miserable, vicious git that *he* could be, was a vastly more attractive char-

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acter than Peter Pettigrew. There was always something perversely glamorous about Snape, and his way with words was an endless entertainment.

There was nothing even remotely glamorous about Pettigrew. Or entertaining.

From where I was standing, what was even more suspicious is the way that, on virtually every occasion that Pettigrew's name came up, Rowling took care to immediately deflect any attention that had been drawn to him. The reader was positively invited to see him as a weak, stupid, cringing, utterly contemptible waste of space. A character who was simply not worth their consideration. Given his actual accomplishments, I was inclined to view this general impression with profound skepticism. It looked very much to me as if to underestimate Peter Pettigrew would usually be a dangerous mistake.

And, after all, upon whose authority were we to base our most typical reading? Sirius Black's, who spent 12 years in Azkaban after Peter tricked him, and framed him as the betrayer of the Potters, and the spy in the Order? Lord Voldemort, who was *such* a fair and unbiased judge of character? I'd suspected for some time that most, if not all of the emphasis on "Peter Pettigrew, mental midget and magical mediocrity" that we had been consistently fed was yet another pack of moonshine and misdirection.

Well. In the end I was somewhat wrong, wasn't I?

Although downstream of DHs, it has now become all but impossible to try to sort out just what he was after and what was in it for him?

Because he doesn't really come across as the sort to have

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been into anything for the sake of a *cause*, does he?



There is a lot that we will never know about Peter Pettigrew which might throw the dismissive evaluation as a “weak wizard” off by a fair degree. And just what can we say about those things that we supposedly do “know” about him when examined more closely?

We know that at 15–16, Peter needed all the help he could get to manage the Animagus transformation.

But, you will also notice, that manage it he did. *Without* formal training (Lupin, it seems, never even made the attempt). Does this sound like a weak wizard to you? Never mind that there were other young wizards in the picture who were magically “stronger.” (Ignore the dog and the stag behind the curtain...) Ask yourself; does becoming an Animagus by the age of 15–16 without professional guidance sound magically *weak* to you?

It really doesn’t to me. I think that if, by the end of HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX, Dean Thomas and Seamus Finnigan had suddenly demonstrated that they could transform into a heron and a hedgehog I would be inclined to scale my estimation of their magical abilities up considerably.

And never mind that Peter “only” transformed into a rat. The form an Animagus takes is a fragment of his personality, not a reflection of his power. The spell is just as difficult regardless of the animal the wizard transforms into. For that matter, out here in the Real World a rat has a reputation for being a good deal more resourceful an animal than a stag. And, for its



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size, is considerably brighter, too.

Let alone the fact that they make good enough company for people to keep them as pets!

We also watched Madame Rosemerta dismisses Peter as “that fat little boy who was always tagging along.”

What does she know of the actual relationship between those kids? Little fat boys might very well seem to be easily dismissible by outside observers. They can look harmless and ineffectual. But are they really? I mean *really*? Dudley Dursley was once a fat little boy. And legitimately stupid with it as well. Would you have said that Dudley was harmless?

For that matter, have you ever actually known a little fat boy? Was he any less capable of giving you grief (or otherwise) than a little thin boy? Dismissing someone because they are fat is even stupider than dismissing them for being Muggle-born.

Minerva, who was in a rather better position to have known the four of them, having had them in her classroom for 5–7 years, tells us that he was never quite in Black & Potter’s league. Okay. That’s fair enough.

But if there is no other consensus available, everyone seems to agree that Black & Potter were “exceptionally bright” and “exceptionally talented.” Particularly in Minerva’s subject, Transfiguration. It sounds like Remus Lupin was not considered as having been altogether “in their league” either. And Remus usually comes across to the reader as an intelligent (or is that only a “sadder, but wiser”?) man, and a competent wizard.

If Peter had been a couple of years older or younger and was not always being directly compared to Black & Potter, people might have made a different evaluation of his abilities (although



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his constitutional laziness suggests otherwise). But that such a notorious weasel-word as “quite” is sitting there in the middle of Minerva’s statement as a qualifier at all, is interesting in itself.

Minerva also tells us that Pettigrew was always hopeless at dueling. Yes, poor physical reaction time when confronted by the unexpected will do that. At that point in canon Hermione Granger still sometimes tended to freeze when confronted by a danger she had not anticipated, too. No one has called Hermione a “weak witch” yet.

In fact, in that regard Peter seems to have had another quality that Hermione shares; when he found himself in a tight spot, he first would glibly try to talk his way out of it. I suspect that he had a history of usually succeeding, too.

That he survived so long in positions of some degree of personal risk would tend to support this suspicion. And the squeaky voice and the dithery, wittering manner he adopts when backed into a corner usually tended to deflect his being called to full account for his actions, too, leading others to underestimate him.

Which, like I say, was usually a mistake.



Looking through canon, the only thing that seemed to be inarguable over the course of the first 6 books was that whenever the subject of Peter Pettigrew came up, Rowling started flinging red herrings about like a fishmonger.

The first fishy viewpoint she handed us was the; “he sounds like Neville” herring which was Harry’s ill-informed interpretation of the tale of poor, overmatched little Peter, standing up to

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his bad-ass former friend Sirius, and getting himself very messily killed for it.

This was a very clever insertion on Rowling’s part, made early enough in the story arc that even by OotP any number of readers still hadn’t twigged to it that they’d been led up the garden path. Every indication we have suggests that apart from having been another “little fat boy” Peter has next to *nothing* in common with Neville Longbottom. But the reader gobbles the suggestion up and keeps looking suspiciously at Neville, rather than directing their suspicion at the invitation they have just been given to compare the two.

The younger readers also tend to overlook the fact that this particular comparison was all in Harry’s head, and it only lasted until Harry actually *met* Pettigrew. Once Harry did so, he knew better.

The next catch of red herrings were brought to market while we eavesdropped on McGonagall, Flitwick, Hagrid and Fudge nattering on about the perfidious Sirius Black in the Three Broomsticks, with Madam Rosemerta chiming in. (And Fudge trying his very best to impress her.) There are several oddities about this conversation which may or may not have been intended to be actual clues. Although possibly clues to several different subjects, some of which seem to have been later abandoned.

In the first place, one gets the distinct impression that Minerva may, for some reason of her own, have actively disliked Pettigrew. “I was often rather sharp with him.” She confesses, after informing us that he wasn’t in Black & Potter’s league. Sharp with him about what? For tagging along after his

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own friends? Excuse me? We seem to be missing a large piece of context here. Is this likely to be significant? Will there be a test?

(For the record: Minerva's sharpness was most likely to have been on account of Peter slacking off in her class.)

What is more to the point, Minerva still says nothing particularly *good* about Pettigrew, for all her confession that she feels badly about the way she snapped at him — now that he's become an heroic martyr.

Is there anything more going on here than a residual exasperation of a somewhat rigid teacher toward a student who was too lazy to even try to master his classwork? Or is this something left over from things she was picking up unconsciously from his behavior back in the days of the original Order of the Phoenix of which presumably both she and Peter (And Hagrid) were all members. It was, after all, during that period that Peter was spying for the enemy.

Or *were* they all members?



It is just possible that McGonagall is a bit of a late-comer where the Order of the Phoenix is concerned. She is certainly Albus's right hand so far as dealing with the school adminis-trivia goes, and has been so for a long while, but we don't know for certain that she was a member of the Order of the Phoenix during the first time around, let alone in Albus's confidence as regards any war effort. Moody didn't point her out in the photo of the original Order, and I believe that the Order was *Moody's* responsibility to administer.

Nor was Albus especially communicative with her on mat-

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ters to do with the (just concluded) war when he found her sitting on the Dursleys' garden wall at the opening of the series.

Albus knows how to compartmentalize. He was a master Legilimens, after all. The Order and the war effort may simply not have been the box that he originally put McGonagall in. After all, she was locked up in the school for 10 months of the year. How much help would she have been with Order business, there? Indeed, apart from Hagrid we do not know that any of the school's faculty or staff were involved in the Order whatsoever. Or not in the *first* war.

Minerva knew *about* the Order, of course. There was nothing secret about the Order in the first war. But she certainly wasn't at liberty to actually do anything in aid of it. It was out all over the map. She was stuck at Hogwarts.

I think it is quite possible that Minerva may have only climbed out of her box when she finally ditched school and went to wait for Albus at Privet Drive. And he was both surprised and amused to find her there.

And, by that time, it was all over but the debriefing.

Since Albus is nearly always happy to Explain It All, after the fact, Minerva may have only been brought up to speed regarding the Order, and the spy, and the Potters' Secret Keeper upon their return to the School. Being Minerva, she remembers everything she was told at the time, and saw no harm in repeating it 12 years later.

Since that point Albus has certainly welcomed her into what is left of the Order, as he has also done with the Weasleys. As he also has Tonks, on Moody's recommendation. Kingsley Shacklebolt was welcomed in as well. Kingsley may be another

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of Moody's comparatively recent recruits, or he may have come in with Arthur Weasley. None of these were a part of the Order the first time, either. But Albus hasn't let Minerva all *that* far in. And if she is a late-comer, she hadn't really been "tested" under fire in that particular context yet. Which might go some way toward the apparent lack of information that she had on what Albus was up to over the final year of his life.



And then in the Shrieking Shack we get the biggest and reddest herring that Rowling handed us of all. She forced us to sit back and get all of our primary reading on Peter Pettigrew's character handed to us from Sirius Black. (Hardly any of whose information has *ever* held up to closer examination.)

You will notice that at no point in this passage does Remus volunteer *his* impressions of Peter, and no one seems to think to ask Remus's impressions on anything, as long as Sirius is around to give us his.

The main thing that this particular device invites us to overlook is the glaring fact that Peter Pettigrew *tricked* Sirius Black. Tricked him (and everyone else, all the way up to Dumbledore) *thoroughly*. And got away with it for a dozen years.

And Rowling was still waving that particular herring under our noses and throwing us completely off the scent.

Make no mistake; Once we were filled in on the basics of the situation in PoA, we could always be confident in our belief that Sirius Black was on the side of the Light. But he was probably a loose cannon from the get-go, and he was not nearly as clever as he thought he was. It is obvious that anyone who knew the



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right buttons to push could program him however they chose. And Peter Pettigrew knew those buttons intimately.

And I still want to know just who Black was chewing the fat with when he came up with the bright idea of being the heroic Secret Keeper decoy while "harmless" little Peter did the real job. And just who led that particular conversation?

Unfortunately, there was a built-in miscalculation. Sirius Black was so sure that he would obviously be targeted by the people that were hunting the Potters that he forgot that the issue wasn't all about *him*. As usual, he underestimated the enemy, and it did not occur to him that pressure would first have been brought to bear on those who were *already* perceived to be weak. Before any specific emergency situation had arisen.

Apparently long before.



It has now been made abundantly clear that Pettigrew only betrayed the Potters because he was truly convinced that Voldemort was going to win. Like the rats of proverb, he felt that his ship was sinking and abandoned it for anything that still looked like a viable option.

But that isn't really the kind of thing that you can convince somebody of overnight. Not unless their confidence in their own side is already shaky.

And we just don't know that, do we?

And Peter also is stated as to have been passing information to the enemy for up to a year before he betrayed the Potters. Given what we now know of Albus's reluctance to actually



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confront his enemies or do anything about combating them, it begins to sound as if the Order may not have been in operation for a year. Certainly not if Albus never even founded it until after Trelawney threw a Prophecy in his face.

And we were never really given a clear understanding of just how effective Alastor Moody was as a leader, and he is almost certainly the person who actually was coordinating and running the Order of the Phoenix. Albus, after all, already had a day job up in Scotland.

As well as more than one part time obligation with the Ministry and the ICW.

So the main show must have been entirely left in the Ministry's hands up to that point, mustn't it?

And by that point, the Ministry was practically, if unwittingly, functioning as Lord Voldemort's publicity department!

Peter may have been got at before he even joined the Order.



Or, if one decides to adopt the view that Albus founded his Order just in time to invite James Potter and his associates into it as soon as they were done sitting their NEWTs, one has to raise the question of just precisely why. Rowling has never given us any convincing reason for why Albus would have felt a need to found an Order to oppose Lord Voldemort when the Ministry was already thoroughly engaged in doing so.

Indeed, until the Trelawney Prophecy was in play there appears to be no definable guiding purpose to the Order at all. Apart, that is, from the pervading, and not altogether unjustified conviction of adolescents and post-adolescents every-

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where that, of course, the Ministry wasn't capable of doing anything right.

For my own part, I am more and more convinced that it was Alastair Moody's grouching about how the Ministry was handling things that prompted Albus to found an Order and give it to Moody to run, just to give him a chance to be useful, and get him out of everyone's hair.

But why would Albus make a point of recruiting the Marauders? Yes, they were generally regarded as clever, and appeared to be popular, and James, at least, was a sports star. So what? They were basically untrained, and known to be bullies. Admittedly, they were also, apart from Lily, evidently all from "good families." But they weren't the least bit responsible. And Sirius had already managed to demonstrate that he was a dangerously loose cannon.

And none of them (but Lily) seem to have had the Potions NEWT which would qualify them for Auror training if they *had* wanted to get officially involved in the war effort.

Once again, with feeling, the Ministry does not maintain *any* sort of a standing *army*. The DMLE only trains and employs *Aurors*. And they insist upon their candidates meeting the qualifications needed to receive that training.

It often gets pointed out that most of the Order was largely composed of Albus's personal friends, Moody's protégés, and people who for various reasons felt obliged to Albus. That much might explain Lupin's inclusion. But it doesn't explain the others.

Until, that is, one also raises the possibility that at some point during the seven years of their attendance at Hogwarts, Albus

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was given reason to trace James Potter's antecedents, and discovered that he was a Peverill descendant.

James had also, by this time lost both of his parents. Albus may have decided that his personal guidance might be... profitable.



A contributing factor that no one seems to be giving any thought to regarding this whole issue, and one that I think is probably the crux of the matter, is that the Marauders were no longer in school.

The social dynamics and advantages of who you run around with in school do not necessarily follow you all the days of your life. Not even in the "old-boy's club" of wizarding Britain.

Basking in the reflected glory of being a close friend of this generation's Quidditch hero doesn't go very far towards getting you a decent job. It certainly didn't for Remus. And I wouldn't count on it having amounted for much in Peter's favor either.

We have already been told more than once that James didn't ever really need to work for a living. Sirius also had come into enough family money at the age of 17 to be marginally self-supporting, and I am no longer convinced that either of them had matured to the point of making any final decisions over what they wanted to do with themselves in the long-term. For a couple of 18/19-year-olds they were doing just fine as they were.

But we don't know anything about Remus or Peter's circumstances. Remus's parents may still have been alive then, and he could live at home. The same may be true for Peter. His mother was certainly still alive in '81 at any rate. But what is most likely

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is that as young wizards out of school with no known family money to depend on, both Remus and Peter were in the process of trying to find and hold down jobs that would pay well enough to support them.

Which means that the old Hogwarts dynamic of the "pair, plus one, plus one" was already in the process of dissolving. Only Sirius Black, with his little independent income could really afford to do the young layabouts together number with the ex-Quidditch hero on a continuing basis. At which they might be joined, intermittently, by poor Remus, who couldn't keep any job much beyond a month, and whose medical condition may have still reeled them all back together every 28 days.

Or at least it may have done so until Remus took up monitoring the other werewolves for Albus, and began to lose touch. By the time James married Lily, probably within a year out of school, Remus may have already been off trying to infiltrate the werewolves' camp.

Peter, on the other hand, had probably managed to score some entry-level, skivvy position, riding a desk somewhere in the Ministry, which does seem to be the largest single employer of qualified wizards, and he hadn't the leisure time to be able to keep in touch apart from weekends or their presumed monthly get-togethers when the moon was full. And you don't get the impression from our trip into the Pensieve that either Sirius or James would have put themselves to a lot of effort to keep in touch with Peter, off their own bat.

Peter, however would not have been willing to turn the shredding friendship loose yet. James Potter was the best thing that had ever happened to him, and even being shunted aside

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in Sirius's favor by the end of their first welcome feast wouldn't have deflected him. He clung like flypaper.

And Peter was generally known to have been a school friend of James's. He had probably boasted of it.

And we know that the Ministry was riddled with Voldemort's moles.

I really do think the whole business of undermining Peter's confidence in the Cult of Albus Dumbledore may have started much earlier than Sirius later worked it out.

Sirius and James *allegedly* had already foiled and escaped DE attentions three times by the time Trelawney spouted her Prophecy, after all. Unless mere membership in the Order *already* qualified them as having repeatedly defied his aims in itself. Group defiance is a thing.

And maybe for quite a while Peter felt he was informing on *Sirius*. Not James. Sirius, after all, was a far more obvious target.



At the end of CoS, Lucius Malfoy informs Harry that his parents had been "meddlesome fools, too".

My own take regarding the "meta" of this statement is that Rowling had not yet worked out the details of this particular "thread of evidence." The details were not in the outline that she was working from. I think if she were to do a revised edition of CoS that statement might now read "Your father was a meddlesome fool, too."

The very fact that Voldemort claims to have been willing to actually give Lily Potter the choice of saving herself while

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he murdered her husband and son — and Rowling has been very insistent in her interviews since the release of HBP that Lily supposedly really did really have that choice, even if Rowling couldn't bring herself to *show* her having one — it seems unlikely that she had been involved in whatever had painted the target on James's back.

(Although, regarding Lily's willingness to involve herself in things, it might be relevant to recall that one of the Easter eggs on Rowling's first official website was a scrap of an early draft of *Philosopher's Stone* wherein James and Lily had stolen the *Philosopher's Stone* from the thieves who had stolen it from Flamel.)

But, given Sirius's attitude to the rest of his family, it is very easy to postulate that he and James had quite deliberately meddled in something that one or other of them — probably cousin Bellatrix — was involved in.

Bellatrix has some dangerous friends.

And a vindictive streak a yard wide.

And then, if my reading of the situation is correct, James and Sirius probably found themselves the targets of a Death Eater attack in retaliation. And escaped.

And, rather than knuckle under and keep their heads down, they treated the situation much in the same way as they had their ongoing guerrilla war with Snape. Only this time the whole wizarding world was looking on. Well nobody would ever accuse Black & Potter of being averse to an audience.

James may have even started screaming defiance in the pages of the *DAILY PROPHET* and generally setting himself up as the blood-traitor faction's poster child. Complete with a

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Muggle-born bride and the Noble House of Black's notorious renegade son at his side. It should probably be noted that by the time he died, everyone in the wizarding world seemed to know who the Potters were. Which is quite a bit of prominence for a kid just barely turned 21.

And even Voldemort himself agreed that James Potter had to go.



Much of the above obviously is "educated" speculation. And from this point, just about everything we've got is pure speculation, and is unlikely to ever be otherwise. But, so far, it all complies with what we've been able to pick up from canon.

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 clique with any degree of eagerness. In fact, getting involved with 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. I firmly believe that once Trelawney had spouted her Prophecy, the core of the Order expanded, and the expansion was largely composed of other people who had all escaped Voldemort's attentions. In Peter's own mind he was probably still being a loyal friend to James Potter. For quite a while, too.

But not all of Voldemort's agents are stupid. And "What have

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they done for you lately?" is an insidious argument. Particularly if coupled with the suggestion that with very little more effort, Peter would be in the position of being able to claim the Dark Lord's gratitude. Which would translate into safety. A hint of apparent admiration for the cleverness and risks that Peter was taking would have gone some way in prompting Peter to reevaluate just who his real friends were.

Plus, a lot depends upon just how effective the Order's *efforts* actually were, too. I've yet to see anything in canon to convince me that they produced any kind of an effect which would have offset the public perception that Voldemort was winning.

And if, as really does appear to be a possibility, the whole covert purpose of the Order was shifting into giving Albus a platform from which to "cultivate" James Potter, whatever funny vibes that Peter (who seems *much* better at reading other people than Sirius Black) may have been picking up might have prompted him to consider trying to line up some protection from the opposition as well.

So far as psychological warfare goes, in fact, Voldemort had already won.



By then 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

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stringing the Dark Lord along for the past couple of 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 him unless he actively *joined* him would he?



Which brings up an issue which seems to have escaped us all. Sirius Black sat rotting in Azkaban for nearly a dozen years. He didn't need to. He escaped with almost absurd ease once he made up his mind to do it.

So why did he stay?

Albus Dumbledore states in PoA that Sirius Black had not really acted like an innocent man.

Well, that much is easy enough to reconcile. He wasn't one. Not by his own reckoning. Not really.

Yes he blamed himself for the Potters' deaths. That would certainly have contributed to it. Guilty, guilty, guilty. And the Dementors would certainly have distorted that perception to their advantage. But it doesn't really answer the question. No one as fundamentally self-righteous as Sirius Black is going to volunteer to sit in Azkaban for a dozen years over an honest mistake, even a big one. Particularly since Sirius was still able to console himself that he had *not* betrayed them.

I think Sirius Black thought that Pettigrew was dead. He thought he *HAD* killed him!

That's why he stood there laughing like a madman and didn't resist arrest. That's why he sat in Azkaban for a dozen years.



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Do you honestly think that he would have stayed there for five minutes after he discovered that the Dementors couldn't recognize him when he was a dog if he thought that Pettigrew was alive, and running around loose? He honestly thought that he had *killed* Pettigrew!

No wonder he was so furious over the whole business when he found how he had been tricked. No wonder he was ranting about being determined to finally commit the murder that he had spent 12 years in Azkaban for.



So let's take another look at that murder. And the events that led up to it.

This segment is also over in the essay on Sirius Black, but it bears repeating here:

Godric's Hollow: Voldemort has killed James and followed Lily upstairs to kill Harry. Peter has followed his Master at a slight delay and is lying in wait for Sirius to show up. We do not see this in Tom's memory. But it was clearly always a part of *Peter's* plan that Sirius should die that night and be blamed for betraying the Potters. Voldemort probably approved it, too. That would have left his agent Wormtail in place to do further damage. The war wasn't over yet, after all.

The trap had already been set. Sirius had arranged to check on Pettigrew that evening. When he found Pettigrew gone, he was expected to hurry off to Godric's Hollow to check on James and Lily. He was supposed to run into an ambush at Godric's Hollow. Peter probably had expected him to Apparate, not spend a lot of additional time flying there on the motorcycle.



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When it all went boom, Peter was stuck. I don't know whether the explosion that allegedly damaged the house was really that much of an explosion. Or whether there was even an explosion at all. The damage to the house could have been Peter's contribution to the overall confusion.

It seems to have taken a while for the emergency crews to show up. But there was enough disturbance to tip Peter off that something unexpected had happened. Even if only an unaccountably bright green flash and a sudden silence.

Peter ran upstairs, found a dead Lily, a live Harry, and *allegedly* no Dark Lord in sight. Just Voldemort's wand lying there. He panicked.

Peter had nothing against Harry. And even if Peter did know why Tom wanted the child dead — which isn't at all likely — Tom is gone, so that doesn't *matter* any more.

Realizing that if Tom is not there to protect him, he is now going to be hunted by *both* sides, he grabs Voldemort's wand and makes a run for it.

Well, now that we know the house is still standing he could have gone back for the wand at any time. But I still think he took it then, or it would have been confiscated by the Ministry. He probably later hid it in the Weasley's attic.

Indeed, he may have blown out the wall and vanished Tom's body himself, so that once someone *did* come, They'd discover an unsolvable mystery, and draw their own conclusions..

Once he gets to safety and calms down a bit, he realizes he's botched things in his panic. He should have stayed put, killed Sirius when he showed up, and "discovered" the bodies in the morning, (or let the emergency crews discover them) and con-

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tinued to let Sirius be blamed for it all, as originally planned.

Although that would still leave at least one DE, his contact at the Ministry, who knows about him still at large. But in any case, he didn't do what he needed to do when he needed to do it. This won't work. He has to disappear.

So he thinks it over and moves the ambush script to Sirius's own doorstep. He gets his props together (no one seems to be questioning where that heap of bloody robes came from. Animagi transform with their clothing — and their wands — and Peter was fully dressed when Sirius and Lupin forced him to change back in the Shack. Yet there was a heap of bloodstained robes at the site of his supposed murder.) He cuts off a finger, heals it, stakes out the area and takes his Animagus form, either complete with his props, or near to where he has concealed them. When Sirius finally gets home the next day, exhausted from his all-night search for Peter, Peter takes his own shape drops his props, yells: "How could you!" and detonates whatever it was he detonated, changes back and scampers into safety. He may have hoped for Sirius to be killed in the explosion, but he erred on the side of timidity and wasn't quite close enough.

Sirius tells us that his handle on sanity was knowing that he had NOT betrayed James and Lily. He doesn't actually say *anything* about not killing Peter. I think he believed he had. He believed that it was serving justice to do it — vigilante justice, but justice all the same — and he may have also believed that he *deserved* to rot in jail for having done it.

Which means that he didn't just stand there like a lump while Peter blew up the street. He had thrown *something* at Peter, at the same time Peter set off his own explosion.

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Between the two of them, it's no wonder the street blew up! Peter may even have even had a good idea about what Sirius was likely to throw too. They'd been allies for years, and he knew Sirius's taste in aggressive magic. He may have taken some kind of specific protective precautions, and at least would have tried to be sure that his own curse was going to be something Sirius would have thought that he was responsible for. What *else* is the point of faking your own death?

By the time we caught up to him in the Shrieking Shack, Sirius had had a year to figure this out, and the certain knowledge that Peter had survived. But I think he really *hadn't* realized that Peter was alive until he saw his picture, with the Weasleys, in the PROPHECY, the summer before. And then he knew that he had been tricked and was convinced that Peter was responsible for *everything*.



Another thing that would be readily apparent to the reader if he were not encouraged at every turn to overlook it, is that at some point along the way Pettigrew learned to be an extremely shrewd reader of a situation. And of character as well, even if he was not a rocket scientist.

And, regardless of whatever show of twittery witlessness Peter might decide to put on for the benefit of witnesses, his brain, such as it was, seems to be the kind that doesn't necessarily have an off switch. Once he actually decided to *use* it, that is. We are talking about a boy who hung around with a werewolf for several years and was too lazy to even bother take a good look at him.



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Sirius never figured it out. Or rather he never figured out what it *meant*.

He enjoyed rubbing Peter's nose in the fact that it was *he* who was James's second. He never dreamed that Peter would try to pay him back.

Gryffindor House does not recognize the well-developed "back-seat driver" rôle that flourishes in Slytherin. Gryffindor is all about the glory, the admiration, the acclaim of the crowd. Pulling the strings from behind the scenes isn't in its vocabulary. Gryffindor recognizes only "Leaders," whom everyone admires, "Lieutenants" who are admired by their Leaders, and "Lone Agents," who, in the main, admire themselves, and hope to be admired by posterity. And as they work their way up through the school, if they expect to succeed, the youngsters in Gryffindor House re-sort themselves into their proper places in this rather narrow spectrum.

Or not. Some kids will just not stop trying to take a rôle to which they are unsuited. Percy Weasley is a failed Leader. It is not that he *could* not lead, so much as that his potential followers will not let him. A true Leader requires more flexibility and charisma than Percy Weasley, despite his many virtues, and his 12 OWLs, will ever have.

Peter Pettigrew is a failed Lieutenant. He was all set to be James Potter's very best friend, and follow him to the ends of the earth. And if Sirius Black had not shown up in their year, I think there is a fighting chance that James might still be alive today, Peter might still be holding down a desk somewhere in the Ministry, and nobody would have heard of Harry Potter, or his siblings. Without Sirius defining "the enemy" as his cousin



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Bellatrix and anyone connected with her circle, James and Peter would have gotten up to some highly dangerous, recklessly, interesting mischief, but they would probably not have messed with matters that would have gotten themselves targeted by Death Eaters in retaliation and James would not have “defied” Voldemort that requisite three times.

But before the Start of Term Feast was over Sirius Black had effortlessly claimed Peter’s place. And Peter never got it back.

Peter, even at eleven, knew *he* was not a Leader. And, at eleven, Peter was not prepared to go into “Lone Agent” mode. He only really did that in the end in response to outside pressure.

Pettigrew is a lot more resourceful than anyone is admitting. His brain showed up late to the party, but when he had to, he sometimes made up for lost time. Scabbers slept a lot. Peter seems to have woken up with a vengeance.

So he was hopeless at dueling. Well, so what? Life is not a duel. In a duel you don’t know what is going to be thrown at you from moment to moment, and you don’t know your opponent’s plans. In real life you can work your way around this.

You don’t like surprises? Okay. Then you take steps not to let yourself get taken by surprise, don’t you?

You learn to stay in the background. You learn to size up anyone you think you are likely to have to deal with, and to do it quickly. And if you can get close to the pack leader, you pay attention. You make a point of learning how to play him. You learn what impresses him. You learn his weaknesses. You figure out who he listens to and what approach is best to take. And you mirror what he wants to see. That’s what Lieutenants do. You don’t have to be Sirius Black in order to do that. Much



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as it might help.

And you never, that is, *never*, volunteer unnecessary information.

Dead heroes are of no use to anyone, least of all themselves.

Being a simple “yes man” is for amateurs. Most leaders would rather feel a little resistance, once and a while.

And some of them take a certain satisfaction in watching their subordinates squirm. It reassures them that they are still able to exert all the control it takes to keep everything in line. So *squirm*, already, and do it abjectly, put on a good show, what does pride matter?

If Voldemort’s wrath can be deflected by a cringing suppliant, then maybe Sirius Black’s can too. Cringe Peter will. He’s not proud. Or, not with the kind of pride that creates dead heroes. He’ll do whatever it takes to buy himself a little more *time*. And he won’t wrack himself with guilt or shame for having done it afterwards, either. Guilt and shame are for suckers. Not survivors. And left to himself, Peter Pettigrew is a *survivor*.



Case in point: a cornered Rat reads a situation:

Sirius and Remus aren’t in a receptive mood this evening, so distract them and confuse their aim by throwing yourself on the mercy of the kids. Turn the witnesses into participants. It maximizes your odds.

Well, forget Weasley. Once he gets an idea into his head he’s immovable. Why did I even bother? Oh good. Little missy has decided to play the Voice of Reason. Good girl! Keep it up. *Sincerely* appreciate *reasonable* people...



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It buys time.

Okay. This is it. Here's the plan. Go for broke and toss the Potter kid right into the "leadership" position. Black is used to deferring to a Potter — and by ghod does this kid ever look like him! — Black may just be feeling guilty enough to buy it, and Lupin never did like the idea of getting blood on his hands. Or teeth.

"Only Potter has the right to decide."

Gotcha! You're dead easy, Padfoot. Twelve years in Azkaban can't make you lose your style, can it? And the kid has been being fed the story of his father the Hero ever since he entered the wizarding world. I should know, I've heard him repeating it.

All right, Kid, show us all that you can be a Hero, for Daddy... Screw dignity. It only needs to *work*.



But what was a *young* Peter Pettigrew like?

Well for one thing he wasn't anything like as hard and calculating as the example above. He was a lot more likely to trust his chosen leaders back then. But, while he may have grown a little in skills and a lot more in selfishness, Wormtail is still unquestionably human. And he shows no signs of any kind of dementia, or misperception of reality. But he was every bit as much at risk of losing his sense of proportion as any of other Dark wizard. And he didn't realize the danger of accepting "rewards" from Tom Riddle.

I rather think that little Peter Pettigrew might actually have been a rather likable character, once upon a time.

Not physically attractive, perhaps. He was always a plain

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little thing. Short and pudgy and watery-eyed (allergies?) and he probably started losing his hair by the time he reached his early 20s. And he never had anything like the overwhelming charm or charisma of either Black or Potter. But he was also certainly no *more* of a jerk than either Black or Potter, and I think he was probably a lively youngster with a sly grin, a quick and occasionally witty tongue and an infectious laugh. He was also a master at convincing you that he thought you were absolutely wonderful. The sort of boy that Black & Potter would have happily kept on board as a friend, an admiring audience, and sometime accomplice.

And a useful accomplice, too. Willing to try to talk his way out of almost anything, and frequently succeeding. He also did an outstanding job of running interference, creating distractions and sowing confusion. And Peter was always up for a lark. Remus was always harder to coax out of his shell. There was never any confusion back in school over why Peter was in Gryffindor.



Moving right along; somebody on the lists always eventually brings up the perennial question of why Pettigrew chose to hide out with the Weasleys.

I think that hiding out with the Weasleys is one of the first and best indications we were handed to suspect that Sirius's estimation of Pettigrew is inadequate. Peter showed extraordinary shrewdness when he chose the Burrow for his bolt-hole.

Pettigrew found himself suddenly on the run from both sides once when it turned out that he had led Voldemort into a

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trap. The Death Eaters do not tolerate mistakes which “inconvenience” them. If he’d had a snowball’s chance of convincing the DEs that he was still valuable enough not to be summarily killed, Sirius would have been dead from that encounter the following day and Peter would have been acting the part of a live hero avenging his friends. But the nickname of “Wormtail” was known by somebody in DE circles, and he believed, rightly, there was no chance of convincing some of Voldemort’s other followers of that scenario. Bellatrix, after all, was still at liberty. If he intended to go on living there was no alternative for him but to “die,” and to do it as conspicuously as possible. Peter was probably alarmed when he realized that Sirius was not killed in the explosion.

It was a calculated risk leaving Sirius alive to pick up whatever information might make the rounds in Azkaban, but who would Sirius tell, and who would believe him if he did? And it wasn’t like Sirius was ever getting out....

Ironically, given the lack of enthusiasm displayed by just about all of Voldemort’s followers regarding any attempt to get their Dark Lord back, Pettigrew might have been overestimating his danger in that quarter. But, really, you could hardly blame him for not daring to chance it. After all Bellatrix was still on the loose at that point. And somebody in the organization knew his nickname.

Peter already knew of the Weasleys. He had been a member of the Order since finishing at Hogwarts, and had been spying for Voldemort within the ranks of Dumbledore’s supporters for at least the previous year. The Weasleys were not involved with the Order themselves, but the late Order members Gideon and

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Fabian Prewett had been Molly’s brothers, after all.

For that matter; back in VoldWar I the Ministry and the Order of the Phoenix were allies. Even though Arthur and Molly were not members of the Order themselves, she and her husband were completely in sympathy. And Arthur was already a Ministry employee. He may have been a trusted source of Ministry information, or a go-between.

For that matter, given that the Ministry of Magic appears to be the largest single employer of trained wizards in Britain, we cannot overlook the probability that Pettigrew was also employed there. While wearing his “Order hat,” Peter may even have dealt with Arthur directly. It is reasonable to suppose that he knew the family, and knew where the Burrow was.

He also probably knew that the Weasleys had a growing horde of little boys who might welcome a pet. Not even Bill was old enough for Hogwarts yet in 1981, and the twins were too young for their dispositions and proclivities to be known to Peter. He knew he could be safely concealed with the Weasleys for years. And profitably, as well. At least as regards Ministry information.

I repeat; Arthur works for the Ministry. By the time Harry first went up to Hogwarts Arthur was actually heading a division of the DMLE, and would have been in an *excellent* position to hear any interdepartmental gossip regarding Dumbledore, Voldemort or the remaining Death Eaters. And you just know that a younger Arthur had discussed everything with his “Mollywobbles” after the kids were in bed. Molly would have insisted on it.

In fact it probably put a considerable spoke in Peter’s wheel

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when first Percy and then Ron hauled him off to Hogwarts and away from this prime information source. Even though by that time I tend to doubt that Molly *wanted* to hear about Arthur's confiscation of various bits of Muggle rubbish.

But Hogwarts also offered distinct possibilities for a self-employed spy. I suspect Scabbers slept so much during the daytime because he spent hours snooping about during the evening and into the night.

And at the end of Year 2, from overhearing Harry's inevitable debriefing with Ron and Hermione, he finally learned that VaporMort was believed to be lurking about in an Albanian forest, and made a note of it.

He probably learned this from listening to Harry telling his friends about it either in Gryffindor tower, or on the London-bound Hogwarts Express. Dumbledore had given Harry that information in his debriefing at the end of the adventure of the Chamber of Secrets, a few days before the end of term.

Peter certainly would have known about the adventure of the Riddle Diary and the death of the Basilisk. After several weeks petrified, Ron and Harry needed to bring Hermione up to speed, and they would hardly have cared if Scabbers was present and listening.

Of course Peter had little notion of what it *meant*.

Not *then* anyway.



Peter — who doesn't *like* surprises — never lost track of the possibility of someday needing to make a break for it and throw himself on Voldemort's mercy. But he was in no hurry to do it.

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Let's take another look at the record, shall we? Peter Pettigrew faked his own death in Gryffindor tower and was — *months* later — discovered in Hagrid's hut.

Oh, say 99% of the readers, that's easy. He was afraid of Crookshanks.

You're damn right it's easy. In fact it's too bloody easy by half.

Peter is an *Animagus*, he doesn't need to worry about a cat. The students — who all know that he's somebody's *pet* — will protect him when they are around and when they aren't he can protect himself. Crookshanks is a major nuisance, but he isn't a compelling danger.

And if Peter is faking his death in order to make an escape, and run off to find Voldemort, why hasn't he done it? Here it is, 4 months later and he is still sitting it out on school property.

He wasn't hiding from *Crookshanks*. He was hiding from the Marauder's Map. Which doesn't map Hagrid's hut.

Harry wasn't given the map until mid-December.

He joined up with Ron and Hermione in Hogsmeade the first time he used it and Ron did his whinging over Fred and George giving it to Harry instead of himself then. Not later in the dorm.

The eavesdropping scene at the 3 Broomsticks gave the trio plenty of other items to discuss. This was rapidly followed by the Buckbeak trial crisis, the Firebolt brouhaha and the 3-way quarrel between the trio — all before Christmas break was over. Before we turn around it's Quidditch season, and then Harry is occupied with Patronus lessons which don't go particularly well for some time. We don't know how long it was before the Map was mentioned in Peter's hearing (It never happened in the reader's hearing). But Peter staged his disappearance by some

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time in February. That was before the 2nd time Harry snuck out with the Map, and that time both Snape and Lupin caught him with it. Lupin confiscated it. But by then, Peter was sitting it out at Hagrid's.

The inside of Hagrid's hut is off the map. Lupin later claims that it was only after the trio left Hagrid's with Scabbers/Peter in their custody that Peter showed up on the Map. Peter would have known that the hut was a safe area where he would have been undetected. That's why he was there. I think he intended to wait it out in the hut until the school year ended, stow away in Ron's luggage and be "discovered" on the way home. (And to hide at the Burrow before Ron could bring him back the following year) Unfortunately, Hermione rooted him out of his hidey-hole and the jig was up.

Indeed, once he discovered that the old Marauders' Map was back in play, (around February) he faked his death as Scabbers and shifted his operations to the discomfort of having to dodge Fang and Buckbeak in Hagrid's hut, rather than leave Hogwarts and strike out on his own.

It was definitely Peter who nabbed Voldemort's wand at Godric's Hollow (JKR admitted as much on her old website). Voldemort was in no condition to take it with him. Which provides us with convincing circumstantial evidence that Peter, at least, WAS indeed at Godric's Hollow, even though we have no convincing evidence of just exactly when. And dead useful that wand of Voldemort's was, we thought, since his own wand may have had to be left at the scene of his "murder." Although that conclusion is a long way from certain. All they say they found was bloody robes and a finger, not a wand.



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While we are on the subject of wands: it would appear that little Peter Pettigrew has a "thing" for lifting other people's wands. He may have had quite the collection by the end of GoF — although he also may have been forced to donate that collection to the DEs that Voldemort sprung from Azkaban. As well as his own, since Ollivander claims to have made him a new one.

He had certainly taken charge of Voldemort's after Godric's Hollow.

For that matter, while we're on the subject of Godric's Hollow, he may just have helped himself to James and Lily's wands as well. They no longer needed them.

We still have Bertha Jorkins's wand unaccounted for, too, and Barty Crouch Sr made his escape on Wormtail's watch, and seems to have made his way to Hogwarts without one. So Peter probably still has his. And, once the shouting was over in the graveyard, I suspect that he also helped himself to Cedric's.

If the Weasleys had any stored in the attic, I doubt they are still there by now. (And if there were any old wands lying around at Spinners' End I'd suggest that Snape double-check whether they were still there after Pettigrew was recalled.)

Don't ever leave an unattended wand out around Pettigrew. You'll never see it again. Or maybe only in Peter's hand, aimed at you.

I suspect that Peter really got off on having Voldemort's wand.

Not that he used it. Didn't need to as a rat. There was certainly no record of extra spells in the wand's log, either. But I'm



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sure he enjoyed *having* it.

I think that if Remus and Sirius had had the presence of mind to search Peter when they forced him back into human form in the shrieking shack, they might have found that wand, too, although he could have already have stashed it at Hagrid's hut for safekeeping. Or left it safe in the Weasley's attic. It is a 13-inch wand, and Peter is not a tall man. it might be awkward to try to carry it concealed.

Although none of this really makes much sense against Olivander's statement that he had to make a new wand for Pettigrew soon after he was taken into custody by the DEs. Nor against his other statements that most wizards can use most wands without too much trouble. If they have to. I think Rowling simply lost track of the whole issue when she found she had to provide Ron with yet another new wand.

(She certainly lost track of her earlier claim in HBP that Olivander had disappeared with no signs of violence and that his shop was empty. What happened to all his stock? Wasn't there a wand in all of the hundreds there that Peter could have used?)

But Peter was far too comfortable living the simple life of a pet rat to take the kind of risks that any such desperate measure on the order of a trek to Albania required unless forced to it. Which he ultimately was.

And for once, Voldemort actually delivered even more than his follower could have ever dreamed. For nearly a year Pettigrew had his Master utterly dependent upon himself. He should have gotten off his duff and made his way to Albania years earlier. But Pettigrew couldn't be arsed as long as he was

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drifting along in reasonable comfort. And if he hadn't waited, the payoff wouldn't have been nearly so high.



Which brings us to Act Two of this particular play. Voldemort and Wormtail.

Our first double portrait of this unholy pair is in the first chapter of Goblet of Fire. And as this particular shoal of red herrings do their little fan dance, our first impression is one of whimpering, submissive little Wormtail being ground under the heel of yet another playground bully.

But is it really? On a closer look, I'm not so sure. Do a reality check. It is Voldemort who is utterly dependent on Wormtail, not the other way around. If anything, this is a picture of a bad-tempered, rich invalid and his nurse. And Voldemort makes a very bad "patient." He's fretful and querulous and simply miserable. And he takes this out on Peter by lashing out with petty spite and insults and accusations. He waves his preference for Barty Crouch Jr (whom neither of them had seen in over a decade) under Wormtail's nose to taunt him. In return, Peter dutifully feeds him every signal to assure him that he is just the servant here, it is Voldemort who is in charge.

It's much safer to be dismissed as a cringing minion and not too bright than to let the tyrant who is physically in your power start viewing you as a threat, you know. That would constitute a positive invitation to get yourself removed as soon as he no longer needs you. Play it humble. Verbal abuse isn't going to raise any blisters.

So we now have conclusive evidence that when Peter sold out

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he stayed sold. And my speculations above as to his resourcefulness seem to have been trumped by Rowling's determination to sign her whole cast of dozens up for a group rate on frontal lobotomies. For in DHs Peter was finally rendered down into another of Rowling's disposable plot devices.

Because, until she finally decided to get rid of him, just by the act of keeping him around she had managed to suggest that he was still significant. And as it turned out, *surprise!* he wasn't. Not in the least. Not once he helped Tom out of the cauldron.

If Peter had really been anything like as resourceful as she had already demonstrated him to be, and if he was as aware that BabyMort was as dependent upon his cooperation as BabyMort clearly was, rather than just being an unconsidered puppet with his author pulling his strings when the plot demanded it, then he could have easily have done an end run around Black and Lupin, by getting Voldemort's wand away from him (which he was certainly capable of) and turning himself in to either Albus OR the Ministry.

Handing a disarmed BabyMort over to them would have translated into instant amnesty and quite possibly a full pardon for anything he had ever done in the course of VoldWar I. For he had certainly led a blameless life after it, and one could hardly have faulted him for not allowing Black and Lupin to give him to the Dementors. The worst of Tom's followers were still inside at that point. Either the Ministry or Albus would have been honor bound to protect him from Black (who was out of the country by then). Lupin would have toed whatever line Albus told him to, and he preferred not getting his hands dirty anyway. And they would be stuck having to deal with

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Tom. But that would not have been Peter's responsibility.

And if he wanted to, Peter could have ratted out Barty Jr for good measure. Which by that time his father may have viewed as almost a relief.

But of course then we wouldn't have had the nonsense of Harry having to compete in the TriWizard tournament, He, and we would have just been able to watch it. And there would be no further developments to the story until whoever had custody of BabyMort managed to drop the ball and he found another patsy.



The only point at which Peter seems to have fumbled the ball in this scene was when his inherent laziness got the better of him and he tried to cover two bases at once. He was out of practice. His suggestion of being let off his leash to find a substitute for Harry Potter was probably absolutely sincere. But the last thing on his mind was to make an escape. He just wants out of the position of glorified nursemaid for a spell. That's just too bloody much like *work*, y'know?

Nor was Peter quite the feckless fool that Voldemort spitefully calls him. Before he went anywhere near the point of confronting Voldemort in his forest lair, Pettigrew had exercised the uncommon foresight to supply himself with a witness/hostage.

That this hostage was the ever-so-useful Bertha Jorkins was pure chance — but that Peter didn't go to meet Voldemort unaccompanied probably was not. Peter really wasn't that stupid. Or that forgetful. Or that uninformed. He knew what

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became of Professor Quirrell.

With this in mind, let's take another look at the following exchange;

"I found you," said Wormtail, and there was definitely a sulky edge to his voice now. "I was the one who found you. I brought you Bertha Jorkins."

"That is true," said the second man, sounding amused. "A stroke of brilliance I would not have thought possible from you, Wormtail — though, if truth be told, you were not aware of how useful she would be when you caught her, were you?"

"I — I though she would be useful, My Lord —"

"Liar," said the second voice again, the cruel amusement more pronounced than ever.

Reads just a little differently, this time round, doesn't it?

On the other hand, it's likely that Voldemort managed to create a Horcrux under Peter's very nose, and Peter didn't have a clue. He watched the whole thing and had no inkling of what was he was seeing.

Which in a roundabout way might make sense of the fact that Peter Pettigrew had to have *been there* when Tom created the Nagini Horcrux, and yet we are given not a single *hint* from Rowling that Peter ever had a clue as to what a Horcrux is.

There has to be a limit regarding how many places your consciousness can be at the same time. We know that Tom managed to at least temporarily possess Harry in the Ministry Atrium, but we have no idea what Tom's physical body was doing at that time, because Harry certainly wasn't attending to that, and nobody i.e., Albus) ever bothered to tell him, and he

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didn't think to ask.

Consequently, I'm going to propose that one can only be in two places at the same time, and might have only limited mobility during that period. But one has at least *some* mobility, or it would be difficult to actually kill the fragment-hosting body while you are possessing it.

As to why he would make a Horcrux out of the snake; yes, Tom had a perfectly rational-sounding reason to do that. The homunculus was being kept alive by some kind of "formula" which required snake venom. We heard Tom and Peter discussing it in the first chapter of GoF.

So Tom knew he was going to be stuck in a highly unsatisfactory body until he could capture his designated victim, and that it might be anything up to a year before the opportunity for staging his grand return came around. Therefore, he needed to assure that the unsatisfactory body wasn't going to fail on him in the meantime, as Quirrell's had. The vestigial "body" he was occupying wasn't going to burn out on its own, (and would, after all, be used as a base for creating a more functional *new* body) but it was dependent upon certain factors. One of them being a potion which required that venom.

So, first, find a snake, coax it in (not difficult for a Parselmouth), enlarge it to the point that one snake will produce enough venom that he won't be needing to ride herd on a whole basket of snakes. And then control it. One could probably keep it under Imperius, but he's only going to have Pettigrew for assistance, and while Pettigrew is a lot more effective than Tom ever expected him to be, he doesn't inspire much confidence.

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Actually, let's go back a bit, I've left out a step of the procedure here. During the setup process of this particular gambit, Tom wasn't just limited to Pettigrew's assistance. He was *perfectly* capable of performing magic on his own. But he already knew that this was a temporary situation and he wasn't going to repeat the error of the Quirrell debacle.

Since Pettigrew had tracked him down, he had been possessing Bertha Jorkins.

Yes, Peter was quite right. She had been **very** useful.

And if Swythiv and I were correct upon just why she had wandered off to the Continent, and her boss, Bagman was unsurprised at her return having been delayed longer than originally stated, she might have been even **more** useful. Bertha seems to have had a very *bad* track record where it comes to men. In our one glimpse of her, She was described as being fairly heavy-set in her teens. If she continued to be so, it might have been a while before an out-of-wedlock pregnancy was publicly evident. An extended trip to the Continent is fairly traditional, under such circumstances, after all.

So there were two fully-functioning magicians involved for this stage of the proceedings. Tom took Bertha's mind apart from the inside, while he directed the creation of the homunculus, taking no concern about burning her out, since he certainly had no intention of leaving her alive.

Once the homunculus was prepared — or arranged for — he shifted his "base" into it, leaving behind only a fragment, to keep control of her until she died, or more likely, he killed her. Probably by an AK since her echo was listed among the records in the Priori Incantatum log.



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Once the fragment was released from the dead body, it was directed into Nagini — who had probably been held under Imperius by Pettigrew until that point. After that, Tom was able to deal with Nagini directly.

Peter watched it all, but he had no idea of what he was seeing. He'd been through Hogwarts on Dumbledore's watch. He never heard of Horcruxes.

We see no more of this pair until Harry's vision in chapter twenty-nine. And at that time we get only a glimpse of Wormtail being punished for the very serious error of allowing Crouch Sr to escape. And in that glimpse he takes his lumps as stolidly as anyone undergoing the Cruciatus Curse can. It is very likely that at that point Voldemort was not yet able to channel the full strength necessary for a really powerful Cruciatus, (Barty Crouch Sr managed to throw off his Imperius in a just a manner of months, if you recall) but Wormtail was not likely to give Tom any reason to suspect that.



But, once Crouch Jr was out of the running for the post of "most faithful servant," Wormtail found himself briefly going head-to-head against Lucius Malfoy. And Malfoy was neither demented nor an amateur. One belatedly wonders just exactly what were the circumstances under which Tom knew to pry the information about the loss of the Diary out of Malfoy.

It is a pity that we never got the opportunity to watch whether such a fine example of an ingrained, traditional Slytherin Politician was able to outmaneuver a dyed-in-the-wool Gryffindor subversive. But while Peter seems never to



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have been particularly highly valued by his Master once that Master had fully returned to the material plane, he also seems to have never fallen so far as Malfoy did.

Peter remained fully in play, butting heads with Bellatrix, and was at least temporarily planted on Severus Snape in Snape's own home. (Or, rather, sent in advance to spy on Narcissa Malfoy if she figured out the Dark Lord's double-cross hidden in Draco's "mission" and went running to Snape for assistance.)

And:

Word.

Underneath it all, Peter is still a thoroughgoing Gryffindor, for all his underhandedness. Pettigrew's mode of operation shows none of the strengths or particular skills of Slytherin House. He forges no "peer" alliances and he does no deals. He opens no negotiations and he makes neither threats nor innuendos. He shares no information and takes no one into any level of his confidence. And he doesn't really get out there and jockey for position either.

And the former Tom Riddle was probably at a standstill trying to figure out what to *do* with him.

He didn't want to just dispense with him. He's too short-handed as it was. And besides, the Rat had proved that he could be *useful*. (And he already knew enough to be dangerous if unsupervised. He was *there* when Tom created the Snake Horcrux, after all. Probably had even assisted — even though I seriously doubt that Tom filled him in on the purpose of just what he was doing.) And Tom never understood him in the least.

When a Gryff isn't trying to lead the troops and hasn't

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entrenched himself in a role of trusted Lieutenant, he is very likely to be off on his own in full-bore "Lone Agent" mode, even if only in his daydreams. And Pettigrew was acting absolutely independently. Unconnected to anyone in the organization but Tom himself. More so than Bellatrix even. But with none her personal devotion.

The alliances of Slytherin House are much shallower and far more flexible than the deep tribal associations of Hufflepuff, but the Slyths nevertheless depend heavily on their "connections". It is a rare Slytherin indeed who chooses to act outside of his "network."

[Post-HBP note: the above statement was originally written *years* before we ever met Horace Slughorn.]

The Hat sorts children, not really by their personalities, but by their goals and values. Peter is an example of what can happen when those goals and values shift.

Gryffindor is all about the admiration, and who gives it.

Slytherin is all about winning. Whatever it takes. Whatever the cost. And the hell with whether anyone admires you for having done it. It is not unknown or even uncommon for a Slytherin to win only at a cost that was higher than he can afford to pay. Tom Riddle, and no few of his followers are proof enough of that.

When Peter Pettigrew was Sorted he was a Lieutenant in search of a Leader who would admire him for his own qualities.

And Peter's chosen Leader almost immediately chose another Lieutenant that he admired much more than he did Peter Pettigrew.

Peter spent 7 years trying to bypass his rival and recapture

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the attention of his chosen Leader.

For Peter Pettigrew it *became* all about the winning.

But he was already Sorted by then.

And he was *still* a Lieutenant in search of a trusted Leader.

Lord Voldemort was never a *trusted* Leader. He had merely dwindled into Peter's only remaining option.

And, somewhere along the way, Albus had lost Peter's trust.

Oh yes, Pettigrew could certainly have survived being sorted into Slytherin House. He might even have thrived there. He would at least have learned those Slytherin networking skills that he lacks. Although I doubt he would have ever rated admittance to the Slug Club.

But it would have been no *better* a fit for Peter than Gryffindor was. In fact it would have probably been a better fit for Harry (who could also stand to learn something about networking) than for Peter. And we all know what an awkward fit it would have been for Harry, don't we?

Although, on reflection, it might have been amusing to watch Peter cozying up to Severus Snape (all those lovely destructive hexes, y'know? That's just so kewl!), jockeying hopefully for Malfoy's attention, or developing a crush on and trying to impress Narcissa Black.

But I think that it might clear some of our lingering confusion about Peter Pettigrew to consider that it wasn't simple physical timidity that kept Peter a step behind Black & Potter. It was that fatal laziness. Plus a somewhat more prudent grasp of his own limits. But any of their exploits that they let him in on, he was in up to his neck, and as recklessly as either of them.

Up until our trip into the Pensieve most readers also over-

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looked the fact that Pettigrew had a seriously underestimated taste for violent mayhem. Blowing the gas line in the middle of a Muggle street was his own contribution to that particular drama. Nobody suggested that to him from outside.

No. Either as boy or man, I would say that everybody's "harmless" little Peter Pettigrew was a closet *thrill seeker*.

If he had fit the basic demographic, and had not had a personal history of trailing along after a couple of demonstrated blood-traitors he might have positively *enjoyed* being a Death Eater.

If Tom Riddle had not been so insistent upon his blood-superiority rhetoric, he might have signed him up *years* earlier.



Regarding Potterverse People

Man on a Tightrope

The enigmatic Severus Snape.



"Loyalty Me Lie"

This is another essay from a fairly early iteration of the site. Although probably not the original, since I hedged my bets regarding Snape until HBP had been released.

It's also the essay which got hijacked and re-posted on someone else's Lj fairly early on in the century.

But that version of the piece has long been superseded by 2nd thoughts and further developments.



S^o. I finally did it. Post-HBP I finally got off the fence, stuck my neck out, and took a stand on the question of the loyalties of former Professor Severus Snape.

I was convinced that Severus Snape was — beyond any reasonable doubt — one of the White Hats.

I was not going to answer to any of the fans who were determined to harbor UNreasonable doubts. But I knew they were out there.

In fact, even now downstream of DHs, they are still out there.

This is also not to say that I think Severus Snape was [secretly] a nice man — he wasn't. Nor that underneath it all he was even necessarily a *good* man, that hadn't been proven then either, although it was at least suggested. But, at any rate, it was sufficiently demonstrated that he generally ended up doing the right thing, for the right reasons, whatever spiteful comments he might make along the way. And it certainly does not mean that he wasn't really a Dark wizard.

Of *course* he was a Dark wizard!

It has been obvious from the beginning of the series that



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Severus Snape was a Dark wizard. Which is to say, he was a student and practitioner of the Dark Arts. That's the *point*. It is one of the biggest reasons why he was there in the cast of characters in the first place. Furthermore, he was already obviously, unequivocally, and intentionally "Dark" by the time he finished school.

Even before that, actually. "Famous" for it, we're told by Sirius Black (assuming we can trust *anything* we were ever told by *him*). The Ministry of Magic may discourage involvement in the Dark Arts, but it doesn't actually do anything to try to stop such people — so long as they support the legitimate government and manage to control themselves. The Dark Arts, on their own account, are not illegal.

They are not even necessarily evil. What they seem to be is *chaotic*.

And you just cannot legislate chaos out of your life. Particularly not if you are living with magic. It just isn't possible.

But the Dark Arts are incredibly risky, and they offer an appalling range of ways in which a wizard might lose himself and end up following a disastrously wrong path, to his own peril, AND that of everyone around him. Which is why there are Aurors employed to apprehend Dark wizards once they become a danger to society. (Think of the issue rather like a magical DUI.)

Which, now that I think of it; since Aurors in the wizarding world, also seem to make a career of capturing common law-breakers *as well as* Dark wizards, is probably part of what has served to so confuse the wizarding public consciousness about just what Dark magic is.

However, this is also beside the point.

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All that I mean by it is that I was convinced that Snape was on the "right side."

In fact, committed to it.



It hadn't sunk in as quickly as it really ought to have that the biggest part of the fallout from HBP was the discovery that this series was really NOT an epic tale of some great conflict between Light and Dark magic, *à la* Tolkein, at all. It wasn't even about some quasi-symbolic face-off between the principles of "Light" and "Dark." It was shaping up to be the close up and personal — in fact rather *petty* tale of the conflict of Tom Riddle against the world. And that meant *everybody*. Regardless of their personal alignment toward either Dark or Light.

And then in DHs it all devolved even further into Rowling's private grief therapy and an orgy of wallowing in absolutes.

And when you really stop to consider it, the only followers Riddle ever had were the ones that he had lured into his "cult of personality" when they were either kids themselves, or independent youngsters at no more than post-adolescent levels of maturity. Or they were disenfranchised elements who were such "outsiders" they really had nothing much to lose the way the wizarding world was set up. Everyone else had been either bullied or bewitched into playing along.

That his human followers were primarily the descendants of Dark Arts-practicing families only indicates that these were the children most vulnerable to the lure of the sort of path that Riddle claimed to be offering. And you will notice that over the course of the 2 generations that he cast his shadow, he has

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reeled in almost every single one of those followers before they were out of their teens. The creature preys on *children*. And he is not their friend. And he does not mean them well. And he never did.

And I think that, insofar as it regarded the loyalties of Severus Snape, any indications to the contrary that JKR inferred to us in her pre-DHs interviews were no more than an indication that until the final book was out, she was determined that the reader should continue to approach anything in the series strictly from a Harry-centric viewpoint. On or off the page.

We already got a hint of this kind of deliberate manipulation in... I think it may have been the Albert Hall interview of some years back, when, in answer to the question of why Dumbledore would not give Snape the DADA position, she effectively hinted exactly the same excuse that Snape later handed the Black sisters in the Spinner's End chapter of HBP. That Dumbledore was afraid the DADA position might prove to be "too great a temptation" for Snape.

Is there anyone who still believes that this was really the reason Snape didn't get the position earlier? Now that we know that the position really was cursed? Particularly now that we have been directly shown that Snape is *the very first person* Dumbledore calls for whenever anyone is injured by what appears to be Dark magic? Expressly *because* of his familiarity with the Dark Arts. Albus Dumbledore all too clearly found Snape's expertise in the Dark Arts extremely *useful*. And he handed Snape the DADA post the very minute that it suited his purposes.

And, besides, "too great a temptation" to *what*, precisely?

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So, while I still do wonder why Rowling considered the fact that the position was literally cursed to need to be a matter of such deep secrecy that she couldn't bear to turn the information loose before Book 6, once you *know* that, her answer does not come across as a viable representation of Dumbledore's real opinion on the issue in the least.

But it is the kind of reason that would probably occur to, or be believed by Harry.

After all, right up to the end of the series, whenever the subject was Snape, Harry *never* seems to have got it right.



It's also a heavy hint that until the final book was released, just about any statement Rowling had ever made in public concerning Severus Snape would probably be according to the same pattern; she was not being altogether straight with us. Indeed it is now clear that even after the final book was out, she still can't meet a straight question regarding the Professor with a straight answer, and has made a career of contradicting herself.

As to Snape and his loyalties; in HBP Rowling handed us the usual packet of assorted clues that pointed in both directions. And most of them balanced each other out every bit as well as they had in all of the first five books.

But this time there was one left over.

And that one seemed to point in only one direction.

And to me it looked like a big one. Any information has to be mighty significant if, in order to get it across, Rowling had to let us catch Albus Dumbledore in a flat-out lie.

Over the first six books of the series Albus Dumbledore really

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did not come across as a member of the frequent liars' club.

Mind you, he was never as pristinely truthful as a lot of his fans would have liked to believe. But he was experienced enough, and clever enough, to realize that a selective and incomplete truth was far more likely to serve his purposes than a direct falsehood. It's much more defensible for one thing, and if what you actually tell people *is* true, it's much easier to keep your stories straight. Rowling would do well to take it as an example.

Dumbledore tacitly admitted as much. He states quite clearly, all the way back in PS/SS, his contention that the truth is a beautiful and terrible thing, and, consequently, is to be treated with extreme caution. And it has been made abundantly clear over the course of the entire series that he shades his statements in accordance with whom he is dealing at any given time.

The only point in the whole series at which he had ever come out and promised NOT to lie was when, at the end of the business with the Philosopher's Stone, he offered to answer Harry's questions.

And then he went ahead and lied anyway. Snape's hatred of Harry Potter had *nothing* to do with his being unable to forgive James for saving his life. With 20/20 hindsight we can see that Dumbledore's explanation of Professor Snape's motivations was a masterpiece of truth-shaving. Snape's so-called "debt" to James had nothing to do with the matter. It was only his debt to *Lily* that counted.

But Albus wasn't able to tell Harry *that*. Snape had insisted that he not speak of it. And Albus gave his word not to.

However, the answer that he did give Harry went a long

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way towards poisoning the well regarding any further relations between them. And whether that was done deliberately is a decision that depends largely upon how much you are itching to look for support for some degree of Evil!Albus interpretation.

In that discussion, as you will also remember, Albus ended up declining to give Harry an answer to the very first question Harry asked, and you will also notice that he never repeated that particular invitation to Harry to ask him questions. Or, at any rate, not with that particular "value-added" promise not to lie accompanying it.

But, still, he seldom made statements which we as readers knew to be absolutely untrue.

Although, it turns out that in OotP, he did.

Twice, in fact.



Or at any rate, upon two occasions his level of truth-telling appears to have been far more selective and incomplete than usual.

In both cases, there were some fairly major contributing circumstances. But, he lied. In fact in the first instance he *flat-out* lied. And we watched him do it. A correspondent pointed this one out to me, I had overlooked it on both my readings of OotP, but it is definitely there, and it is definitely a lie. Let me direct your attention to the following passage; the confrontation between Albus and Cornelius Fudge:

"You organized this?"

"I did," said Dumbledore.

"You recruited these students for — for your army?"

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"Tonight was supposed to be the first meeting," said Dumbledore, nodding. "Merely to see whether they would be interested in joining me. I see now that it was a mistake to invite Miss Edgecombe, of course." [OotP, ch. 27, pg. 618 U.S. pb edition]

Is there anyone, anyone at all, who is going to deny that this is *lying*?

So it is established that, yes, Dumbledore *will* lie if he feels it to be really necessary. In this particular case he was lying to protect Harry — *and* all the rest of the members of the DA. At that point in the series rather a lot of us believed that if there was one reason for which Dumbledore would unhesitatingly tell a direct lie, it would be to protect someone. Particularly one of his own agents. I also believed that he did it again in the chapter regarding the Lost Prophecy.

This is Albus Dumbledore we're talking about here. And up through Book 6, I, in common with most of the fandom, believed that if someone was willing to put his life on the line for Albus, Albus would certainly not rat him out by excessive and ill-timed truthfulness in the presence of his enemies.

And at the end of OotP we can have no doubt that Albus Dumbledore was absolutely convinced that Severus Snape was one of his own agents. And indeed, if you squint around the edges of the Harry filter it ought to have been obvious that to shield Snape appeared to have been one of Albus's main endeavors right up to the end of HBP. He appeared to have expended every bit as much effort into shielding Snape as he had in shielding Harry.

And all of Rowling's backpedaling through the chapter of

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'The Prince's Tale' fails to convince me otherwise. It was too little solid information, much too crudely drawn, and introduced far too late to be believable. Indeed, it was plopped in at the last moment without foreshadowing or background. And I am simply not convinced that what it adds up to was even the conclusion that she had been leading up to over the full course of the series. It reads like a sudden last-minute retcon stuffed in purely for melodramatic effect.

I suspect that it was probably because she just wanted to have the whole thing over with, and doing it properly would have taken more effort than she was willing to expend. And I, for one, flatly don't believe it. By that point she'd been caught out lying to her readers altogether too often.

If my interpretation of what was going on between Voldemort and Harry over the course of OotP is right, Albus had every reason to believe (correctly or otherwise) that their final conversation might be being overheard by Lord Voldemort. A suspicion which really does appear to be supported by all of Voldemort's statements and actions over the course of DHs, and there simply isn't anyone else who could have filled him in on that particular information.

After all, the possibility that Voldemort might be eavesdropping through Harry, is the reason why Harry was being kept in the dark all year long. And at that point Harry's mind was still wide open to Voldemort's tampering. If Albus suspected covert surveillance to be even a possibility, then to tell the unmodified truth at that point in time could have cost Severus Snape his life. And Albus still needed Snape. He wasn't about to gratuitously put him at risk.

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For another thing, I don't think Albus was quite prepared to entrust the truth on this particular issue to Harry just yet, even if Voldemort *wasn't* listening in. Albus may have absolute faith in Harry's intentions, but, after a year of CAPSLOCKS, he must have had reasonable doubts as to Harry's discretion. While Albus was willing to entrust Harry's safety to Snape, His confidence didn't necessarily run in the opposite direction.

Albus — if that was indeed Albus — was given another opportunity to reveal some truth or other to Harry in HBP, just before he and Harry departed for the sea cave, and he clearly paused and considered doing it (on stage, in full sight of the audience), but he ultimately decided against it. This may turn out to have been an unfortunate choice. But his reluctance was no doubt essential for dramatic purposes. It certainly lit the fuse to what seemed clearly intended to be a major bombshell intended for Book 7.

A bombshell which Rowling unaccountably seems to have forgotten to include.



And, yes, I'm afraid we're back to that bloody Trelawney Prophecy again. We may all be reasonably confident that we now know the full text, and the correct wording of that Prophecy (even though the wording seems to have been backward and entirely counter to the way it eventually played out), but we sure don't have the complete story of what actually went down at the Hog's Head the night that it was delivered. We have two conflicting versions of what happened that evening, and I have grown to suspect that one of those was deliberately

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incorrect, and the other was unavoidably incomplete.

I have already gone into this event in considerable detail and at considerable length in the essay entitled 'The Child Foretold'. I was tempted to just copy it here, verbatim. But the issue is critical enough that it probably deserves to be restated rather than simply repeated.

The relevant points and questions to be kept in mind while analyzing the two competing versions of the conundrum of that night at the Hog's Head are:

Point: it can't have taken more than a minute to actually make that Prophecy. Unless Albus also edited just how much of the original pronouncement we actually heard, it's just not that long. Which renders Albus's statement about interruptions half-way through it somewhat implausible right from the top.

Point: we've all known since Book 3 that Sybill Trelawney has no awareness of what is going on around her while she is actually channeling the Prophecy demons, only of what was going on before, and after. We've already watched her burp up a Prophecy ourselves.

Point: we also watched Trelawney delivering the Prophecy from Albus's memory in the Pensieve. She gave us the whole thing in one pronouncement. She did not stop in the middle. He did not obviously tamper with the memory, either. He extracted it, put it directly into the Pensieve, and then played it for us.

Point: we *only* saw Trelawney delivering the Prophecy. We did not go *into* the Pensieve to see what else was going on in the room or hear what was going on outside it. Dumbledore carefully controlled *exactly* what information we were given.

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So.

Point: Sybill reports that there was a "commotion" at the door of the room, which then flew open to reveal Snape (and Aberforth Dumbledore, the barman).

Question: unless Sybill — who is unaware of her surroundings while in the grip of a Prophecy — never actually *saw* or *heard* an eavesdropper, how would she even know that there was one, let alone his identity?

Question: if Snape was discovered halfway through the Prophecy and thrown from the building *as Albus claims,* how would Sybill have known that Snape was the person listening at the door?

Question: if Snape-the-Snoop was *still at the door* after the Prophecy was *finished*, how can Albus say so confidently that he only heard the FIRST part of it?

Point: given all of the cloak-and-dagger nonsense about that Prophecy record over the course of OotP, it is obvious that Voldemort *really* was only TOLD the first part of the Prophecy.

Point: neither Apparition nor Disapparition has typically been represented as silent (although the DEs in the Little Hangleton graveyard seem to have mastered that).

Point: we were told on Rowling's first official website, and have seen for ourselves in the books that members of the Order of the Phoenix can send messages to one another by means of their Patronuses (Patroni?). Dumbledore himself taught them this technique. It seems to be a very speedy form of communication.

So. Okay. What have we got here?

A nice little tangle, it looks like.

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Under any normal circumstances, Sybill is a far less credible witness than Albus, even given what we've learned of Albus's general truth-shaving. But since the whole point of giving us her report on the events of that evening was to hand Harry and the reader the information that Severus Snape was the previously unnamed eavesdropper who overheard the Prophecy and reported a portion of it to Lord Voldemort, it stands to reason that Sybill *must* have actually seen him there.

Since she is unaware of what is going on while she is in the grip of a Prophecy, she has to have seen him either before she made the Prophecy, or afterwards. From the report she gives us, she caught sight of him right *after* she finished delivering the Prophecy.

Consequently; Albus is just plain not being altogether honest with us when he claims that the eavesdropper who reported the first part of the Prophecy to Voldemort was discovered partway through, ejected from the building — and, therefore, had no opportunity to hear the second half of it. That is the story that *Voldemort* has been told. I suspect that Albus is keeping his stories straight just in case Voldemort is listening in again. All of which makes Rowling's insistence that everything played out exactly as it appears on the surface, without any coordination between the various players, rather difficult for me to accept. Yes, *particularly* now.

Plus, of course Albus also intended to ever-so-slightly redirect Harry's attention. There was no purpose to be served by allowing that particular debriefing session — in OotP — to wander off in pursuit of an unidentified eavesdropper, after all.

Albus could perhaps have given us a sort-of (but even then

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not completely) plausible story, claiming that the eavesdropper had only heard the tag end of the Prophecy — which *repeated* the first part. But he didn’t claim that. That wouldn’t have matched Snape’s version which had already been told to Voldemort.

I was sure that the whole contradiction was there for a reason. Rowling was giving us a clue.

After the fact, we seem to be expected to understand that it was no more than yet another hint that Albus Dumbledore tells lies whenever he feels justified in it. Which is most disappointing.



Of course in some other reality it could have been a clue to much, much more. Over the period between HBP and DHs I was sure that it was. And I still think that the overall story would have been both stronger and marginally less tawdry if it had been. But Rowling clearly preferred the shallower, more tawdry version. After all, shallow and tawdry would certainly have been more in keeping with the overall theme of DHs.

Wandering off now into my own little country of fore-closed theories: I was sure that “the affair of the interrupted eavesdropper” was Snape and Albus’s mutual cover story. Albus, Snape, and no doubt Aberforth would have all agreed to it if asked. But that it wasn’t quite how the incident had actually happened.

However, we’re stuck with the fact that either it *really did* happen as Trelawney tells it, or there is *no way* that she could have identified the listener. And by the way she tells it, if Snape

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was definitely in a position to hear only *one* part of the Prophecy, it was probably some undetermined portion of the *last* part.

But, judging from all of his subsequent actions, Voldemort clearly only knew about the information that was presented in the **FIRST** part.

Ergo: I concluded that Albus let the first part of that Prophecy escape.

No. That’s an understatement. I believed that Albus deliberately turned the first part of the Prophecy loose. He *wanted* Voldemort to learn about the first part of that Prophecy. In fact I’m **STILL** absolutely convinced that he did *exactly* that.

Why not the whole thing?

Well, that’s the question, isn’t it? The next part of that Prophecy includes a couple of rather serious cautions doesn’t it? Like, just for starters, marking “the one” as his *equal*? You think Tom Riddle would take the risk of doing something like that if he knew about it going into the situation? I’m not so sure. I think Albus wasn’t so sure, either. So he didn’t take the risk of letting Voldemort know about that part of the pronouncement. He made sure that that “middle passage” of that Prophecy was carefully edited out of whatever Voldemort was told.

Which brings us back to Snape: who was at the door of the room at the *end* of the Prophecy, and is the Death Eater who told Voldemort only the *first* part of it. I am still more than half of the opinion that Snape has to have done that on Dumbledore’s behalf. Otherwise why did Albus — and Aberforth — who had him in custody, let him get away without just Obliviating a few seconds of the evening’s events from his memory, in keeping with established Ministry policy as regards Prophecies?

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We know that Albus will permit memory modifications to be performed if it suits him. He allowed as much to be done to Marietta Edgecombe on far less provocation.



So, first let's take a look at the "Severus Snape: reformed DE" reading shall we? The official version, that is.

Which so far as Rowling has ever established presupposes that Albus, up in his ivory tower, was unaware of the developing Snape->Lily<-James triangle at the time the werewolf caper took place, and did not follow through on the incident to the point of being filled in on it until years afterwards. Slughorn, who was on the front lines in the classroom, and watched it play out under his own nose, unable to do a thing about it, seems to have found it painful enough that he never spoke of it to anyone.

So my original (and very early) reading went; from Albus's vantage:

Point: Severus Snape, to all appearances, is a thoroughly nasty young piece of work.

Point: He is, in the main, an intelligent and fundamentally realistic nasty young piece of work. And, ultimately, even thoroughly nasty pieces of work have to answer to their own consciences.

Consideration: this particular nasty young piece of work is one with a history. That mess concerning the Shrieking Shack does not appear to have been resolved to anyone's real satisfaction, and the boy is now obliged to a rival, which cannot sit well. He does seem to have kept his mouth shut over the business, however, even though he is no longer under Albus's



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authority as a student. So his sworn word is worth something. He might very well feel that Albus owes him something for his silence, too. Dumbledore could well have some unfinished business pertaining to one Severus Snape.

Point: when given a choice, a Slytherin will usually choose to save his own skin.

Offering amnesty to one mean-spirited young wizard — so long as he is willing to give up any current illegal activities — is a very small price to pay for the possible removal of the former Tom Riddle.

Severus Snape wants a job?

Give him one.



Well, the character reading in itself *might* have played. At least it might have played back *then*. But the character reading in itself it doesn't really get us any forwarder, does it?

And it leaves a far too many trailing ends dangling for anyone's satisfaction. Like I say, it was an early iteration, and Rowling clearly never went there.

The biggest question was whether Albus gave him that particular job by mutual agreement or cynically just let him go to make his report to Tom as an unwitting tool. The Albus who was revealed over the course of DHs would have been perfectly capable of such a stunt.

But leaving DHs aside, I am going to continue to explore possibilities that Rowling has foreclosed upon. I still think they play perfectly well with the series as we had it at the end of HBP, and frankly, it has fewer inconsistencies than Rowling's



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subsequent version. You are welcome to stop reading now if you wish to.

Things to consider; with the usual rider that we are primarily talking about our state of information as it stood at the end of HBP:

Perhaps Snape was *already* on his road to Damascus when he followed Albus into the Hog’s Head that evening. If he did. (Wait for it...)

Conversely, maybe Snape didn’t “go to Dumbledore” at all. Maybe it was Dumbledore who recruited Snape. And at that point we had no information as to when that recruitment might have taken place.

Maybe that whole tale of Snape’s apparent remorse and Dumbledore’s grand forgiveness at the point that Snape went to work at Hogwarts (which is the tale that they were still both telling) is just the blue-plate, gammon-and-spinach special this week, one that was originally cooked up between the two of them as a cover to be fed back to the DEs. Or, indeed, to anyone who asked impertinent questions.

So. Taking the “official” version as a jumping off place: at the presumed date of the Trelawney Prophecy (now adjusted to the week following Halloween, 1979), Severus Snape, then 19 years of age, would have probably been inside the DE organization for something just over a year. Long enough to have begun to be a little disenchanted. Long enough for rivalries to have become a bit bitter.

Long enough for him to have been handed a few stinging disappointments. Long enough for him to begin *noticing* things, and to begin to ask himself a few questions. He is not a trusting

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soul. He does not have the Blacks’ and the Malfoys’ built-in assurance that “of course” nobody could possibly renege on a promise to *him*. And he’s bright enough to usually recognize the truth when it’s pointed out to him (by anyone but Harry, or Sirius Black at least).

If Snape had joined up in good faith, he might have been all in favor of overthrowing the Ministry or subverting some of its policies. But it was the Ministry that was responsible for maintaining wizarding Secrecy, which every wizarding-raised child — and Snape was wizarding-raised, even if his family home was in a Muggle town, his mother’s family were still wizards — had been brought up to regard as his only hope of continuing personal safety, and Voldemort had no particular interest in doing anything about that! In fact, given the direction of the activities that Voldemort was now proposing, it was only a matter of time before wizarding Seclusion would be impossible to maintain!

Canon Snape may not be the quite same degree of all-round genius that fanon Snape is so frequently portrayed, but he is more than bright enough to realize that without the protection that their secluded world gives them, wizards haven’t much chance of surviving as a culture, or indeed, as anything but fugitives, and you don’t get a lot of chance to set up a potions lab and study arcane branches of magic when you are cowering in hiding, and may have to run for your life at any minute. (The irony that the whole wizarding world was already effectively cowering in hiding and had been for nearly three centuries by then, had undoubtedly escaped him.)

Even assuming that Snape was on absolutely nobody’s side

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but his own, he might have weighed his options and contacted Dumbledore, whose track record of taking in waifs, strays and general outsiders who were in a position to make themselves useful, as well as his status as the uncrowned king of wizarding Britain, offered the best chance for Snape to enlist him as middleman for cutting a deal with the Ministry. All at the very reasonable price of admitting that Albus was right about the Dark Lord.

Indeed, somewhere in a fanfic we might even have a thoroughly opportunistic Snape who was already disenchanted with the DE's empty rhetoric and the direction the whole movement (and it's leader!) were veering off into, sitting in the taproom, considering what options might be available to him, and, seeing Albus go upstairs, followed. After overhearing the Prophecy, and being summarily thrown out without a hearing, he decided to deploy the first part himself, in hopes that Tom would manage to undo himself just as hopefully as I believe Albus did. When he discovered where Tom intended to strike, the rest proceeds as in canon.



Now, admittedly, by the end of HBP I no longer really supported this theory of Opportunistic!Snape, myself, but if you were determined to maintain your belief in that version this much still plays.

But, like I say, I no longer believed in Opportunistic!Snape. In the way that a minor rockfall can set off an avalanche, once the balance of evidence started shifting, I could no longer maintain my long-held attempt to maintain neutrality on the subject.

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I had come to my own decision on the issue.

Snape was one of the White Hats.

This much is what had percolated through by the time I needed to do my first-pass update of the collection in the summer of 2005, dragging it into a rudimentary post-HBP canon-compliance. I don't think I did that bad a job of it. But the new data was all still in the process of settling. And by the time DHs was pending release I'd pushed this train of conclusions quite a bit farther down the track.

Most of the following was jarred loose by a correspondent who had read the first-pass update of the article, and had expressed reservations pertaining to certain points. Reservations that I actually shared, but had backed off from exploring due to what at the time had appeared to be a lack of enough hard data to really justify drawing any kind of a solid conclusion.

His first point was the question of what was Snape doing at the Hog's Head that night in the first place?

It's a damn good question, too. Rowling is very bad at providing actual motivations for why her game pieces were in any given position for her next move throughout the entire backstory for the series. We're usually stuck having to roll our own.

Voldemort would have hardly assigned a random 19-year-old DE to follow Dumbledore around whenever he left the Castle, just on spec. Nor is the information that there was a Divination instructor candidate staying at the Hog's Head — which was by that time dodgy enough to be a low-level Death Eater hang-out — likely to have interested him overmuch, either. Even if he does believe in Prophecies. Particularly not if he had any kind of information on who the candidate was. It's obvious to just

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about anyone that Trelawney is 90% charlatan, even if she does have a spark of the gift. So why was Snape there at all? Had he just stepped in for a drink? Had he already arranged to meet someone else? Why was he there?

It's a valid question, and one that Rowling has determinedly ignored.

The second issue was; how likely is it that Dumbledore would have tried to, let alone been able to successfully recruit Snape, on the spot, after his eavesdropping, that very night? We realize that he *must* have recruited Snape at some point. And it had to have been done by that evening, if Snape immediately did as Dumbledore requested of him. But could Dumbledore really, plausibly have recruited him *that very night*? On consideration, I didn't think so.

I quite agreed with my “critic.” Recruiting Snape, on the spot, on the strength of his eavesdropping on the Prophecy, seems highly unlikely. Snape is not a trusting soul and he does not change his views easily. It would have only worked if Snape had already come to speak to Albus about changing sides in the first place. And while *that's* certainly possible, we didn't have anything to establish that this was the case. Snape clearly *did* report only the first half of the Prophecy, yes, when he was *manifestly* in the position to have heard it all, but there is nothing else in the text of the books to hang that possibility on.

And Rowling really did seem to be visibly straining with the greatest of efforts for the smallest of results (to the point of rather shabbily expecting us to accept the whole thing as a coincidence). So let's follow this whole line of reasoning back a bit and see where we come out.

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We know that Snape *did* only report the first half of the Prophecy, despite his having apparently been in position to have heard the 2nd half, if not the whole thing.

Which, to me, made the following conclusion unavoidable:

Snape was already “Dumbledore's man” by the time the Prophecy was made.

Or at the very least, he was no longer *Voldemort's* man.

The report to Lord Voldemort was almost unquestionably made at Dumbledore's direction. Albus was still lying about the circumstances under which the thing was supposedly overheard until the night he died.



So why would Dumbledore be lying to keep Voldemort (or Harry) from figuring out that Snape could have heard the second part of the Prophecy as well as the first part, unless it really, really, *mattered*?

Well, *did* Snape hear the second part?

I don't know. In fact, by this time I wasn't convinced he actually heard *any* part of it.

I'd come around to the conclusion that Snape quite possibly wasn't anywhere near the Hog's Head that night — or not until Dumbledore *summoned* him.

As I mentioned above; Rowling informs us that a member of the Order of the Phoenix can communicate with his fellows by means of his individual, and unique, Patronus. It was Dumbledore who devised this form of communication and taught it to them. By the end of HBP we had twice seen Order members send such messengers. I expected that at

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some point in Book 7 we might finally be present when somebody received such a message and we would discover whether a Patronus is actually able to speak. But even just the sight of such a messenger would be enough to convey the fact that so-and-so wants you — now!

That’s how it worked when Dumbledore summoned Hagrid in GoF. That was how it was *supposed* to work when Tonks summoned Hagrid in HBP. On this second occasion, Snape showed up instead, claiming to have been deputized to substitute (Hagrid was probably still occupied escorting the new batch of Firsties across the lake). Admittedly, neither of them Apparated in response to the summons, but they were at Hogwarts. You can’t *do* that there (and Hagrid cannot do that anyway).

But we get no indication that Albus devised this method of communication *specifically* for the Order. He could have been using it with his earlier agents for years beforehand. Decades even.

So, even though it couldn’t have taken more than a minute for Trelawney to deliver the Prophecy, that was just about enough time for Dumbledore to have fired off a Patronus — which I suspect he would have done as soon as he realized that this was the genuine article, and that it concerned Lord Voldemort. Which is right there in the very first phrase of the thing.

Wherever Snape may have been that night (apparently not in the company of other DEs, at least), having Dumbledore’s Phoenix Patronus flash in his face would have had him Apparating to wherever Dumbledore was on the double. It isn’t just Lord Voldemort who can call his followers to him on the

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instant. The whole thing might have taken no more than the minute it took Trelawney to deliver the thing.

Dumbledore would have wanted to call his trusted operative inside the DE organization as soon as humanly possible. IF they were going to make any kind of use of this development, there was no time to waste. Voldemort would hardly be convinced by a follower’s report that he had overheard a Prophecy (much less only part of a Prophecy) some undetermined time ago. The report, if they were going to make such a report, had to be made by the following morning. Or even sooner.

If it was to be believed, they had to act *now*.

Especially if Riddle — who is also not a trusting fellow — decides to double-check the report.

Sybill Trelawney is a barfly. Albus recognizes the signs. There will be witnesses as to when she arrived at the Hog’s Head, and since Albus cannot in good conscience let her wander around loose now that she’s channeling messages from the Prophecy demons, she is soon going to be celebrating her new job in the taproom downstairs.

The Hog’s Head has been something on the order of a Death Eater dive (well, at least among the lower rankers. I suspect the inner circle wouldn’t be caught dead in the place) since before there officially were Death Eaters. Albus has no control over who might be loitering about to tell tales. So he’ll give them all a show to fix the incident in their minds.

And I think that Albus summoned both Severus and Aberforth in response to this new development. Trelawney came out of her trance just after Snape Apparated outside the room, too late to hear what the noise actually was, and to identify it, but

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quickly enough to register that there had been a noise at the door.

Snape after either Apparating into the hallway — or, just possibly, in the street below and pounding up the stairs to answer the summons — and not knowing that Trelawney was there, threw open the door. Aberforth who had also been summoned was right behind him.

Or possibly not. Albus could have wanted to kill two birds with one trip into Hogsmeade, and had already arranged to take a report from Snape at the Hog's Head later that evening. Maybe that's why the job interview was taking place at the Hog's Head, rather than up in his own office at Hogwarts. He was hardly going to bring Snape onto campus to give a report. Somehow their wires got crossed. Snape showed up, and when he discovered that Albus had already arrived went looking for him.

In any case, once Snape and Aberforth threw the door open and saw Trelawney they backpedaled; Snape with his "likely tale" of coming up the wrong staircase, and Aberforth, improvising, taking Snape by the scruff of the neck and hauling him away. Anyone who chose to investigate Snape's report would have learned that Snape had indeed been publicly ejected from the building the evening Dumbledore had come to interview the new Divination instructor up at the school.

After tossing Snape out the front door 'Forth went around and let him in the back, and once Albus extracted himself from Trelawney and joined them in the kitchen, or 'Forth's private quarters, they burned the midnight oil discussing what they were going to do about this opportunity.

Or, if Albus had already made his decision of what to do

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about it, he gave Snape his instructions, and after Snape left to make his report to Lord Voldemort, discussed what he was going to do to limit the potential damage with Aberforth.

At this point, of course, none of them had any clue as to whose family was going to be put at risk. They were all still dealing with hypothetical people at that point. Indeed, if the issues explored in the essay entitled 'The Child Foretold' are on track Albus may have already been convinced he *knew* who the Prophecy referred to and that it was *not* a child.

Until it finally sunk in to him that *Tom* would believe it concerned a child. And it was Tom's interpretation of the thing that was going to matter.



For a number of reasons, not the least of them being a timely reminder from another correspondent that Dumbledore actually tells us in HBP that Lucius Malfoy was only entrusted with the Diary shortly before Voldemort's first defeat — in 1981, I have come to the conclusion that the Prophecy may have been made within a few days after Halloween, 1979, right around the time of the foretold child's conception. At that point even Frank Longbottom and James Potter were unaware of the existence of those children. And even Alice and Lily were probably not yet sure.

Turning loose that Prophecy was one of the "hugest" mistakes that Dumbledore ever made in his life. It locked him into a course of action which (act all our previous readings of him) was out of character, and which put him at cross-purposes with himself.

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He may, believing that most Prophecies are bollocks anyway (or at least that's what he's claiming during HBP, 16 years later, we don't know what he believed about them when the Prophecy demons actually tossed one into his lap), have been attempting to goad Riddle (who he knows believes in them) into unwise action and have the matter settled before any child it foretold was actually born.

He should have known better. You do not *ever* want to give the Prophecy demons an opening. They do not play fair, and they do *not* mean well.

But then, Dumbledore also tells us that he never studied Divination. He does claim (now) that Prophecies are virtually always a snare and a delusion. But he seems to have overlooked the fact that if you mess with them, they tend to play out according to some variation which could be interpreted as stated, even if inverted. It is clear that on this matter he was not dealing in one of his many areas of expertise.

The gamble seems to have ultimately paid off, but the price was way too high. And by messing with it, Albus trapped himself every bit as surely as he trapped Tom Riddle. But then, HE was the one that the Prophecy demons taunted with the thing. I rather doubt that *Riddle* was ever their real target.

Still, at that point in time, that Prophecy must have looked like the most promising breakthrough in the whole ongoing, ever-escalating generation-long conflict against Voldemort and his Death Eaters. Particularly since by '79 Dumbledore may have had a pretty good idea of the kind of thing he was up against. There are likely to be as few magical processes which could account for the alteration in Tom Riddle's phys-

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ical appearance as there are monsters which are stone-turners. And if Albus knew enough about Horcruxes to be able to see the whole subject banned from the school more than a dozen years before he became Headmaster — as Slughorn tells us — then he probably knows as much about them as Tom Riddle does.

And he'd also had plenty of time to figure it out by then. But he no doubt thought there were other dividends to be paid by setting loose that Prophecy, and he took the risk.

In complete defiance of all established Ministry policy of *supressing* Prphecies. From which, I rather think we can safely conclude that by this point in time, Albus Dumblecore had already attained all of the offices and honors which are listed on the Hogwarts stationary letterhead, as well as those on his chocolate frog card. He was already effectively the uncrowned King of wizarding Britain, and he regarded himself as above the mere Ministry. In short, this was not the act of an innocent man. He was all too ready to blind himself to the probabilities. But he was confident in his justification.

In the first place, this development offered some hope that there really might be an end in sight. Second; it could be used as bait to tempt Voldemort into the kind of reckless or ill-considered action that would bring him down. And, third, it could be used to get Albus's agent higher up the DE hierarchy and into Voldemort's favor. It's not that surprising that he did ultimately choose to deploy it, despite the fact that he must have *known* that tangling with a Prophecy almost invariably brings such a meddler to ruin. He may have considered the personal cost worth it.

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Albus, (or at any rate, the Albus we *thought* we knew) now being thoroughly at cross-purposes with himself, also immediately started working *against* the Prophecy, by trying to limit the damage to innocent bystanders and to keep Voldemort away from any foretold child for as long as possible (which never works). He first tried attempting to discover the potentially targeted family's identity and to offer them at least some degree of protection. It was to this end that I originally believed he founded the Order of the Phoenix, probably over the following month or two. But in its original iteration, the Order did not concern Severus Snape, and he had no contact with it during the course of VoldWar I.



In this belief, I am at loggerheads with Rowling who insists that the Order of the Phoenix was up and running by the time James Potter and his cohort started their final year at Hogwarts, despite the fact that she can point to no function that it served which was not already covered by the Ministry. Indeed the Order appears to have existed only for the sake of symmetry with the DEs, and to provide Albus Dumbledore with information, personnel, services and resources that the Ministry might have balked at turning over to him. I'm amazed that he did not name it "Mini-Me."

Although if you want an even less benign interpretation, one is certainly available. In that version, Albus founded the Order, specifically in order to be able to invite James Potter and his associates into it once they were out of Hogwarts. Primarily for the purpose of being able to continue "cultivating" young

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Potter after he finished school.

All that is required for this to be a viable interpretation is to assume that by the time James Potter finished at Hogwarts, Albus had discovered that James was a Peverill descendant.

If James was as careless with that Cloak in his early years at Hogwarts as Harry was, it wouldn't have been difficult.

Both Gellert and Albus went collectively Hallows-mad in their teens. And I don't get the impression that either of them ever *really* got over it.

But I was convinced that Snape was already Albus Dumbledore's man before the Order of the Phoenix was founded. And I believed that his first *known* action on Dumbledore's behalf was to report the first part, and **ONLY** the first part, of the Trelawney Prophecy to Lord Voldemort.

At some point around Halloween, 1979. When he was 19 years old.

I really do think it would have made for a stronger story arc. As well as a rather better "reveal!"

And we got what appeared might be some additional support for this reading in the Spinner's End chapter of HBP. Despite the web of truths, half-truths, innuendos and outright lies that Snape weaves for the edification of the Black sisters, unless Rowling was being "impressionistic" with her math again (she isn't always, you know), she forced Snape to be just a tad indiscreet in his rush to score off Bellatrix when he points out that in contrast to her useless gesture of putting herself into Azkaban for over a dozen years, he had kept to his assigned post, as ordered, and that by delaying a mere two hours in responding to the graveyard summons was able to give Voldemort *sixteen*

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years worth of information on Albus Dumbledore's actions.

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

Even in the summer of '96 when this statement was actually made, at Spinner's End, Voldemort's first defeat had only been fifteen years earlier.

So what event took place sixteen years — or thereabouts — before Voldemort's return at the end of GoF?

I say that Trelawney had made her first Prophecy. That's what event took place. And that apparently Snape either had some Voldemort-approved reason for observing Albus Dumbledore for two years before he started teaching, (in which case why hadn't he reported these findings at the time?) or — which is more likely — Snape claimed to have discovered retroactive information concerning Albus's activities that had taken place before Snape took up his post at Hogwarts, which wasn't until September of 1981.

In either case we now had what could be interpreted as Snape in association with Dumbledore for nearly two years before he replaced Horace Slughorn as Potions master of Hogwarts.

And I have never believed that Snape won Dumbledore's iron-clad trust on the strength of no more than the 8 weeks that he is known to have taught after he first took up that post, in the last days before Voldemort's first defeat.



Speaking of which: as pointed out, Dumbledore is no stranger to weaving a web of truths, half-truths and little white lies, himself. Throughout HBP, both he and Snape are hold-

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ing to the same cover story; that upon taking up his post at Hogwarts, Snape confessed reporting the partial Prophecy to the Dark Lord, expressing his deepest remorse at putting the Potters at such risk, thereby earning Albus's magnanimous forgiveness and undying trust.

In two words: fish fuzz.

Now, Snape certainly *appeared* to have Albus's undying trust, and I didn't discount the likelihood that he did indeed feel remorse, perhaps very deep remorse, over discovering that he had endangered people that he knew personally, and in one case at least, it turns out he deeply cared about.

Remorse that was probably only matched, and indeed possibly surpassed, by Albus's own. Putting faces on hypothetical people is apt to be a painful business, regardless of how sterling your intentions are, or however great the "greater good" you have endangered them over may turn out to be. I'm sure that once Snape found out the identity of the targeted young couples, he *did* regret it.

After all, just because he loathed James Potter, doesn't necessarily mean that he wanted him dead.

And at that point we still hadn't been given any solid clue as to what he thought of Lily.

But I sure wasn't convinced that this was the reason Snape "returned to our side". So don't waste your breath. I was convinced that he was already on "our side" before the Potters were endangered, before he discovered that it was even *about* the Potters, thank you very much. Or the Longbottoms either (who, by that point may have mattered to Albus a good deal more than the Potters did).

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And is it really all that much of a stretch to believe that Albus just didn't quite think that Harry had the maturity to be trusted with the whole story yet?

The kid had enough on his plate already, for heaven's sake! Had events not overtaken them all, Harry would have gotten filled in eventually. As it read, the fact that it wasn't *just* Snape, but Albus *also* who endangered his parents was likely to come as a nasty shock. And, of the two, it's Albus who bears the greater responsibility.

And still does. If Snape's presence at the door to that room had been merely fortuitous, One of the Dumbledores could have Obliviated that critical minute from Snape's memory before Aberforth threw him out.

Or are we now supposed to think he merely Obliviated the 2nd half of the Prophecy and let him go? An Albus who would do that is *definitely* not as white as he's painted.



But the main thing about this issue that we don't yet know is just *when* Severus Snape became "Dumbledore's man".

I was sure we would eventually, of course. That particular piece of information was bound to be one of the reveals of Book 7, wherein Rowling would prove to have laid down at least one more trail of gunpowder to blow us all up with (probably more than one).

Within my interpretations, an alliance between Snape and Dumbledore certainly had been forged by Halloween, 1979. That much seemed plain. Snape had finished school in June of 1978. It isn't particularly difficult to come up with any variety

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of plausible theories about an incident to hang a reason for him to turn his coat from during that interval

For a couple of months, I thought that Rowling may have handed us one when she donated her sketch of the Black family tapestry to a charity auction in February, 2006.

Rather to our surprise, if the most recent dates on the tapestry sketch can be taken at face value (ETA: they can't), we discovered that instead of 1980 — as was stated outright in OotP — Sirius Black's younger brother Regulus turns out to have died in 1979.

Quite possibly even before the Prophecy was made.

Although it could not have been much before. Or much after, either.

In fact; since Regulus Black was listed on the tapestry as having been born in 1961, he would have only just finished Hogwarts at the end of June, 1979 and it seemed unlikely that he had already made his fatal mistake of signing up with the Death Eaters before finishing school. Consequently it seemed that his death had to have taken place between the beginning of July and the end of December of that year.

Now, of course, we know from statements made in the course of the books themselves that the dates on the tapestry sketch are simply unworkable, and unlikely to have had anything to do with insights developed by Severus Snape. We must dismiss them and recast the dates from what we were given in the course of story. Which we will now do and get them out of the way.

In the *story*, we have been told that Regulus's death took place in 1980 and according to Kreachur's tale, he was 17 at the

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time, which would move his birth date to 1963.

And if he was 17 at the time of his death, he was probably still at Hogwarts.

Which means that both the episode wherein Riddle must have "borrowed" the family House Elf, and the date of Regulus's death took place during term breaks.

We do not know which breaks, but if Riddle only began hiding his Horcruxes after he knew about the Prophecy, then it is likely that the borrowing of Kreachur was over the winter break, when Reggie had access to the family library. He did manage to figure out that the locket that Riddle had put into the basin in that cave had been a Horcrux, and he wouldn't have found that out at school.

The return to the cave with Kreachur, and his own death would have probably been either over Easter, or the following summer break. Of the two, Easter seems more likely.

Originally it did not seem out of reason to suppose that something about that affair may have contributed the final straw to prompt Severus Snape into reconsidering his options.

Particularly if he was involved in it.

Even more particularly if Regulus wasn't really dead.

But whether Reggie was dead or not, I no longer believed that his adventure had anything to do with Severus Snape. Any influence went in the other direction.

After all, if Riddle wasn't hiding the Locket until late '79 or 1980, then he didn't hide it until after he heard there was a Prophecy about his downfall running around loose. Indeed, he was probably hiding it *because* there was a Prophecy about his downfall running around loose.

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And that much still holds.



We also watched Albus offer Draco Malfoy the opportunity to go into hiding (via faking his own death?) on top of the Astronomy Tower. We have no reason to suppose that this was the *first* time Albus had ever made such an offer.

Snape, on the other hand, had demonstrably chosen to stay and fight.

But as of yet there was no point during the stretch of time between the date at which Snape finished Hogwarts, and the evening that Trelawney spouted her first Prophecy at which Snape and Dumbledore are known to have even met.

But we already *did* know — for a rock-solid certainty — of at least one previous conversation-confrontation which had taken place between the two of them before that blank stretch.

We still hadn't heard the last word on the werewolf caper, had we?

And we'd been promised it for a long time.

All Sirius Black was able to say about the aftermath of that incident was that Snape had been forbidden to speak of what he had seen. That doesn't sound really sound to me as though Sirius was present as a fly on the wall at that interview. In Dumbledore's place I know that I'd have made sure to speak to each of the involved parties separately.

And an offer of Amnesty and/or escape to a surly 16-year-old who appears to be on a collision path with disaster, would have been absolutely in character for what we *thought* we knew of Albus Dumbledore. We even saw him make the same offer on

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the top of the Astronomy Tower. (A hollow offer if there ever was one. By that point, how, and more to the point *who*, would he have deputized to arrange the matter had the boy *accepted*?)

Dumbledore is certainly not excessively squeamish about entrusting the young to dangerous paths in dangerous times. Particularly the young whose paths have already been chosen for them, such as Harry and Draco. Or those who seem likely to be put in a position where to refuse an offered path could be even more dangerous than to accept it. As was probably the case with Severus Snape. The boy was very much at risk of being put to use by the enemy. Willing or not.

Albus wasn't *completely* isolated in his ivory tower office. He knew something of the history there. He could hardly have missed the fact that there had been an ongoing war between this one Slytherin boy and that little gaggle of Gryffindors in the same year ever since they all arrived at the school together. And yet the Slytherin, however awkward, and unpopular, and clearly a fledgling Dark wizard to boot, was *not* a gratuitous troublemaker, nor was he the leader of his *own* gang. Not like Riddle, certainly. *Very different* from Riddle, in fact.

Indeed most of the boy's problems seem to have stemmed from having allowed himself to be taken up by a dangerous crowd in his First year. Even though most of that particular crowd appeared to have dropped him before the end of it. Dumbledore was probably well aware of this because he had his own reasons to keep an eye on that particular crowd. This boy does not appear to have made any attempt to keep up the association with the leaders of that circle since that time. Although he did form an association with another, not signifi-

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cantly better clique by the following Autumn. Most of this second group has also now passed out of the school. Although this boy is still tagging along after the last of them.

But he is clever, and he was once willing to be useful to his Housemates, and in another couple of years he will be out of Hogwarts, and his former Housemates may not have forgotten him. And Albus has grave suspicions of where *their* loyalties lie.

While Draco's opportunity to make his own choices got derailed by the unwanted intrusion of a set of enemies and a werewolf (Hm. Symmetry there, much?), I doubt that the opportunity for Snape's decision was similarly aborted.

Young Snape was almost certainly on a crash course to soon receive an offer that he may not be able to refuse, even if — after having been taken up and then summarily dropped by those particular ex-Housemates — such an offer isn't what he now wants.

Is that what he wants? What does he want?

I rather think that Albus intended to find out.



And the possibility that the werewolf caper was Severus Snape's “turning point” ratchets up considerably when you factor in Phineas Nigellus's snide little endorsement of Albus's trust in Snape, which he injected into one of the private lessons with Harry, over the course of HBP. This matter is further explored in the piece of “extreme theorizing” entitled, ‘The View from the Martian Canals’.

But in any case, I felt that there was vanishingly little reason for me to continue to hang back from committing to a definite

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side in this particular debate. By the end of HBP I thought we had enough clues to figure out just what Severus Snape’s ultimate choice was. Snape was one of Dumbledore’s very own White Hats.

And was so years before James-bloody-Potter became one. Or so I thought.

(Inserting an additional bit of venom to Snape’s taunts to Sirius Black in OotP, that he was out actively risking his neck for Dumbledore’s cause, while Black — and by extension, James Potter — was only involved at all because he needed to be *protected*.)

And, we could also now finally conclude that the biggest reason that Severus Snape so hated Harry — and he did sincerely hate Harry — had very little to do with James. Much as Snape honestly loathed James.

Harry, after all, had taken his place.

James never really *mattered* to anyone, not the way Harry does, certainly not to anyone *in charge*.

But, by his very existence, Harry Potter, “the Boy Who Lived,” had effortlessly supplanted Severus Snape as Albus Dumbledore’s most valued young protégé.

Sibling rivalry appears to have been the factor which warped Sirius Black’s life out of shape. Something remarkably like it seems to have also had a lot to answer for in whatever was riding Severus Snape.

And that is what I thought was the real wound that ran too deep for the healing. I’m not perfectly convinced that Dumbledore ever realized it. Snape is a superb Occlumens, after all. He would have gladly let Dumbledore continue to

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believe that it was all about James. Or as a last resort, that it was about Lily.

It’s not. It really was all about Harry.

Especially by the end.



[Note: the declaration, “Loyaulte me lie” (Loyalty binds me) was the personal motto of Richard Plantagenet, King Richard III of England. A man much maligned by his enemies. Enemies whose own probable crimes have for centuries been attributed to him.]



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This essay reached the end of its effective development cycle before DHs was released. In fact I think it must have been before HBP came out that I found myself in the rather odd position in that, if I were to remove all the parts of the essay that had turned out to be wrong, because they were clearly wrong, as well as all the parts that were right, because they were proven right, and were now so solidly established as canon as to render my earlier speculations unnecessary, I wouldn't have had a whole lot left.

So, by this time the whole thing definitely just functions as an historical exercise in watching the curtains twitch. I was briefly tempted to just go ahead and delete it.

But, frankly, I enjoyed putting together the reasoning that went into it, so I won't.

Plus, it's been a part of the collection, in one iteration or other, since the very beginning in the Spring of 2003, so I might as well just let it sit here. Even if it is mainly just of historical interest by now. Do not expect 100% accuracy from it. I was wrong on a number of points.

There may also be several repeats of things stated in other essays lurking about the collection as well.



So. As of the general update of April 2007, and, by the internal timeline of the series; June, 1997, Severus Snape was no longer a professor of Hogwarts School of Wizardry and Witchcraft. I don't really think many of us expected to see him back there. Certainly not as Headmaster. I will have to admit that that was one of the very few instances in DHs in which Rowling managed to surprise me.



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At that point, to a surprising number of fans it was "evident" that he had been working for Voldemort all along, and had now returned to the mother ship and was no longer a double-agent.

I was not one of those fans. HBP was the book that gave me all the hints that I required to finally get off the fence and commit to the view that Snape was one of the White Hats and probably always had been.

Or at any rate that he had become so by the time the bloody Prophecy joined the fun. I conceded there might still have been a period between finishing school in July 1978 and some as yet undetermined point of time in the first ten months of 1979 that he was truly a Death Eater. But I was not even altogether convinced of that much.

And if he was no longer a double-agent at the end of HBP, I was sure that it was because he was now solidly *Dumbledore's* agent, in deep cover.

From the look of things at the end of HBP, Snape's flight from Hogwarts at the end of Year 6 was hardly in the interests of benefiting Voldemort.

Not having anticipated that by the next academic year the Ministry would have fallen, I thought that Voldemort would have probably been much happier to still have Snape posted at the school in a position to spy on Dumbledore's associates (and at least I was right about that). But, from the moment that the information filtered back to him that Snape had finally been appointed to the DADA position, he must have been resigned to the fact that Snape would not last out the full year. None of the DADA professors had done so since he jinxed the position himself more than 30 years earlier. The only uncertainty he



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must have had would have been whether Snape would return to him in any condition to still be useful.

People keep overlooking the fact that Voldemort does not take proper care of his toys. Now that we know that the DADA position really was jinxed, there is no blinking the fact that two years earlier he deliberately sent his "most faithful servant" into Hogwarts into what he knew was a job with a curse on it, and he did not do anything to lift or blunt that curse. The only unknown factor would have been the degree of damage young Crouch would take.

He even rode Quirrell into that position himself, and took no action to blunt or divert the jinx. Nor, evidently, did he direct Quirrell to take any measures which might lessen the effects. Either there was nothing that could be done about that jinx, once it was established, or there was some pay-off to it that Voldemort was unwilling to relinquish.

Which suggests that he also must have considered Amicus Carrow to be completely expendable. Although they did at least change the name of the class. I doubt that was enough to deflect the curse, however.

(Rowling tells us that after Tom managed to kill himself the school was no longer troubled by the DADA jinx. Whether this was Tom's doing through having finally blown himself up permanently, or that the jinx had been tied to Albus's tenure as Headmaster, or if he really had finally canceled the jinx before sending Carrow in, Rowling isn't saying.)



From a reader's perspective, it also seemed that it was those

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agents which *he* had placed there, and who were sincerely following his directives (either willingly or under coercion) who are the ones who took the greatest damage. Which is odd. I have no explanation for that, unless the castle has some way of defending itself.

Indeed, I thought that if we took Harry at his word that *he* would not be returning to Hogwarts even if the school did reopen (which I had suspected was a tip-off to us that it wouldn't reopen), then the pattern of the fates of the DADA instructors separates neatly into two groups of three

Year 1 & Year 4: agents working with/for Voldemort = death and worse.

Year 2 & Year 5: unaffiliated outsiders = hoist on their own petard by their inherent defects of character and their own actions. Varying degrees of physical, mental or emotional damage of varying duration.

Year 3 & Year 6: Dumbledore's allies = driven away by an "unmasking" of their secret histories. Public exposure, disgrace, loss of reputation, little or no lasting physical damage.



So, what (and whose) purpose was Snape likely to be serving now?

I had rather wondered just why Dumbledore was so eager to keep Snape at his own side where he was least in a position to collect information from inside the DE organization if his primary value to Albus was as a spy. But it now seemed clear that Snape's primary value was not so much as a spy but as a potential accomplice. For example; who else among his associ-



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ates could Albus have trusted to *kill* him.

I have also contended for some years that Snape was originally sent into Hogwarts, not merely to spy on Dumbledore's actions, but as an assassin. And Albus was fully aware of this. Indeed, the whole production of; "The Murder of Albus Dumbledore" may well have been in the planning stages for well over a decade.

In fact, the original plan may even have been to orchestrate that faked death so beloved of fanon, at need. It was only Albus's managing to fatally curse himself with the Ring Horcrux that removed this particular option from the table.

I am confident that Snape certainly knew about Draco's mission to assassinate Dumbledore, because that part of the job had originally been *his* mission. He knew about it now because Voldemort had to have called him off when he reassigned it to Draco. Snape had to have been made aware of the reassignment at least. Even if only in order to know to keep out of the boy's way so suspicion didn't fall upon him and ruin his own value as an agent.

Where do I get that idea? Think: when Snape first applied for a post at Hogwarts — which we can be sure was on Voldemort's orders — according to the Ministry records, he applied for the DADA position.

The DADA position is cursed.

Voldemort knew this. He'd cursed it himself.

Dumbledore also knew that it was cursed. He'd been watching the effects ever since the year he became Headmaster.

Snape can hardly have gone through seven years in the school as a student without having heard the rumors that the position was cursed, too. Everyone in the school hears those rumors. And

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he certainly saw that none of the DADA instructors in his day lasted more than a year. If it worked the same way it did in Harry's day, none of his instructors would have *completed* a full year. He must have eventually asked Albus about that, and, under the circumstances, Albus had nothing to gain by lying about it.

Ergo: Voldemort certainly wanted to place an agent in the school that year (1981-'82). But he never intended for Snape to make a career of it. Whatever he was really sending Snape into the school for needed to have been accomplished within one academic year. Because that was all the time Snape was going to get.

And therefore Snape — who was the *only* one of Tom's followers who knew anything about the Prophecy — was *expendable*.

I think that at least a part of the original mission was that Snape was supposed to assassinate Dumbledore.

But I'm not going to follow that line of inquiry any further here. It's gone into elsewhere.

The rest of this article relates to the (historic) period when Snape was still serving two (living) masters from inside Hogwarts itself. This section of the essay built up over a period of about six years, even though it had only been posted for five, and went through a number of shifts and changes during that time.



One purely fanon theory which somehow managed to attain the status of "established fact" over the 3-year summer between Harry's years 4 & 5 was the conviction that Severus Snape's status as a spy had been thoroughly "outed" and that it would be impossible for him to continue spying once Voldemort returned.

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Rowling neatly blew this reading of the situation to smithereens with her depiction of circumstances as they stood at the opening of Book 5, with Snape making flying visits to Grimmauld Place, clearly back in the spying game. And for those who were slow on the uptake, she further nailed the lid closed on that particular theory's coffin with Snape's direct admission to Harry, in the penultimate Occlumency lesson, that, yes, he was spying. It was his job to find out what the Dark Lord was up to. But even as late as the spring of 2004 an astounding number of fans seemed to be determined to cling to this fanon myth in the face of all evidence to the contrary.

What these readers did not seem to have grasped is that this is not a "series," in the sense of a detective story series, or of a "series" on the order of the adventures of this or that group of High School friends, where new information in one book may change the situation in that particular book and in the books that come after it, but will have no effect upon any of the books that came before it. The Harry Potter "series" is supposedly *all one story*, and the story wasn't finished yet. Any new information in the most recent book could change the reading of *anything* that took place in *any* of the others, all the way back to the beginning. And that if the reader was going to be able to follow the development of the action they must remain alert to such changes. And to be prepared to make such adjustments of their interpretation as necessary.

The now obsolete, Voldemort-Suspects-Snape fanon interpretation appeared to rest upon a tripod of assumptions drawn from the most surface reading of three specific incidents in the first four books. These incidents, in order of occurrence are;

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the foiling of Quirrell's attempt to hex Potter off his broom in PS/SS; the infamous "where your loyalties lie" confrontation between Snape and Quirrell somewhat later the same year, and, finally, the belief that Snape was publicly outed by Dumbledore's testimony at Karkaroff's plea-bargain hearing in the Pensieve summary in GoF.

Voldemort's speech regarding the Coward, the Oathbreaker, and the Faithful Servant later on in that book was generally believed to support this conclusion.

The assumptions regarding Snape that were inspired by the Voldemort speech seemed to be the ones that offer the highest level of "disconnect" with the situation as we saw it regarding Snape's actual position within the DE's confidences by the time Harry arrived at Grimmauld Place about 6 weeks later. (The gap between these two events inside the story is that between June 24 and August 6. Not three full years, as it was for the reader) The "received message" of Voldemort's speech, to most of the fans, was that Snape was now outed and would be summarily killed. This clearly had not happened.

My own interpretation of the matter, that Snape *had* in fact turned up at the graveyard muster and was in his assigned place neither speaking, nor spoken to, turned out to have been completely wrong. This is one of the few points, on *this* issue in which I was completely wrong. Voldemort's speech *had* indeed referred to Snape. But Snape had managed to dodge the bullet despite his tardy arrival. We were not conclusively informed of this until early in HBP, however.

Ergo; it turns out that I was most unwarrantably complacent about having hit my own personal "wait a minute..." moment

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regarding this issue about two weeks before Phoenix's release. But I was certainly not at all surprised by the situation we were shown at the opening of Phoenix and which prevailed throughout the book. What we were shown in OotP only appeared to confirm what I had come to suspect. That, if there were only those three no-shows at the meeting in the graveyard, then it was highly unlikely that Snape was one of them.

Ironically, it was from that jumping-off point — which turned out to have been completely wrong — that a re-examination of the earlier incidents in Book 1, cited above, revealed those to also be readily subject to very different interpretations from what they had appeared to suggest from an initial surface reading.

Which opened up a whole new line of reasoning in which I was *not* wrong.



On this issue, my own personal “ground zero” was the admission to myself that the situation as it is clearly set up at the opening of Phoenix — Snape apparently spying for Dumbledore, still in solid with Lucius Malfoy, and nobody apart from Sirius Black giving him any sort of a hard time at all — makes no sense whatsoever according to the prevailing expectations of the fandom.

Therefore, either Rowling had arbitrarily decided to ignore all of the laws of plausibility in her story's development, or we, the fans, had been reasoning from a faulty premise.

Whereas, in the light of DHs, the idea that Rowling may have chosen to arbitrarily dismiss all consideration of the laws of plausibility no longer seems to be at all inconceivable,

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until I was actually handed DHs and forced to work my way through it, I felt it much more likely that it was the fanon premise that was faulty.

I don't know about anyone else, but it is a lot easier for me to suspect that I've missed something than to perform the sort of mental backbends necessary to bring two such mutually incompatible scenarios into compliance. (My major problem with DHs is that rather than supposing that we had missed things, we were suddenly far too often being bullied into being expected to recant ever having noticed things that were really there. And are *still* there if one attempts a reread of any of the earlier books.)

One of the worst things an analyst can do is to fall so totally in love with their own interpretation of incomplete data that they are blind and deaf to any further information. I may very well be guilty of this error elsewhere in this collection, but I was not guilty of it regarding this matter. Or at least not then.

I could not believe that Rowling had suddenly changed her mind as to just what the former Professor's part in the adventure of Harry Potter and the Dark Lord entailed. She had known what Snape was up to from the beginning of the story arc. Consequently, most of the information that was necessary for us to unravel the line of his actions and motivations which we had been shown up to that point must have already been present in the text, despite Rowling's thick overlay of moonshine and misdirection.

In this particular case, the biggest point to keep in mind was that the whole Snape-is-under-suspicion premise was a *fanon* creation. Rowling might have chosen to deploy it herself later,

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but she had obviously not chosen to deploy it then.

And the fact that the fandom spent three years building fanfic castles in the air and using that premise as their foundation did not make it a valid premise for interpreting what Rowling had now actually given us to work with in canon. Up to the opening of HBP Rowling had never invoked that premise. As of OotP she clearly did not support it. And I was not going to make a blood sacrifice of common sense in order to clutch it to my bosom or let it stand in the way of my trying to unravel the ramifications of what she *did* write in attempting to figure out what was going on from this point henceforth.

Fact: the only person who seemed inclined to suspect Snape of anything by the end of Book 5 was Harry.

Well, it's true that we soon learned otherwise in HBP. Some of his fellow Death Eaters had also suspected Snape, and had done so for some time. But, then, the Death Eaters probably made a cottage industry of suspecting one another. That's the way Voldemort preferred it.

Nobody *in charge* suspected Snape at all. They never had. Neither one of them. Ever.

Well, that's a *slight* exaggeration. Voldemort, despite any statements to the contrary, really trusted nobody. To the extent that by the opening of HBP he appeared to have at least temporarily set a spy on his chief spy, parking Pettigrew in the man's own house. But that doesn't necessarily mean that he actually suspected Snape of anything in particular. (My examination of Voldemort's probable reasons for sending Pettigrew home with Snape are gone into in the essay entitled 'Exeunt Albus: Setting the Stage'.)

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The most central piece of misdirection we have always had to work our way around throughout the entire series is the "Harry filter." Which is to say that the books are tightly told from Harry's point of view. It is a masterful piece of misdirection. It takes a considerable effort of will to keep reminding ourselves that Harry and his friends are a good deal more in the dark as to what is taking place in each book than Dumbledore, or most of the rest of the adult characters are. And if Harry believed that Snape was acting suspiciously it did not follow that anybody else did.

Furthermore, around this time, it belatedly dawned on me that Rowling, as much as possible, was applying the Harry filter to her interview answers as well. She was determined that the reader should *continue* to approach the series strictly from Harry's point of view, as it stood at that particular point in the story arc, whether on or off the page. She had a LOT invested in her primary narrator's unreliability. Which didn't make accurate interpretations any easier.

We are also forced to remember that if Dumbledore *did* indeed trust and depend upon Professor Snape, therefore, unless we are living in a world without logic or common sense he must have made a point of seeing to it that Snape had enough information to be able to take the steps necessary to cover his arse. He knew that what Snape was doing was *dangerous*. Did he really have so many spies so well-placed inside the Dark Lord's organization that he could afford to just blow this one off?



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The level of confidence that the Dark Lord and his followers had in Snape by the opening of Phoenix simply does not come from punishing someone that you have had under suspicion with Crucio, and expecting him to have learned his lesson. And I defy anyone to find any clear indication in the entire 870 pages of OotP that Voldemort had anything less than full confidence in Snape — regardless of what Umbridge eventually came to think of him.

Conversely, once someone has given you really *good* reason to hold him under suspicion, you never completely trust him again. Certainly not if you are a self-anointed Dark Lord who judges everyone in the world's motivations by your own. That we get no hint of a lack of confidence in Snape throughout OotP from anyone who we know to be a DE (we do not know that of Umbridge, even if her family is allegedly “connected”) anywhere in the entire book is not what I would call a lack of evidence.

Therefore; the widely-held fanon assumption that if Snape returned to Voldemort he did so under a heavy cloud of suspicion, seemed simply *wrong*.



Furthermore, it seemed to me, that if the fundamental assumption was wrong, it changed everything that we thought we knew about what we [thought we] saw in Book 1. As well as the implications of what we were told at Karkaroff's hearing.

As it turns out the only likely reason that Voldemort had to suspect Snape is that he didn't show up immediately when called to the graveyard in Little Hangleton. By that time, even Voldemort must have recognized that their cross-purposes during the Quirrell debacle was not conclusive proof that Snape

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had turned his coat.

If Snape was not under suspicion before Voldemort's return, it will be because he had never given Voldemort, or — perhaps more accurately — Lucius Malfoy, any cause to suspect him of anything beyond the sort of petty, venial lapses that come from selfishness and indolence. These are the sort of shortcomings that everyone has, and which do not reflect upon one's loyalties in the least.

Lucius Malfoy had almost certainly been monitoring Snape's actions and getting his reports on Dumbledore's activities for most of the previous 14 years, if not longer. It was in Malfoy's own best interests to have some idea of what Dumbledore might be up to that the Board of Governors did not know about. It was in Dumbledore's best interests to have kept up to date on what Voldemort's ex-followers were up to during the interregnum. Even without committing to the issue of Snape's loyalties to one side or the other, it was in Snape's own best interests to keep the conduit of information between both of his principals' factions open and to make himself indispensable to both sides.

He was much better at this sort of thing than Peter Pettigrew, who was more of a freelancer. He managed to jockey himself into a position that put him in control of who got access to whatever information concerned the school. There is no question regarding Snape's “return” to spying, in that he had never *stopped* spying.

Given that his established affinity to, and his skill in the art of discovering other people's secrets was well-developed before he even finished Hogwarts, I wouldn't be surprised if the greater part of his duties as a Death Eater hadn't always been

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related to some form of espionage. Kimball O'Hara, move over. Severus Snape may have always been a spy.

And if Snape was not under direct suspicion from Voldemort at the opening of OotP, it will be because he had given neither Lucius Malfoy nor Voldemort (nor Dumbledore) any reason to suddenly start suspecting him.



At the end of GoF Voldemort had issued a general call to all Death Eaters. Snape was expected to be there, in the circle with his "brothers." Since there had been no apparent change in his status *viv-a-vis* Malfoy and the rest of the known attendees since that evening, the provisional conclusion which I had drawn was that he *was* in the circle. The fact that Voldemort spoke of only three absentees seemed in itself a confirmation that Snape must have been present. If Snape had been one of those absentees, he ought not have lived through the summer break.

Snape was not the "loyal servant" that Voldemort referred to. That was Barty Crouch Jr. Snape did not run. He did not hide. Voldemort, Malfoy and all the others knew where to find him. And there he was, six weeks later, smug and smirking and taunting Sirius Black, showing no heightened concern for his own personal safety whatsoever. He's convinced he's covered. It's obvious.

After digesting that much; in retrospect, the very fact that we were deliberately shown three specific DE trials/hearings in the course of GoF, offset by Voldemort's drafting out the ultimate fates of only three missing DEs also seemed a good indication

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that fanon's assumption that one of these fates was reserved for Severus Snape was indicative only of Snape's having — once again — served as Rowling's favorite red herring. I concluded that the real herring that point was Ludo Bagman instead. I'll have to admit that I am still not altogether convinced of Bagman's apparent innocence, even if he was not the "coward" of Voldemort's speech.

We knew that the "faithful servant" was Barty Crouch Jr. We knew that both the Crouch trial and the Karkaroff hearing were fundamental to the events of GoF. I could not upon reflection believe that the Bagman trial was irrelevant. I thought it was probably a warning. And one that Albus Dumbledore, at least, had not overlooked, or why else was he reviewing that memory? Even though he is perfectly happy to admit that Bagman had never given anyone further cause for suspicion. (Mainly because Bagman wanted nothing more to do with the DEs or anything regarding them. He'd learned that lesson at any event.)

The non-negotiable sticking point was that the Potion Master's circumstances at the opening of Phoenix were so widely divergent from everything that fanon expectation held dear that it seemed that a re-examination of what fanon expectations were based upon was overdue. Which meant that it was necessary to go back and re-evaluate what we thought we were shown as far back as Book 1, during Severus Snape's first tour of duty as Rowling's favorite red herring.



The first suspicious incident regarding Professor Snape in PS/

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SS was the broom hexing at the Gryffindor/Slytherin match. This was the first match of the year. By the end of the book, there is no confusion on QuirrellMort's part as to who had countered the attempt to hex Potter off his broom. Nor, interestingly enough, is there any particular annoyance expressed over Snape's having done so. But, then, handled carefully, Snape's culpability in that incident would have been a piece of cake to explain away. All Snape would have needed to do would be to convince QuirrellMort that he did not *know* whose hex he was countering.

If you have read the companion article posted under the title of 'The Quirrell Debacle', you will already know that, in my reading of what was going on in that adventure, there was never any uncertainty on Dumbledore's part as to who was serving as Voldemort's agent, or of what was under Quirrell's turban. It is also reasonable to suspect that Dumbledore had probably at least taken the Heads of Houses into his confidence regarding the matter. He would certainly have at least taken Snape into his confidence, since (DHs' innuendos, notwithstanding) Snape would have still been much too valuable to Dumbledore as an agent to let him risk himself blundering about, without a clue in the presence of his former Master.

That, upon arrival, Voldemort found his former agent in the school to be still at his post and faithfully performing as much as he could manage to execute of his original mission (Snape was almost certainly told to await Voldemort's signal before initiating his mission, and to all appearances was still awaiting that signal), which speaks a good deal more highly in Snape's favor than the inaction taken by Voldemort's other followers

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among the idle rich. And it isn't like Snape had appeared to be particularly *happy* to be at Hogwarts over Year 1, did it? Snape's lack of apparent joy in his profession would also go some way to suggest that his sullen determination to hang on to it is due to a sense of duty.

Such attempts upon Snape's part also included a dogged determination to execute his original orders by repeatedly applying for the DADA position. It is clear from this last that Voldemort probably had not let Snape in on the fact that the position really was cursed. Tom may even have found the irony amusing. If Dumbledore had ever relented on the issue, Snape would have no longer been there.

That Voldemort did not reveal himself to this particular former agent was not particularly significant. It may have been enough of a stretch on his limited resources to keep Quirrell under control that he did not welcome the possible complications of trying to direct or restrain a second agent at the same time.

He may also have reasonably suspected that Dumbledore might have the whole Castle under some form of surveillance and did not want to risk either of their missions by approaching this former agent openly. In this suspicion he may even have been right. The walls of Hogwarts do have both ears and eyes. In every painting. And the castle's ghosts are not always visible, but they may still be present. To say nothing of the House Elves.

He may even have regarded this particular follower as too strong a wizard to be taken deeply into his personal confidence while he himself was in a state of such vulnerability. PS/SS!Snape was no Peter Pettigrew to happily display submis-

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sive behavior even to UglyBaby!Mort. And Voldemort would have known this. Added to which he has probably never really been able to “read” Snape, and under the turban he can’t even observe him properly.

In any case, although, after the fact, it seems that Snape must have known with whom he was dealing, QuirrellMort was successfully kept from realizing that Snape was aware of his true identity. And Snape was at considerable pains to make sure that QuirrellMort did not figure that out.



That Snape might suspect Quirrell of trying to steal the Philosophers’ Stone, or of possibly being Voldemort’s agent is one thing. That he should suspect that Quirrell was actually QuirrellMort would have been something else altogether. The broom hexing incident might even have been a gambit. If it worked, wonderful. But, if that incident was even initiated by Voldemort at all (and that attempt could easily have been Quirrell acting semi-independently in an attempt to please his Master) it might have been more useful for sounding out his original agent’s current position within the school hierarchy than a serious attempt upon Potter’s life. Potter is a wizard, for heaven’s sake. A fall from a broomstick would result in pain and a great deal of inconvenience, but it is a very uncertain method to use in an attempt to murder him. Voldemort knows this.

We do *not* know for certain whether there was any past history between Snape and Quirrell. Or what form such a history is likely to have taken. That Quirrell was described as a *young* man — within the perceptions of the “Harry filter” (Snape,

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barely into his 30s at that point, is never so described) would tend to suggest that Quirrell was somewhere in his mid-20s, and, consequently, was probably too young to have ever actually been a Death Eater. A distinction of which both Voldemort and Snape would have been aware.

Permit me to take a moment to state that I *still* do not believe that Voldemort has ever commonly inducted schoolboys still living in dormitories into his ranks, even if he may have occasionally made an exception in an individual case. Particularly not during VoldWar I when he seems to have had no difficulty recruiting more broadly useful followers. There is far too great a risk of someone seeing a schoolboy’s Dark Mark and either calling attention to it, or drawing unwanted conclusions.

Remember; Voldemort grew up in an orphanage. He also attended Hogwarts himself. He knows this from experience. Even if his activities at the orphanage did eventually goad the staff into turning a storage area into a private room for him. Ergo; hardly anyone who was still in school when Voldemort, fell in the autumn of 1981, is all that likely have ever officially been a Death Eater.

Quirrell’s statements in the last chapter of the book suggest pretty strongly that his time at Hogwarts overlapped both the end of the ongoing Snape vs Marauders conflict and possibly the beginning of the tenure of the Black Bat of the Potions Lab. And, moreover, Quirrell now has the job that Snape is “known” to want. This last fact by this time is also sure to be known by Voldemort. It was Voldemort who had sent Snape into the school with orders to fill that position in the first place. I suspect that their relations across the Staff table were not particularly cordial.

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I also suspect that it was whatever remained of young Quirrell himself who was left to deal with the situation — with no particular assistance from his “Master.” I am sure that there were times throughout the school year that Voldemort found the Snape complication to be highly inconvenient. But I also suspect that there were others in which he found it to be just as highly entertaining. And Snape, having been primed with the crucial information that he needed in order to safely navigate this particular strait, knew better than to let his Death-Eater-off-his-Master’s-leash mask slip at any point during the year.



But, about that broom hexing: the way you defuse an incident like that after the fact is that you don’t allow your opponent any opportunity to draw his own conclusions. You *hand* him the conclusion you want him to draw wrapped up in a purple bow, and you don’t allow breathing space for any alternate readings.

You start by launching a particularly vicious, snarling tirade about having been required to save Potter — yes, *Potter!* — in the course of your duties — because there was no way that as a staff member you could have gotten away with not having acted to save the brat, not in such a public place in full sight of the whole School. And be sure to allow your “excess of feelings” to lead you to be somewhat incautious about where you stage this performance — like, in a place where your “rival” can overhear it. Follow this up with the emphatically stated pronouncement that it was obviously one of your *own* 6th or 7th years who was responsible — and if you ever find out which one, they will rue

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the day. After all, thwarting Death Eater spawn who are flirting with a stint in Azkaban — over a *Quidditch game*, yet! — is part of your job description, damnit! (From both sides of the fence.) And finish up in a spitting fury that someone — *someone* — ONE of the misbegotten little brats — had the temerity to *set you on fire* while you did it!

And don’t leave him any room to doubt your sincerity. It shouldn’t be hard. Just about every word of it is absolutely true. And, by this time we know from experience that Snape has an exceedingly well-developed gift for being able to draft the literal truth to serve his own purposes..

Because Snape, as a teacher in the School, really *didn’t* have much choice but to publicly be seen to be making an attempt to control the situation. And even if a pair of First Years misread that public attempt because they disliked him, the rest of the Staff didn’t. Voldemort must have known that. He really wasn’t stupid, you know (well, not at that point in the series anyway). He was totally incapable of empathizing with any sort of human feelings, and he was supremely overconfident; but he wasn’t fundamentally stupid.

And, rather more to the point, he has since repeatedly demonstrated that he maintained a track record of at least 90% accuracy for second-guessing just about *everybody’s* probable future actions, and continued to do so throughout the series, all the way to the end!

Which causes me to suddenly wonder — and far too belatedly — whether that may not have been why he forced Quirrell to do it (unless it was all that poor fool Quirrell’s own contribution to the situation, and one of the things for which

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his Master was forced to “punish” him). After all, he could hardly have expected to succeed in killing Potter by a fall from his broom, even if he does think he could manage to make him part company with it.

But Voldemort did certainly like to taunt and tease his followers, didn't he. All of them.

But, really, his mission at the school that year was to get the Stone, not to kill Potter. He still didn't know why his curse at Godric's Hollow had backfired, and that made him wary. Even that final attack in the heart of the Labyrinth was an attempt to get the Stone away from Potter more than it was to kill him — although if Quirrell could have managed it, all the better.

No. I really am 85% certain that the broom hexing was Quirrell's own contribution to the situation, and Voldemort wasn't that upset to see it stopped. It was just too much of a security risk.

And, besides, Acto Albus, at the end of HBP we now were supposed to understand that what he had intended to accomplish by killing Harry originally had been to create a Horcrux. Knocking a kid off a broom isn't going to create a Horcrux.



Which brings us to the “where your loyalties lie” confrontation.

One thing that should be kept in mind is that it looks very much as if this confrontation was most likely to be Part 2 of some master plan that Snape and Dumbledore had already set up connected to the Gryffindor/Hufflepuff match. The one that Dumbledore attended and Snape refereed.

You know: the match that Harry brought to a close by catching the Snitch about five minutes into the game, neatly derail-

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ing any covert plans for the afternoon which may have been set up, well before there was any chance to put them into play.

The same match after which Snape treated us all to his lack of couth with a display of public spitting. *Something* had really, *really* put him out. And I doubt that whatever it was was a Hufflepuff loss at Quidditch.

I suspect that Harry's having brought that match to a premature close was not in Snape's, or Dumbledore's, best interests. And it meant that Snape was stuck having to meet Quirrell-Mort, as had been already arranged, without having laid some of the groundwork which had been intended.

By the time we had reached that point in the overall story arc, post-OotP; it would have been lunacy to pin our entire interpretation of what was going down offstage over that whole first school year on the recollection of one overheard conversation mid-way through it. We had been handed far too much conflicting information since that point to still be taking that conversation at face value. And the fact that Rowling summarily dismisses the initial conclusion that the fans had drawn from that conversation by the end of the very same book is a pretty clear indication that somewhere along the way the fans had misinterpreted something.

And just how often do we all remember that Harry didn't even catch the whole conversation? Quirrell was *mumbling* throughout it, and an all-too-convenient owl suddenly hooted in Harry's ear loudly enough to distract him from even catching all of Snape's end of it. With all due respect, I'd say that if a reader couldn't look back at that scene and smell “red herring” by the time they've finished Book 5,

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they need their sinuses cleared out.

We never were let in on all that was said in that meeting and we have no idea just how much we may have missed. And, by this time, it no longer matters. Harry heard *just* enough of that conversation to serve the purposes of the plot of Book 1, after he had *already* decided that Snape was the villain of the piece. But that was much too frail a hook for us to hang major assumptions on, post-OotP.

It is pretty clear on even a cursory rereading* that the kids never even *tried* to figure out just what was *really* going on throughout their first year. They were simply too young to take that broad a view of the matter. They were totally absorbed in the mystery of the Philosophers' Stone.

[* i.e., reading it and asking yourself; "What would adults do?"]

The indications, after the fact, are that there was never any mystery of who was under that turban from Dumbledore's end of the equation. Also that Dumbledore had clearly enlisted at least some of his senior staff in his plans. The whole Labyrinth was an *obvious* trap, and the Philosopher's Stone was bait to distract Voldemort from any more dangerous pursuit, like, say, calling up his followers and re-establishing his empire, or directing too much of his attention to destroying Harry Potter.

With this in mind; would Snape — *knowing* that Voldemort — or at least one of his agents, was at the meeting have said the part that we did hear him say unless there had been careful ambiguities built into it, along with much preparation, back-up interpretations and follow-up plans? (And context that Harry *missed*?) Snape knew that he was talking to someone who was working for his former Master — to whom he had been feed-

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ing disinformation at breakfast, lunch and dinner for several weeks running by that point in the story. This whole exercise was almost certainly an intrinsic part of the staff plot to get QuirrellMort into the Labyrinth where he could be *trapped*.

In short, Snape was engaged in "belling the cat." This particular confrontation was the point at which Quirrell was to be given the added spur to his actions of being led to believe that someone *else* had figured out his intentions and had decided to go after the Stone, as well. Turning the "mission" into a *race*.

And his rival thief is a former DE at that. Voldemort has no illusions about his followers. He's a Legilimens, for heaven's sake, even if he was unable to deploy this skill from under Quirrell's turban. He knows that if offered such a temptation, sooner or later most of his followers would make a snatch at it. For Snape to be after the Stone himself is a no-brainer. It would probably be more suspicious if he *weren't*.

For Snape to have figured out that Quirrell was after it and be trying to make him back off is unfortunate, but an equally predictable part of behaving in true DE character. Quirrell is too young to have been one of Voldemort's DEs and, consequently, is fair game for intimidation tactics. And, if Snape is *threatening* Quirrell, then Snape "obviously" doesn't realize that Quirrell is actually QuirrellMort. Ergo; this masquerade is *working*! No one suspects the true state of affairs!



From Voldemort's point of view, this is all just another rather tiresome complication of his imposture as Quirrell, but it certainly isn't going to convince him that Snape has transferred

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his loyalties to *Dumbledore*. If Snape had done that, he would hardly be threatening Quirrell into backing off so that he can get at the Philosopher's Stone *himself*, now would he? And no doubt intending to blame its disappearance on Quirrell, too.

And, in fact, the probability is that this confrontation was set up specifically for the purpose of giving Voldemort *exactly* this impression and thereby *deflecting* suspicions on the subject of Snape's loyalties, rather than to create new ones.

Think about it. This confrontation was set up for a *reason*, and Snape was probably not acting independently. Why on earth would Snape and Dumbledore have wanted to *create* suspicion? They were (or Albus was) not working blindly. They (or Albus) knew who they were dealing with. In fact, convincing QuirrellMort that he, Snape, was after the Philosopher's Stone, *himself*, was the about only explanation which Voldemort would have been able to comprehend which would have taken account for Snape's actions back on Halloween (and since) that would have fully allayed suspicion of complicity with Dumbledore. And it would also give Snape a cover story for lurking about and keeping Quirrell under future observation. Thereby protecting Potter.

Look at the pieces we've got and ask yourself whether they still fit together in the pattern that fanon would like to have them. Start by asking; "What would Dumbledore do?" Do you believe that a well-intentioned Dumbledore would have kept his trusted agent Snape in the dark about what was going on with the Stone that year, while Snape's former Master had the school under covert attack, and any unwitting blunder on Snape's part could put him at risk of his life?

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I'll ask it again: did Dumbledore have so many other agents placed so well inside the DE organization that he could afford to simply write this one off?

Second; Do *you* believe that Snape was really after the Philosopher's Stone for himself? Well? Do you? If not, then what would he have been trying to accomplish by going to such pains to make Quirrell *think* he was? Why on earth would Snape have gone to the trouble to have set up, or have agreed to this meeting with Quirrell at all, if he expected that the result was going to be to make Voldemort believe that he had transferred his loyalties to Dumbledore? Do either of these readings make the slightest bit of sense?

No. They don't.

We are still looking at that confrontation through the Harry filter. That meeting wasn't set up to misdirect Harry. But it certainly succeeded.

If nothing else; this particular gambit established, from the very first book, Severus Snape's uncommon courage, and his mastery of the art of the "double-bluff".

The second most difficult act that year must have been for Dumbledore and the rest of the staff to carry out their rôles of looking and acting clueless, and convincing QuirrellMort that they were all watching for an attempt on the Stone from an outside agent. Dumbledore must have found the comparatively new-at-his-job Minister Fudge's frequent owls for advice an invaluable cover for making periodic absences from the school to tempt QuirrellMort to make his attempt.



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Moving right along: we now leap ahead three years to the Pensieve overview of Karkaroff's hearing and the graveyard gathering in Little Hangleton complete with Voldemort's famous speech regarding the three no-shows.

The first thing to keep in mind regarding Karkaroff's hearing is that this was not actually a public trial. Karkaroff had already been tried, sentenced, and had been in Azkaban for about a year by the time Voldemort fell. And if Snape has always been known by the DEs to be spying on Dumbledore, the situation on Voldemort's end, was already covered.

From Tom's vantage point; "The DE who came in from the cold" was Snape's cover story with Dumbledore, who backed it up at the hearing. Karkaroff either wasn't on the "need to know" list regarding Snape's mission, or he just threw Snape's name in as a last-ditch effort to enhance his own value, but Voldemort, who helped set the whole situation up, would have already been fully aware of it. Dumbledore's testimony only revealed that Dumbledore believed the interpretation of events that Voldemort had intended him to believe.

In fact, it is clear from this scene that Snape had *already* had *his* hearing, of which Dumbledore was reminding everyone, and that there is undoubtedly an official record of it on file. Given that Karkaroff was probably clamoring to make a plea bargain from the moment that his Dark mark disappeared, if Snape's panel had already taken place, there is some reason to suspect that it may have been both very private, and had possibly been held when he first started working at Hogwarts, *before* the end of the war itself, and that he was officially known by Voldemort to now be passing himself off as a Minis-



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try informant, reporting via Dumbledore.

I had finally come to the conclusion that, until the time of the Prophecy, Snape's primary function within the DEs may not actually have been Potions brewing, despite his unquestionable gift for it. He was one of Malfoy's henchmen, and unless he was already fully engaged in some professional training program — such as, say, Healer training at St Mungo's Hospital, or an apprenticeship for a Potions Mastery — although he obliged with Potions when needed, his primary duty was more likely to be the gathering and verification of information. His marked affinity for this sort of work had been apparent even before he finished school, and it is just as likely to have proved essential to Malfoy as it has been to Dumbledore. In short: he has always been engaged in espionage at some level

Given Rita Skeeter's obvious Malfoy connections, it appears likely that Malfoy and his entire "cell" may have been Voldemort's "intelligence" unit rather than one of the units engaged in active violence. We already know from observation that Lucius Malfoy can't really be trusted to keep his head if he is posted on the front lines, or in any position where he is likely to encounter a direct challenge. He always flies off the handle and does or says something stupid, and his specialty seems more on the order of blackmail and extortion than in matters requiring brute force, or quasi-military discipline.

But behind the scenes he could be very effective indeed.

I also suspect that Snape only really came to Voldemort's direct notice when he reported the overheard fragment of the Trelawney Prophecy to the Dark Lord himself. From that point he had Voldemort's attention.



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Until the release of HBP we were not officially aware that Snape was the informant who reported the Prophecy (although quite a few fans had guessed that correctly). We definitely did not know that there were two conflicting versions of the circumstances under which the Prophecy was made, or, more to the point, of how Snape had come to overhear it.

To me, the ambiguity about this information established a strong probability that Snape's dealings with Albus Dumbledore might go back at least as far as the night of the Trelawney Prophecy, if not earlier, in fact well before Voldemort ordered him to infiltrate Dumbledore's school. The ramifications of this (now officially canon-shafted) possibility are discussed elsewhere in the collection.



Snape was almost certainly selected by Voldemort to be the agent to infiltrate the school *because* he was the person to have heard the partial Prophecy. Since he had been seen (and ejected) by the barman that night, and Dumbledore was known to be on good terms with the local barmen, Snape was probably advised to feed Dumbledore a tale of remorse and a plea for forgiveness in order to gain his confidence. Both Snape and Dumbledore, if asked, will support this story. But it is unlikely to be the real story of the beginnings of their association. At the very least, I believed the time that their first interview took place had been falsified by several months.

It should also be noted that at the time he supposedly contacted Dumbledore, there was probably no provable crime for which Snape could have personally been charged. Such crimes

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may well have existed, but it is almost certain that Snape's involvement was nothing that could have been proved. Any other related activities such as disagreeing with Ministry policy, even publicly, were not crimes. Even the active study of the Dark Arts is not illegal.

A crucial piece of information that was given us in OotP, confirmed that Voldemort *did* indeed send Snape to Hogwarts, presumably to infiltrate Dumbledore's school and to pass the DEs information on Dumbledore's movements before his own first defeat at Godric's Hollow took place.

For the slow of comprehension this fact was restated openly in the Spinners' End chapter of HBP. It was this factor which enabled Snape to allay suspicions and retain contact with the likes of Lucius Malfoy throughout the entire period of Voldemort's absence. But, from the wording of Dumbledore's testimony at Karkaroff's hearing, I was more inclined to suspect that Snape had been keeping in touch with Hogwarts on either Voldemort's or Dumbledore's behalf for some time before he took up his position on staff as the Hogwarts Potions master, a post which he had only finally achieved a few weeks before Voldemort's first defeat.

In this supposition I proved to be correct, even if my final conclusion drawn regarding the true state of affairs officially is not. To me the conflicting versions related to Snape's overhearing of the Trelawney Prophecy strongly implied that Snape's first recognized act on behalf of Albus Dumbledore was, in fact, to report the first half, and *only* the first half of the Prophecy to Voldemort.

Due to the fact that I find nearly all of what we were told

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in DHs all but completely implausible, I am still more than half convinced that this was indeed the case.



One would have thought that Voldemort must have wanted to place as many agents as possible within Dumbledore's organization at his earliest convenience, yet Snape, according to all indications appears to have been one of his first choices of agent, and he was not placed in Hogwarts until nearly the end of Vold-War I. I have long suspected that Snape's assignment may have had something to do with the Prophecy, since none of the other DEs were aware of it. But Snape's skill as an Occlumens was may have been a deciding factor for directing him to actually take up a position in the School. At some point, very likely in his childhood, or as a Hogwarts student, perhaps even back when Albus had delivered his Hogwarts letter, it must have occurred to Tom that Dumbledore was another Legilimens.

The wandless nature of really expert Legilimency and Occlumency would classify the process as falling within one definition of the Dark Arts, and it is probably an excellent defense against some of them. It is possible that this was the very form of the Dark Arts in which Voldemort personally trained Bellatrix Black, and of which she boasted. We do know that she was reasonably competent in this skill, and this competence may be one of the only reasons why she managed to survive 12 years in Azkaban with as much of her sanity intact as she had. If Tom taught Bellatrix, he might well have also taught Snape. Particularly when he had a job for Snape to do which would require it.

We will probably never be told who actually trained Snape

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in Occlumency. That he had a natural affinity for this skill is very likely. What we saw of his childhood might have tended to develop such an affinity. It is probable that he was originally self-trained. It is also possible that either of his two principles might have coached him in this skill before sending him to spy on the other. Of the two, Voldemort is very slightly the more likely candidate. First, since he has no compunction about using Legilimency upon his associates, he would have noted Snape's natural resistance and decided to make use of it. Also, if it was Voldemort who originally trained Snape, he would be less inclined to regard Snape's ability in this skill with suspicion.

From Dumbledore's end of the equation, it has always seemed unlikely that Snape would have earned the sort of testimony that Albus made at Karkaroff's hearing in just the matter of the eight weeks or so that he had officially been a part of the Hogwarts staff. I suspected that the real period of "great personal risk" Dumbledore referred to had taken place before Snape's addition to the Hogwarts staff. Since Snape, like the Potters could have been no more than 21 at the time of Voldemort's defeat at Godric's Hollow, this would require that there be some reason for him to remain in contact, or to have re-established contact with Hogwarts after finishing school, but before he was sufficiently qualified to be hired as a teacher. We do not know what any such hypothetical reason may have been.



Which invites another sidebar regarding what our *dramatis personae* might have been doing between June of 1978 when the Marauder cohort finished at Hogwarts, and September,

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1981 when Snape returned as a teacher..

So far as the question of Severus Snape, the Dark Arts, and the original lure of Voldemort's organization go, as late as HBP we seem to have all been expected to believe that Severus Snape was the very model of a non-"aristo" Death Eater recruit (assuming there ever actually was such a thing, looking back, the whole organization seems to have been a lot more "elite" than we were led to believe over the first 5 books), for whom the primary lure was the study of the Dark Arts. And it was easy to accept that if such a reading of the situation was the correct one, to the young Severus Snape the whole issue would probably, at first, have looked very simple. Under Voldemort's sponsorship he would have had full latitude to study, and practice, the Dark Arts, without any pettifying Ministry restraints.

It also would give him a continuing "in" to retain the patronage of his social betters like Malfoy..

The only problem with this reading is that upon closer examination, it doesn't hold water.



For one thing; there do not appear to *be* any Ministry restraints imposed upon the study or practice of the Dark Arts at all. Only on specific *spells*.

Snape allegedly was widely acknowledged to have been fascinated by the Dark Arts from childhood. "Famous" for it, while still at Hogwarts. Admittedly, our only informant on the subject is Sirius Black, so consider the source.

However, if this were the case, Snape would very likely have

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considered the study of the Dark Arts to be his entitlement, had perhaps placed all of his earliest hopes upon getting to Hogwarts and learning the Dark Arts, and ultimately arrived at Hogwarts to discover that this study was not officially offered, and indeed was discouraged as much as possible.

Which isn't to say that one cannot still learn them, or learn them at Hogwarts. Because people clearly *do*. But they were not offered as a formal study by the time Snape started there.

But still, given that the study is not illegal, why would Snape need the Death Eaters at all?

Even more to the point; why would the Death Eaters think they needed *him*?

Well, it seems reasonable to suppose that Snape probably also dreamed of power and glory, like most youngsters, and across the fandom it is generally supposed that he would readily have signed on to whichever group assured him of the greatest opportunities to achieve them.

But would that really have been the Death Eaters? They were an *illegal* organization. Membership could not have been a feasible route to social or professional advancement.

Many fans also suppose that he might have signed up willingly if he could do so under the sponsorship of someone as socially prominent as, say, Lucius (or, even better, Abraxis) Malfoy, and even more if there had been nothing in his own upbringing which would have conditioned him to regard the stated sentiments of the typical pureblood-supremacist agenda as abhorrent in itself. That much seems likely enough, as far as it goes. Or, at least as far as it went until we discovered that Snape was a literal halfblood.

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Still, it is not in the least illegal to believe that pureblood wizards are superior to mixed-blood wizards. Even if such a belief is manifestly unsupported by any sort of facts. And if a mixed-blood wizard can make himself noticed and of use to the purebloods who seem to be running things, well, why ever not?

Particularly when there is nothing in his own command of magic, or knowledge of wizarding traditions that would suggest, to anyone who did not know better, that his own bloodlines were any less pure than theirs.

I am sure that on the surface, this is a perfectly reasonable conclusion for someone, particularly someone like Harry, to be drawing.

But when did we ever get the feeling that Severus Snape was, exactly... superficial?

One rather suspects that such a surface reading for Snape's actions must have been made available, both to his supporters and to his detractors. But such a reading does not really explain his actions, does it? So let's follow that thread a bit farther. Yes. Again. This time with a twist.



Assuming that Severus Snape did not sign on with the DEs as a spy in the first place (which is a remarkably easy interpretation to support, really, given the possibilities handed us over the course of the first six books of the series) and — for the duration of this exercise dismissing the whole issue of Snape-Loved-Lily — it would still be easy enough to extrapolate that his involvement over his first year or so inside the DE organization may very well have brought him to a certain “dark night

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of the soul.” He might have still been able to tell himself that he had been brought there with the very best of motives.

But that now he needed to get himself out.

I do not think Voldemort's order to take a post in Hogwarts was at all unwelcome.

If, on the chance that Snape did sign up with Riddle in good faith, it might well have been considerations along the line of realizing that he had signed a contract with a madman — which would have been becoming obvious — that prompted him to seek out and offer his support to Dumbledore.



For the two years between the release of OotP and HBP, we had been led to believe — chiefly on the strength of statements made by Sirius Black in OotP — that there was a specific point at which Voldemort had suddenly “revealed his true goals” to his supporters' and followers' dismay. At the time it seemed plausible that this “grand revelation” alone might be what gave Snape cause to reconsider his options.

Since that point it has become apparent that any hints in OotP of a “grand revelation” on Voldemort's part was either intended as a red herring, was an artifact of an abandoned plot element, an indication of Sirius Black's particular biases and tendency to make things up which support his own contentions, rendering it merely a detail of characterization, or it was just plain shoddy writing, for nothing in the “official backstory” given to us over the course of HBP or later supports anything of the sort. For this reason I have chosen to abandon this whole line of reasoning, and most of its baggage.

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Even if one does not chose to reject it, it seems all-too-likely that this “grand revelation” is not unconnected with Albus’s mysterious “11 years ago,” of 1981 which would put any such revelation around 1970 and out of range for having anything in particular to do with Severus Snape. Or Sirius Black, either.

The implications of the grand contradiction between Albus and Sybil’s accounts of what took place on the night that the Prophecy was made which were dropped upon us from a great height in HBP forced me to the conclusion that Snape was already working with Albus Dumbledore by the time the Prophecy was added to the equation.

Indeed, this conclusion makes so much sense in relation to so much of the action over the entire course of the series, that it is now difficult to attempt to dispense with it.



One question which was raised is; what was Snape doing between the time that he finished Hogwarts and started teaching? For that matter what were *all* of them doing?

I began to wonder whether Snape may have been at St Mungo’s. Certainly working in Potions, possibly even as a trainee Healer. And that he may well be a formally qualified Healer, with a specialty in curse damage. It would certainly suit his skills.

Or that to train as such might have *been* his ambition before he was suddenly ordered to go and teach kids at Hogwarts, possibly before he had completed his training.

The DEs could certainly have *used* an in-house Healer trained in treating curse damage. St Mungo’s requires only

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an ‘E’ in NEWTS for Charms, Transfiguration, Herbology, Potions, and DADA. It is almost inconceivable that the “Half-Blood Prince” as he was presented to us in the book that bears his nickname couldn’t have managed at least that. Snape’s NEWT scores and the Malfoys’ patronage could have readily secured him a place in St Mungo’s training program.

But with only three years to play with between finishing Hogwarts and being ordered back, he would not have had time to finish that training — which requires 4 years before earning full qualification.

Being a qualified, or *almost*-qualified, Healer would certainly have made it all the easier for Albus to install him as Potions master when Voldemort redeployed him by ordering him into the school to spy. And it would have kept him out of the cursed DADA position.



For that matter, insofar as Ministry obligation goes, I rather think that Snape proved to be invaluable in the post-Voldemort mop-up of the DE’s activities. Behind the scenes, at any rate.

And, once one considers it, given that pretty near all of the known DE captures and deaths while resisting arrest of which we have actually been told about appear to have taken place in the period between the night of the Prophecy — by which time I still prefer the reading that Snape was already working with Albus — and the date of his taking up a teaching post at Hogwarts it is not too much to wonder whether Snape may have had a hand in at least a few of these as well. He is unlikely to have been the only agent informing on the DEs but he may

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have been one of the better ones.



By the time the Lestranges were arrested, there was certainly no longer any likelihood of any Ministry policy of leaving the small fry observed but not interfered with in hopes of catching bigger fish. If, that is, there had ever been such a policy in the first place. We are given no clear indication of such.

By that time the emphasis was to get as many of the evil bastard's followers out of commission as possible and leave any remaining small fry without a potential hub around which to regroup. This campaign was not helped by the fact that the Dark Marks all disappeared when the Dark Lord did, leaving investigating Aurors without any inarguable indication of suspects' allegiances. Of course this also presupposes that the Aurors of the day were aware that the Dark Lord had set a physical mark on his followers, and, however likely this is, it has never been fully confirmed in canon. Indeed the whole issue has been ignored.

The disappearance of the Dark Marks would have made a mess of the DE's communication lines also, and it is also just barely possible that even sending up the image of the Dark Mark was suddenly something that his followers were no longer able to perform, giving additional cause for the panic on all sides at the World Cup when Crouch Jr. managed to do exactly that.

Albus's comment in HBP that Slughorn's tableau was missing the Dark mark, however, suggests that anyone who knew the incantation could probably cast it, regardless of Arthur Weasley's and Amos Diggory's understanding of the matter in

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GoF. We know that the followers' Marks all began to return once Voldemort was again, however vestigially, on the physical plane. But they may not have been apparent even to their bearers for some weeks, or months afterward.

For the record, I also tend to think the reason that Dumbledore knew to send Hagrid to Godric's Hollow to collect Harry so quickly was that Snape informed him of his Dark Mark's sudden disappearance. This would have sent out the alert that the Dark Lord was no more. That the Potters, his acknowledged targets, had only been in hiding a week would have been a strong indication of where Voldemort is most likely to have been when he fell. But further speculations regarding this matter are to be found in the article regarding the "missing" 24 Hours.



As to the meeting in the graveyard; from the information that was at our disposal by the end of OotP, it appeared to me to be fairly evident that Snape must have managed to defy fanon's expectations and show up after all. The fact that he did not run, did not hide, and yet managed to survive comfortably to the next school year suggested that it had not been Snape's death that Voldemort was promising, and, if Snape was not "the Coward" and had already "paid" for his non-appearance offstage by the opening of OotP, then Voldemort had never referred to Snape in the graveyard speech at all. The re-establishment of Voldemort's organization was at too vulnerable a point for the Dark Lord to have tolerated anyone's involvement whose loyalties he doubted, And I've already commented upon

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the unlikelihood of a restoration of full trust to anyone who Voldemort has ever truly doubted, even if that person managed, against all odds, to allay those doubts.

I was wrong in this reasoning, of course.

One could weasel-word it and say that Voldemort cannot have *truly* doubted Severus Snape. He only sort-of-doubted him. And Snape was able to offer excellent justifications for his actions. Or at any event Voldemort hadn't doubted him for very *long*. Just a couple of hours. But no. I was simply wrong.

Although, at the time, when subjected to a closer examination, the odds of Snape's having managed to answer Voldemort's summons after all turned out not to be half bad.

One thing that seemed to be overlooked by the fans was that for all that Lord Voldemort may have publicly and repeatedly called Dumbledore an old fool, he was still extremely wary of the old man. And he seemed more determined to make sure that there was nothing that Dumbledore could *prove* than that there should be nothing that he could *guess*. Voldemort knew perfectly well that it would be impossible to keep Dumbledore from figuring out that someone was running a plot under cover of the Tri-Wizard Tournament from the moment that Harry Potter's name came out of the Goblet of Fire. And the very fact that said plot was wrapped around the use of Harry Potter would pretty well guarantee that Dumbledore would conclude that Voldemort was behind it.

And I thought that Voldemort probably took great satisfaction in being able to tweak the old man's crooked nose with that knowledge. In PS/SS Voldemort had discovered that the sleeper-agent he had placed in Dumbledore's school 10 years

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earlier was still at his post and (apparently) was still rather less than in step with Dumbledore's goals. His agent had nevertheless managed to gain and to retain Dumbledore's trust throughout that time.

Therefore, I thought that Voldemort could pretty well gamble on the probability that Dumbledore, secure in his belief that Snape was his own spy, could be counted upon to facilitate Snape's absence in the expectation of his being eventually summoned. (So convenient to be able to count on your enemy to make your arrangements for you! And Voldemort has a very *good* class of enemy.)

It was also clear to everyone involved that if such a summons was to be made, that it would be made on the night of the final task. Even if for no other reason than that no such summons had gone out earlier in the year. All of the involved parties were fully aware of this. To the initiated, it had attained the level of a certainty.

Consequently, Snape was not posted out in general view patrolling the boundaries of the maze on the night of the third task. Nor was he in any other post with an active function. My own reading was that if he was not there at Dumbledore's left hand, he was probably playing least in sight as much as he and Dumbledore between them could manage. When Harry, Cedric and the Cup disappeared from the maze he retrieved his DE rig and made tracks into the forest to a point beyond the boundaries where he could Disapparate on Tom's signal.

It must have taken Wormtail at least 20-40 minutes to carry Voldemort to the rendezvous point, kill Cedric, subdue and bind Harry, heave that stone cauldron into position — which

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was filled, adding to its total weight. Pettigrew is a small man, and traditional graveyards with standing monuments are hardly a smooth and unimpeded terrain over which to maneuver something of that weight and mass. Levitation spells or no levitation spells.

And, having accomplished that, he still needed to perform the ritual, one-handedly assist his newly risen Lord to dress himself and to facilitate sending out the general summons. Pettigrew had a very busy night. Snape had ample time after Harry's disappearance and before the general summons to get beyond the boundaries of Hogwarts.

When the summons did come, I was convinced that Snape silently took his allotted place in the circle with his fellows, probably cursing the certainty that he was now going to have to blow his cover with a rescue attempt to get Potter out of there. And frustrated as all get-out that he wasn't offered any clear opportunity to do it.

And which turned out not to be required of him after all.



If this had been the case, and Snape was there, he would have witnessed Potter's escape from death at the Dark Lord's hand.

He had seen Potter throw off Tom's Imperius, overcome Voldemort's force of will in the battle between the wands, and he had watched Potter make his escape, taking Cedric's body with him. That odd look he was giving Harry over breakfast at the end of term was probably due to his having finally seen Harry in action and discovering that he was having to re-evaluate some of his beliefs regarding the boy. This cautious re-eval-



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uation on Snape's part seems to have carried over well into the first portion of OotP. Although he still felt quite secure about taunting the boy over what now seemed to be a quite genuine lack of aptitude in the art and science of Potions brewing.

As to those fans who remained unconvinced and demanded that if Snape was at the meeting in the graveyard, why didn't Harry see him there: My response was: first off; can we at least agree that Harry was under a lot of stress during this particular adventure? He was not coolly observing events and making mental notes of what was going on in what order.

Some 30-40 Death Eaters actually showed up for the meeting. All were cloaked *and masked*, and unless somebody spoke there was not much to distinguish them one from another but general size. Comparatively few of them had the nerve to speak up, either.

It states quite clearly that Voldemort passed round the circle, speaking to some but not others. Some he merely passed by with a nod. I believed that there was nothing at all to say that Snape, if present, was not one of those. In fact, if he regarded Snape as his own agent — which seemed to be the case — it would be in Voldemort's best interests *not* to be shouting his identity out to the whole gathering. If this was what happened, then Harry *had* seen Snape there. He just did not know which of the cloaked and masked DEs that he saw was Snape.

In support of this reading, I pointed out that there were only a handful of DEs whose identities were revealed by name at that meeting. At least two of these (Malfoy and Avery) were publicly known anyway, since they had been identified 13 years earlier, and had been acquitted through the use of the Imperius



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defense. Other than these I think only Crabbe, Goyle, Nott and McNair were actually named at the meeting. Voldemort did not even publicly give out the names of the Coward and the Oathbreaker who were respectively to be disciplined and killed. That he *did* give out the names of Crabbe, Goyle, Nott and McNair suggests that he either was particularly displeased with their performance in his absence or he was flaunting their names for some other purpose, never determined.

I had also believed that at that point in time, that although Snape must have known that Dumbledore would expect him to make some attempt to rescue Potter, that due to his having been unaffiliated with the Order of the Phoenix during Vold-War I, he was not aware of the content of the Trelawney Prophecy. At that time it had not yet been revealed that Snape was the eavesdropper who had reported it in the first place.

I rightfully doubted that Voldemort shared his knowledge of the Prophecy with his followers. And given the importance that was generally placed upon the boy by Albus, I believed that Snape might have understood that to bring about the defeat of the Dark Lord, it was essential to rescue Potter. Consequently, he would have been looking for an opportunity to do so which would not totally jeopardize his own value as a double agent. And he never got one.

I imagined that he may have been brought up to speed in that regard at some point after the end of term, before he was formally brought into the Order, which was the case by the time Harry showed up at Grimmauld Place some six weeks later.



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Admittedly, Snape's return from the graveyard required tighter timing than his answer to an anticipated summons, but the time available remained adequate for the purpose. Just.

We watched while Crouch/Moody escorted Harry, who was injured and did not have full mobility, all the way from the Quidditch pitch, across the lawn, past the lake, into the Castle, up to his office — on the third floor — which to Americans would be the fourth floor and — so far as we have been told — it is the staircases that move, not the stairs; sat him down and took time out for a fine, classic, “evil minion” gloat about how clever he'd been and what the evil plot was all about and how he now was going to finish up the year by killing Harry, before he was finally interrupted.

When looked at objectively, this must also have taken at least 15-20 minutes. Ample time for Snape to get the nod from Voldemort to follow at once and perform damage control. Almost as soon as Harry disappeared, Snape had Apparated or portkeyed back to someplace that he could ditch the DE rig, and make all haste to find Dumbledore and join him and McGonagall in time for the show-down with Crouch.



Well obviously I was well and truly off-target in that reading! Although I still contend that it would have worked.

In that case, Albus's “Are you ready. Are you prepared” speech would have been in regards to having to send Snape *back* to Tom. At once, since his break with the Ministry would be impossible to hush up. It was imperative for Snape to make a report on the matter immediatly, if he was to retain his cover.



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What my reading on it had failed to take into account is that by delaying his answer to the original summons until after a sufficient interval, Snape would be able to make his excuses, reiterate his continuing loyalty, feed Voldemort an official story and wave his retroactive information on the actions of Albus Dumbledore (and Harry Potter) including the just breaking news of Dumbledore's split with the Ministry under Tom's non-nose, without so many witnesses.

Which is clearly what happened, in any case.

The delay would also have underscored his possession of Dumbledore's complete and absolute trust, thereby enhancing his value as an agent. In canon, he was taking an awful risk by delaying that return, but he was certainly enhancing the value of what he had to offer by doing it. And, at that point, Voldemort needed Snape far more than Snape needed him, and he must have realized that.

Nevertheless I still flatly disbelieve that Tom then took the opportunity to question Snape about his love life. Even if practically the last thing he ever did in life was to taunt Harry by claiming that he had.



Still, up to DHs, I had to wonder. Given that Harry Potter's survival was supposedly so crucially important, would Albus Dumbledore have just let him disappear like that when he had an agent who was manifestly able to follow where he had been taken? I mean, one really does at least have to ask the question.

Not to mention the question of; if Snape had *not* answered the summons, once Dumbledore sent him off to report, how

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would he have known where Voldemort was to be found? Are we supposed to understand that Tom simply decided to hang out in the graveyard for late arrivals?

The timing was adequate for the purpose of sending Snape after him. The reasoning above as to Albus probably being aware that Voldemort had somehow subverted the Tournament from the outset still holds. And Snape's statements at Spinners' End were a complete web of truth, half-truth, innuendo and outright lies. But I can't quite bring myself to the point of proposing that Snape had responded to the call and, rather than being in the circle where he belonged, was lurking about, invisible, looking for an opportunity to get Potter out of there. I just can't.

Post-DHs, of course, it is obvious that Acto Albus Dumbledore, if Voldemort had killed Harry Potter that night there would have simply been one less of the pesky Horcruxes to have to disarm. A very great pity all round to lose the boy too, but unavoidable. It was only after that night that he believed such a loss became *maybe* avoidable. But I have a hard time believing that even DHs!Albus would have been banking on that being the result.



The motives behind Snape's semi-public revealing of his Mark to Minister Fudge are still not entirely clear. But, as stated elsewhere, the most likely reading is that his intent was a bold, preemptive strike to the witnesses in the hospital wing of producing exactly what the effect seems to have been upon the reader. To "reveal" himself as a *former* Death Eater

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who was completely within Dumbledore's confidence, and as a current spy for the White Hats. Leading everyone present to make allowances for his current and future actions. To any doubters, his status as a Ministry spy would have been easily confirmed, after all. Many readers never seriously questioned Snape's loyalties to Dumbledore after that scene, until the climax of HBP, did they?

Sometimes you just have to work things from the angle that what DID happen was what was INTENDED to happen.

The evening's last task, the one that Dumbledore was ultimately sorry to have to ask of Snape, was, as I now agree, to return to Voldemort to report on the success of his damage control, and, incidentally, to bring Voldemort up to speed regarding Dumbledore's break with the Ministry. It would not have been plausible for Snape to have withheld that information, since Voldemort would have been sure to hear of it from someone in contact with Fudge, and Snape would be well known to have actually been present at the falling out. I can well believe that Dumbledore very sincerely regretted having had to pass along that information.

Information, by the way, which linked all too tidily into Malfoy's already well-established plot to discredit both Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore by manipulating the press. I suspect that by the end of that evening Malfoy had managed to amply make up for whatever level of "disappointment" Voldemort may have had in him at its beginning. Or at least until Voldemort found out what Lucius had done with his Diary. And by then Malfoy was too greatly needed for his influence on Fudge to be immediatly dispensed with.



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I'm also rather inclined to suspect that Voldemort had probably already intended to dispense with Barty Crouch Jr's services at his earliest convenience, should Crouch have survived to return. He would probably have retained him for some while longer if it had been possible. But even though he likes to keep his followers always jockeying for position among themselves, to keep an obviously deranged follower who is harboring a major grudge against just about all of his fellows is running an internal risk that Voldemort was unlikely to have been unaware of. It would only have been a matter of time before it would have been necessary to "sacrifice" him. For that matter, now that we know that the DADA position really was jinxed, he cannot have been either astonished or overly dismayed to learn that Crouch was in no condition to return.



As to the fans' questions as to HOW Snape is spying by the opening of Book 5 — which is to say the mechanics of how it was accomplished; I would guess that — on the Voldemort end — once Voldemort managed to get himself settled into some "permanent base" someplace, over the course of Year 5, Snape had been spying in pretty much the same manner that Voldemort had sent him into Hogwarts to spy from the beginning. Which is to say, that he managed to send information through an intermediary. And — on the Dumbledore end — Snape has been picking up and passing on whatever information is being circulated through the DE network.

Over the course of Year 6 there may have been other, more direct arrangements, once Lucius Malfoy was off the playing



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board. Or, considering that Snape was being kept firmly out of the loop by Draco and Bellatrix, the whole mechanism may have broken down. Which might go some way toward explaining some of Snape's frustration. Particularly if Tom still wanted progress reports on the invasion plans and the Dumbledore assassination.

We have known since OotP that Voldemort had a hand in Snape's posting at the school, because in OotP we were finally given the data necessary to add up the dates and realize that Snape started as a teacher at Hogwarts before Voldemort fell. True, it was only a matter of a few weeks before, but Snape certainly went off to teach at Hogwarts with Voldemort's knowledge and approval.

In summary:

During the period that Umbridge was making a nuisance of herself with her clipboard, Snape claimed to having been teaching for 14 years. Harry is just 15 at that point, so Snape would have started teaching the year that Harry turned 1 year old. That was the year that Voldemort fell. But school started on Sept 1, and Voldemort didn't fall until Oct 31. That makes for an overlap of two months wherein Snape was unquestionably serving two masters.

In HBP we got information which would push the possible beginning of Snape's involvement with Dumbledore back to the date of the Trelawney Prophecy, which may have been made as early as Halloween, 1979. And in DHs (if we can believe anything we are told there) it was indicated that he had probably contacted Dumbledore before Christmas of 1980.

So it appears that there was already at least one double-bluff

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going on. We do not know how much was known at either end of the pipeline, or the details of how the current situation was set up. Rowling evidently did not think that was important.

And it was certainly Tom that sent Snape to Hogwarts, for there is no obvious reason for how keeping Snape inside the school best served Dumbledore's interests either before Voldemort's fall or after his return. Isolated inside the school, Snape is positioned where he was least likely to pick up sensitive information on Voldemort's plans. Unless his mission was to deduce information from his students, by acting as an intermediary either to or from their parents.

It was Post-HBP that I finally came to the conclusion that Snape's posting to the school was so that he would be available to take part in a more sensitive operation than mere spying.

Part of the current purpose, on Albus's end, must have been to send carefully selected information out. On the face of it, it would appear that for Snape to be positioned inside Dumbledore's school would serve Voldemort's purposes far better than it did Dumbledore's. And Snape's own purposes better than either. Obviously, once Voldemort came up with his brilliant plan to send Snape off to spy on Dumbledore, neither Snape nor Dumbledore had full control of the situation.

From an objective standpoint, at the end of HBP some of the possibilities surrounding Snape's posting to Hogwarts looked like they might be (although were not limited to):

- 1 Voldemort sent Snape to spy on Dumbledore under a cover act of being a poor penitent DE who wants out. Snape has been spying on Dumbledore from the beginning, feeding him info that Voldemort gave

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him for the purpose. Since he originally applied for the DADA position, spying on Dumbledore inside the school was only a temporary assignment. He was expected to have fulfilled his real objective by the end of the year. Something went awry with this part of the plan.

- 2 As above; Voldemort originally sent Snape to spy on Dumbledore before he started working in the school. But Dumbledore won Snape over to his side. Now Snape is spying on Voldemort and feeding him info that Albus gives him for the purpose.
- 3 Same setup as either #1 or #2, but since Voldemort fell the first time Snape has had second thoughts. He has been passing info back and forth between both of his principals' organizations and keeping his own council. When the time comes that he must make a choice he would back the side that offered him the best deal, or seems to be most in a position to actually win. He's covered either way. Or he was until the events of HBP. Things went out of control then, and now he's stuck.
- 4 Snape really was a poor penitent DE who went to Dumbledore and ended up agreeing to spy. Having Voldemort later insert him into Dumbledore's school to spy from the other end was a plan cooked up between Snape and Albus for purposes as yet undetermined and Voldemort bought it.
- 5 As above in #4, only when Voldemort proposed insert-



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ing a spy in the school, Snape volunteered for the job in order to keep Voldemort from actually managing to send in a real one. (Also somewhat lessening his own chances of ever coming up against Aurors and their new shoot-to-kill policy. No one ever said Snape was doing any of this *purely* out of altruism.) Given that I still believe there was an additional agenda related to that mission, this seems rather likely.

- 6 Dumbledore basically approached Snape. Possibly even while he was still a student. (In the aftermath of the werewolf caper perhaps?) Offered him the option of going into hiding if the DEs ever approached and tried to recruit him. Snape was later approached by the DEs, but he offered to spy rather than hide. Given the worsening progress of the war, Dumbledore could hardly refuse him. He may have made a point of teaching the boy Occlumency in preparation. The poor penitent DE story is a double-bluff cover from the Voldemort end.

Unlikely as it may seem, at the end of HBP we still hadn't anything in canon to absolutely contradict that last possibility. In fact, with the conflicting reports of what took place the night Trelawney spouted her Prophecy pushing Snape's known involvement with Dumbledore quite plausibly back to the night of the Prophecy was made, based upon his actions from that point, most of our observations tended to support it. As did Phineas Nigellus's snide little endorsement in response to Albus's profession of faith in Snape.



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As to Death Eater meetings and the mechanics of this operation; I suspect that Snape has always had a special dispensation from Voldemort which exempted him from showing up at any general meetings during school terms (much the way he showed no concern over Barty Crouch's absence at the graveyard). Snape's assignment to infiltrate Dumbledore's school and gain the old man's trust would have made unexplained absences inadvisable, particularly if he came into the post as a Head of House (which had originally seemed unlikely, but Rowling doesn't appear to have much of a problem with unlikely). The major exception to this rule having been the general summons at the end of the Tri-Wizard Tournament, at that point Voldemort didn't give a damn about any of his followers' convenience. Or their "cover" either.

My own reading was that at the beginning (for all of the two months that he served as a double agent before Voldemort's first defeat) Snape's contact was one of the Board of Governors. This may have been Lucius Malfoy even as far back as that time. But the contact at that point could have been one of Voldemort's other followers from the older generation. The likelihood of there being a DE, or Voldemort sympathizer on the Hogwarts Board of Governors during VoldWar I is hardly a major stretch of the imagination. He had adopted the standard pureblood isolationist rhetoric, which had been around a lot longer than he had, and a great many people still believed that he was sincere about it.

In the interregnum after Voldemort's defeat, it was in

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Dumbledore's best interests to keep the communication lines to Voldemort's old organization open, in order to track developments in case any of its members got empire-building notions of their own. He may, in fact, have been requested to do so by the Ministry, but it is more likely that he took the job on voluntarily.

In the two months of the summer break following Voldemort's return, Snape was on his own time, and his peripatetic comings and goings at Grimmauld Place suggest that he was on courier duty for somebody. Since Voldemort was at that point in time attempting to re-establish an empire that had lain dormant for 13 years; the inference is that it was he who was directing Snape's comings and goings. I seriously doubt that there were any general DE meetings during this period. Voldemort almost certainly was contacting and speaking with his surviving followers in small groups of 2 or 3 at most, and quite possibly taking individual "interviews" to find out where his followers were currently placed in order to be able to give them new assignments, and to decide which of his goals were the most readily achievable from what he had to work with.

It also will be noted that there was no murder plot *du jour* against Harry Potter during year 5. Or year 6, for that matter, I wouldn't be surprised to learn that Umbridge's attempt to get the boy expelled from school, and by extension expelled from the wizarding world itself (which she claims was her own brilliant plan) had been a very unwelcome development, and possibly one reason why she was sent off to Hogwarts instead of left to get up to further independent mischief at the Ministry.

After the fact, the conclusion which Dumbledore claims to have drawn during Year 5 was that Voldemort had wanted

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to discover whether the full text of the Prophecy might have had any input on what went wrong at Godric's Hollow, before taking his vendetta against Potter any further. If this is true, the general instructions to his followers would have been to make the boy miserable if you must, but leave him alone until he has served his purpose. Those instructions seem to have remained in effect.

Book 5 was the "phony war" to VoldWar II. It is a pity that they couldn't have kept it going a bit longer, but the situation was unsustainable. So, it was better to have it outed on Dumbledore's time rather than Voldemort's. As long as the Ministry could be convinced to deny that he was out there, Voldemort had been willing to keep his head down while making other plans. His surviving followers were left in place, and his one major public mission of the year was to retrieve the survivors from Azkaban. And, given their level of mental stability, much good they did him. At the end of the book, half of them had been recaptured and Malfoy, Avery, Crabbe, Nott and McNair seem to have all been unmasked and packed off to Azkaban with them. The defection of the Dementors from Azkaban ensured that those arrested at the end of OotP would eventually be back in the game for at least part of the rest of the story arc. Nott's injuries might or might not keep him out of further action.

As to Snape and spying, no, he not only was back in the game by the opening of OotP, he was stuck there. He could not retire from spying at that point. Neither Dumbledore nor Voldemort was ready to let him do that, and I really didn't think that Dumbledore's "death" had released him, either. There was

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every chance that he was now in deep cover serving Dumbledore's ends at Voldemort's side.



So, to recap:

The situation at the opening of OotP made it fairly clear that both sides knew that Snape was a spy, and that both sides believed that he was spying for them. At that point, nobody in charge suspected him of disloyalty at all.

Given all of Snape's flying visits at Grimmauld Place, the highest probability was that Voldemort had him running around on courier duty during the summer break helping to re-establish his network. Once school was in session, however, things were probably back to business as usual on Snape's end; reporting Dumbledore's apparent actions to Lucius Malfoy through his usual channels or through some other intermediary. Given the situation with the overseen Floo network and the Owl post that year, this intermediary is quite likely to have been Dolores Umbridge. Who regularly reported back to Fudge and, by extension, Lucius Malfoy. It is uncertain whether Umbridge was aware of just what additional information these reports may have contained. It is also quite possible that for specifically DE matters, Snape and Malfoy were also in contact directly by some other method, possibly a pair of mirrors, but not necessarily. Since their long association has been well established, public contact between them in itself would not be suspect. Snape was certainly not being yanked out of the school to DE meetings during year 5, assuming that there were any, which I doubt.

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I'd guess that Snape's primary contact probably had always been Malfoy. Until just a couple of years earlier, Malfoy had been on the Hogwarts Board of Governors, and, once we knew that Snape (at the tender age of 21) took up his post as Potions Master before Voldemort's first fall, we can pretty well assume that from the matter of public record side of the issue, the Malfoys may have had some say in his getting the position in the first place. Given the additional probability of an acquaintance which dated from their Hogwarts days, contact between Snape and Lucius would have looked quite natural to anyone who observed it.

I'll admit that I was somewhat disturbed by the echoes in the Ron accuse/Hermione defend interchanges regarding Snape which were noted at the opening of OotP. At some time the year before Ron and Hermione had been singing the exact same duet, only back then it was about Percy. I was pretty sure that we were all being set up. I was even more sure of it by the end of the book.

Even leaving my own convictions as to what was really going on aside: I personally thought that it would be a rather poor message for Rowling to be sending if she eventually did rank Snape conclusively among the Black Hats (i.e., that it's only the *nice* people who are really on your side), but Rowling's artistic judgment was not likely to be played out at my direction.

The one thing that I had confidently expected from Book 5 was that after the apparently unequivocal designation of Snape among the "White Hats" in Goblet, we were certain to get something in Phoenix to immediately call this assumption into question. And we didn't.

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Consequently, if Rowling meant to upset the applecart as to just where Snape's loyalties lay — and there were just too many clues that pointed in both directions lying around for her not to be intending exactly that — she was saving it up for later. And the later she set off that particular bombshell the bigger the explosion would be, and the more likely it is that the accusation would stick, rather than be overturned by yet further information at another point farther on.

But that Rowling had at least one more bombshell up her sleeve with Snape's name on it we could be sure.

And boy was I right.

She left it to the very end of Book 6, and it was a BIG one.

And you know what?

I didn't think that was the last one, either.

She was laying another trail of gunpowder with which to blow us all up again in Book 7.

Well, I suppose she managed to surprise a few people.



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After HBP, I discounted some of the earlier conclusions this piece had been pointing at, but I decided to hedge my bets a little longer and not completely excise them. Actually, most of the rest of it still plays fairly well. And, frankly, I am so thoroughly unconvinced by anything in DHs that I cannot see any reason why I should dispense with a perfectly sound theory on its account.

(If you want your audience to accept your story, Ms Rowling, you need to make it *convincing*, not just *yours*. We won't believe just any old thing simply because you say it. Especially considering the number of times you've lied to us before. Deliberately or otherwise.)



By now, any number of people discussing the Potions master have cited Snape's introductory speech about there being no foolish wand-waving or silly incantations in HIS class. And, to be sure, while I believe Rowling *might* have shown us Molly stirring her cook pots with her wand at one point (or, more likely, charming something into them), we never once in canon saw Snape or anyone else using their wand to stir a cauldron while brewing a Potion.

Regardless of whatever rabbits Rowling may have chosen to pull out of her hat in an interview.

By this time we all ought to know better than to fully accept *anything* Rowling tells us in an interview.

She did attempt to backpedal in one of her interviews and claim someone might use their wand to stir a potion, as an example when attempting to assure the readers that yes, brewing potions is magic, not cooking. But she still never showed

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anyone actually try to do it.

It's obvious that magic must be used in Potions-brewing or even Muggles could produce potions. And that is highly unlikely. I suspect that if you gave a Muggle a collection of ingredients, instructions, and a cauldron and told him to set to it, all he would end up with is a lumpy, probably toxic mess. Rowling confirmed this on her (now long-departed) official site. Wizards are not Muggles.

Indeed, I doubt that a Muggle with a cauldron and a table full of various potions ingredients would even be able to produce an explosion. Or, indeed, *anything* but a mess. Or, as an outside possibility, a non-magical herbal remedy. Which, depending on the ingredients, still might turn out to be toxic.

But one wouldn't be stirring a potion with a *wand*. Brewing a potion requires specific ingredients and a specific environment. A potion that requires a pewter cauldron is not going to come out the same if you brew it in an iron one. Wands are *much* too individual to be allowed in contact with potions. They are made of all different sorts of woods and are cored with different magical materials. You aren't going to instruct someone to stir a potion with their wand when you have no idea of what that wand is made of.

Instead, you use a stirring rod, which is a piece of standard equipment of known qualities. And if you need to channel magic into your potion (and, yes, you do) you channel it through *that*. And it is *harder* to channel magic through a stirring rod — which has no magical core (and may be made of glass, or metal, or a *specific* wood) — than it is to channel it through a wand, which does.

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This is both more difficult to do and harder to control than channeling magic through a wand. The peculiar results that students (and not just Neville) seem to get in potions class is ample evidence of that.

I tend to regard Snape's opening speech to the first-years more in the nature of throwing out a challenge that although they will hardly *believe* that this is magic — since there is no “foolish wand-waving” involved, it is still magic for all of that, and magic that they probably haven't the wit or the skills to master (*Nnyah!*). I have no doubt whatsoever that Potions brewing requires the very active use of magic in order to work at all.

Magic, and... ritual? The construction and assembly of a potion is the closest thing to formalized, ceremonial “magick” as Rowling ever gets. In fact, it is interesting to note that the only glimpse of an out-and-out magical “ritual” we HAVE seen in the whole series was structured around the assembly and deployment of a potion. Probably a Dark potion, at that. Assuming that there is such a thing in Rowling's worldview as a Dark potion.



Potion brewing seems to inherently be an extremely formal, highly structured branch of magical “working” — which undoubtedly extends all the way down to the cellular level. Certainly in the way that Professor Snape approaches it. This same kind of formal, ritualistic structuring seems to seep over into other parts of Snape's demeanor as well. It certainly is a large part of what makes his mannerisms so different from everyone else's. (Public spitting on the Quidditch pitch, not-

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withstanding.) Horace Slughorn's is a far more informal style. But of course he has been doing it for much longer.

It was this buttoned-up formality which had so many fans assuming that *of course* Snape was something on the order of Lord Snape of Snape Manor for so many years. Whereas, when you really consider the matter, it is far more likely that his particular variety of uptight, petty insistence upon the meticulous observation of every scrap of acquired dignity to which he is rightfully entitled is far more characteristic of the *arriviste* who has managed to pull himself up by his bootstraps to well above the social class in which he was raised. I suspect that without the added intimidation factor it would have merely come across as terminally pompous. In fact, something reminiscent of Percy Weasley. (I don't think anyone has ever been intimidated by Percy Weasley.)

Such ingrained formality also probably colors many of Snape's perceptions of the world around him. Being forced to watch an ever-changing parade of adolescents slogging away over their cauldrons in a thoroughly slovenly manner with not a clue about proper deportment or respect for the process probably infuriates him.

Horace Slughorn, as I say, is far more casual and easy-going. And, as he will inform you, *much* better-connected.

In addition to all that, the kind of accidents that can happen in a Potions class, and the potential frequency of those accidents would tend to support the reading that a Potions lab is a situation where you've got a room full of young witches and wizards with still developing magic all trying to focus and direct magical energies wandlessly. Or trying to channel magic

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through something that is *not* a wand.

Which is likely to be bloody dangerous any way you try to slice it! You definitely want a sharp observer with good reflexes and a cool head in charge.

Ergo: the “good Professor’s” customary watchfulness is a job requirement.



And, so long as we’re on the subject: that textbook. (Yes, I know. I’ve already expended way too much time on that Potions textbook. If Rowling didn’t want people to be picking apart her storyline, then she ought not have written it as a puzzle.)

Borage’s ‘ADVANCED POTION-MAKING’ appears to be Slughorn’s specifically “NEWT-level” text, just as the title would lead the reader to conclude. Slughorn, in his first class session, refers to the sort of differences his students will find in 6th year work from that of their lower grades, and it is unlikely that he would be making that statement if he uses the same textbook for any year earlier.

So, it stands to reason that the book was probably not being used in Snape’s classes prior to 6th year, either. We know almost nothing about Snape’s required texts. From what we could see of Snape’s methods, he put his instructions on the board, and we seldom saw him refer to a textbook. We also never watched him teach Potions at NEWT-level.

Until DHs came out, the internal evidence from the story, made it appear that Snape’s copy of Borage must have left his possession at some time in the Marauder cohort’s 5th year, since Levicorpus, one of Snape’s own homemade hexes man-

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aged to escape at some point during that year and enjoy a wide popularity.

We were initially also led to believe that he never got the book back. For if he had, he would have kept it in his own collection, rather than a cupboard in the classroom. At the very least he’d have kept it in his desk. And he’d not have left it behind.

And, fanfiction notwithstanding, there is nothing in canon to suggest that the students have access to the Potions labs for special projects or personal research outside their actual class time. To this point any special projects we have ever heard about have been conducted in the common rooms and the Library. (And, secretly in Myrtle’s loo.)

Upon reflection, most of those deductions regarding that copy of Borage are almost certainly wrong.

The amount of annotation that was added to that particular copy of Borage also strongly suggests that the book had certainly been in use, indeed, it had been in heavy use, and that had most probably been during Snape’s 6th year, for the notes in it all seemed to be following Slughorn’s 6th year lesson plan. And all of the notes were in what now appears to have been established as Snape’s own teenaged handwriting.

I will admit that I’m not convinced that all classes require new textbooks every year. Some of the texts probably are listed because the student is expected to need them for general reference over the course of several years. For example: I very much doubt that the copy of ‘1000 MAGICAL PLANTS AND FUNGI’ on Harry’s first year booklist served Harry for only his first year in Herbology. Nor, I think, has Hagrid required a later

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edition of 'THE MONSTER BOOK OF MONSTERS' every year. The Charms texts have indeed been codified into a Standard Book of Spells for each year, but it is very likely that some of the other classes use a given text, particularly a reference text, over 2 or three years at a stretch, or even more.

But there is no convincing reason why a young Severus shouldn't have had a 6th year text in his 5th year, or even earlier, if he wanted to. Particularly if the book had been his mother's, as many fans have speculated. He wouldn't have used it in his regular classes until 6th year, but he does seem to have used it then.

Students do, however, each have their own Potions kits. He could have been brewing various messes in the Slytherin dorm's bathroom on Sundays ever since his first year. And one has to admit that if it was discovered that he had a 6th year text before he needed one, stealing it might have been all the more attractive in that he couldn't just borrow a replacement from a classmate. But he does seem to have still had the book in his own possession by the time he actually needed it in class. And if the book was stolen — and there is no proof that it ever was — we do not know who stole it. But it would seem to be most likely to have been one of Snape's own dorm-mates who did it. From what we saw in the Pensieve he was not widely popular among his own Housemates, despite Rowling's DHs attempt at a retrofit on this issue, by the addition of Avery and "Mulciber" (i.e., she most probaly meant Evan Rosier).

By this point, the probability is that the book was never stolen at all. It was only some of the hexes that escaped. In the wake of the crude patch-job of DHs we are clearly supposed to

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assume that Snape taught Levicorpus to Avery or "Mulciber" and that it got away from them. In Snape's 5th year.

Before most of the potions annotations were added to the book.

Or that some other person or persons unknown found the book in Snape's dorm during an earlier year, when Snape himself was off in class and memorised what looked useful and it escaped that way.

And accepting either of those suppositions to be the case is optional. I'm not going to follow it any further here.



Around the time GoF was published, there was an interview comment made by Rowling to the effect that there are no wizarding universities in her interpretation of the wizarding world. To the best of my understanding Rowling has never modified, or recanted on that statement.

Wizards are a rare breed she tells us; and we were invited to conclude that the wizarding population of Europe is probably not large enough to support a university yet. If this is the case, then any form of advanced training would probably be a matter of either on-the-job training, such as that of an Auror or Healer, some form of independent study, or it is accomplished within a formal Master/Apprentice program, possibly under the oversight of a traditional Guild.

This particular interpretation is widely popular across the fanfic community, but there is no mention of any such thing in canon.

Rowling has remained silent on this issue, but I suspect that as well as such a postulation fits with what we have seen throughout our time in the wizarding world, Ms Rowl-

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ing probably does not envision anything of the sort. Instead, she has already shown us that those fields which require advanced training appear to hire prospective young workers straight out of Hogwarts, and then send them through a training program on the job.

Still, an advanced study of Potions, with its extensive physical component and its dependence upon wandless control would certainly appear to be the sort of field which might require at least some such form of post-Hogwarts training.

In the absence of a university course, it would stand to reason that the existing magical training ministries or facilities might have some sort of additional responsibility to oversee any such independent study programs. If this is the case, then Snape would have had a built-in reason to have retained contact with Hogwarts after finishing his seventh year. At least during the 2–3 years that one might project for either an independent study “Masters” program or a formal Apprenticeship.

What is far more likely, however, is that in addition to the DMLE or St Mungo’s there are a small number of commercial Potions breweries which hire prospective young workers on the basis of their NEWTs and give them any required advanced training on the job.

We will probably never know from Rowling whether Snape’s “Potions master” position at Hogwarts is merely a fancy way of identifying him as a “schoolmaster,” or teacher, or whether it actually denotes his having earned the equivalent of a Master’s degree in the study of Potions. But the likelihood is that the former is the case. For all that Ms Rowling is regarded as being rather clever, the prevailing attitudes presented over

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the course of the series are firmly grounded in the most thoroughly anti-intellectual of camps. Snape’s status as Hogwarts’s Potions “master” almost certainly merely signifies that he is the Potions *teacher*.



About the only related bit of information that we have directly from canon is that the Auror training program requires a full additional 3 years of post-Hogwarts training. Tonks has mentioned in passing that her training included actual classes as well as fieldwork. We also know that Healer training requires an additional 4-year post-graduate training program, which is conducted at St Mungo’s.

I have come round to the view that it would play very well in the story arc if Snape got all of the requisite “Exceeds Expectation,” or higher, NEWTs in the study of Charms, Transfiguration, Herbology, Potions, and DADA to have qualified for the Healer training program at St Mungo’s hospital. And, indeed, it is hard to suppose that he wouldn’t have done so, if he did indeed sign up for those classes.

With Malfoy patronage to back him, he would probably have been accepted into the program as well. The possibility that Slughorn may have also had a string to pull must not be overlooked either, although Slughorn certainly takes no credit for doing so, and one would rather expect it of him if he had.

After all, the DEs would have had a clear and present *use* for a trained Healer with a specialty in the Dark Arts and curse damage.

And now that we’ve been required to scale up the Marauder

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cohort's probable birth year to 1960, we can see that he would have had no more than 3 years between finishing Hogwarts as a student and his return there as a teacher to have engaged in any training. Given that the training program at St Mungo's is longer than 3 years, he would not have had the chance to have become a fully qualified Healer — before Voldemort ordered him into Hogwarts, regardless.

But his having completed up to three years of the training course might certainly explain how Albus could so easily slot him into the Potions master job rather than give him the cursed DADA instructor's position. Or at least how he could explain having done so to the Board of Governors.

Not to mention that Snape also appears to be the *first* person called in whenever someone seems to have sustained some curse damage beyond the usual level that Madam Pomfrey is expected to deal with.

But we have no clear and present indication whether this was in fact the case.



Another thing that frequently gets mentioned regarding Professor Snape, is the “Harry filter.” And the Harry filter is definitely skewing our perception of Severus Snape's performance on the job. Because there is absolutely no doubt about it that Severus Snape has had his own axe to grind with Harry Potter from the day that the boy first showed up at the School.

Snape's treatment of Harry is simply appalling. There are no other words for it.

But there may have been a compelling reason for it.



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At least at the outset.

Nor is he alone in the matter. Albus and Snape have certainly been playing good cop/bad cop with Harry ever since the boy got to Hogwarts (although to be strictly accurate it was Hagrid and Snape who were playing that game over Year 1, Hagrid as Dumbledore's proxy) but how much of that was an act is debatable. It is not even altogether certain that the act is solely for Harry's benefit. Because it certainly wasn't for *Harry's* benefit in Year 1.

Snape *has* to have known that he was, at the very least, under observation by one of Voldemort's agents throughout the whole of Year 1. He couldn't have shown any favor to Harry Potter, even if the boy had deserved it.



Snape, like Draco Malfoy, starts the series from the vantage point of being a required character “type.” All school stories evidently must include the hero's playground/classroom rival. All school stories also must include the “nasty teacher” (and usually also the intimidating but sympathetic Head). It is one of Rowling's crowning achievements that she decided to take this required peripheral stock character and make him central to the entire storyline. Severus Snape has never consented to be stuffed into a nice tidy pigeonhole and be no more than Harry would choose to make of him. As such, from the beginning of the series he has always stood as the gatekeeper to the reading that there is more going on in this series than Harry realizes. (There's more knows Tom Fool than Tom Fool knows.)

Severus Snape started teaching at the age of 21, before the



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kids who remembered him as a student had even finished school, and some of his first students had watched James Potter publicly humiliate him at the end of his 5th year.

His method for taking charge and keeping order was to set himself up as a classroom tyrant and never let the kids get the upper hand. It is an aggressive and adversarial stance, and would amply explain his being the “most hated teacher” in the school, but it is not indiscriminately sadistic.

We’ve got a sadistic teacher in this series. Her name is Dolores Umbridge.

Severus Snape is no Dolores Umbridge.

But.

He *has* made a point of being partial, playing favorites, and being deliberately unfair — at least to Harry and his friends — in the classroom. And Albus let him get away with it.

This may have nothing to do with Harry, although I seriously doubt that, since in our experience it was usually directed at Harry. But we cannot know for certain since we have never seen Snape take a class that did *not* include Harry.

Squinting around the edges of the Harry filter we can see that, contrary to expectations, Snape does NOT treat all of his students the way he treats Harry. In 4 cases out of 5 anyone he comes the ugly with in his classroom has generally done something to deserve it. His retaliation may be in excess of the requirements, but it was not unprovoked.

The 5th case is typically Neville, who Snape would probably not even have permitted *in* his class if it were an elective. Neville’s “duffer” act cuts no ice with Snape, who saw through it almost at once, and it got up his nose from year 1. My own

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contention regarding Neville is that he spent his first four years at Hogwarts trying to get himself sent down for incompetence, because he didn’t really want to be a wizard at all.

Plus, one has to admit that Snape is the sort of overbearing git who responds to cringing by giving you something to cringe *from*. Snape and Neville were always going to be a bad combination any way you slice it.

Snape’s blatant favoritism toward the children of his own House, on the other hand, may be a matter of policy which Albus has perhaps reluctantly approved. At that, it has been grossly exaggerated by fanon, but it does at least seem to actually exist in the official text, even if in a somewhat less extreme form.

It has undoubtedly enhanced and maintained Snape’s status and general approval rating among the DEs who escaped prosecution to so blatantly favor their children throughout the decade of Voldemort’s absence. That this was done blatantly may have been to ensure that even the youngest of the DE’s children should be aware of it, and pass the word back to their parents. Which would have facilitated his ease of operating as Dumbledore’s spy upon this group during the years of Voldemort’s absence.

But if you squint between the lines, this approval has not — at least during Harry’s period at Hogwarts — extended to the awarding of House points. Snape has not ever been observed in canon to award House points to *anybody*. Not even his Slytherins. And while he seldom strips points off his own House (which he does do, but very rarely) he assigns lines and detentions with a liberal hand.

But I do suspect that in the entire 16 years of Snape’s tenure

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at Hogwarts his class scapegoat (and I suspect that there usually has been at least one scapegoat in every class) has never been a child from a DE background, regardless of what he may actually think of such children. I originally thought that Albus may have simply been resigned to the imbalance, justifying it to himself by the reflection that the world is not a fair place, and the kids may as well be made aware of it now as later. And that goes double and in spades for the wizarding world.

Post-DHs of course we realize that Albus simply did not care.



Harry, as usual, is a special case.

It was never made clear inside canon whether there was an internal reason for why Harry Potter needed to hate Severus Snape. From a meta standpoint obviously Harry must hate Snape for the dramatic purposes of the story. Despite the fact that Snape kept repeatedly saving Harry from both his external enemies and the consequences of his own recklessness.

But until the end of the series most of us thought that there might be an actual *reason* inside the story as well, and if so, it was one to which we did not yet seem to have been given the key. For Snape certainly went out of his way to act hatefully to Harry. From the first moment he clapped eyes on him.

And at first glance there is a bit of oddity about his having done so at such an early point in their relationship. If, as he stated in Spinner's End, there ever *had* been a faction of the surviving DEs who postulated that the only way that Harry could have survived Voldemort's attack and defeated him was by being a powerful Dark wizard in his own right — one who

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might be brought in to spearhead their own cause — one might have expected a little more caution on Snape's part. At least to the point of hedging his bets. If such a theory had ever seemed likely, then for him to immediately attempt to alienate the boy seems both incautious and unreasonable.

Until, that is, you remember that given any closer look at the circumstances, Snape almost certainly knew that he was under very close observation that particular year by Lord Voldemort himself, or, at the very least, by one of Voldemort's agents

Dumbledore could have been under no illusion about what was under Quirrell's turban. And one would have supposed that he could hardly have omitted to inform Snape of the fact, so Snape could take appropriate measures to protect himself and to maintain his cover. Not if Albus had a continuing *use* for Snape.

Rowling, of course, passes the entire matter off almost without examination in the chapter of 'The Prince's Tale' in DHs. And her brush-off is a highly insulting disservice to the story, its readers, and all of the participants. To imply that Albus never really valued Snape *himself* is one thing, but to strongly imply that he did not even value Snape's function as his own spy makes Albus come across as a moron. And even in her determined deconstruction of "saint Albus," Rowling does not appear to *intend* to imply that Albus was a moron.

But in any case, to an adult reader attempting to make sense out of what we were shown, Snape's hateful, intimidating behavior and publicly broadcast contempt for Harry Potter in Year 1 were an essential part of the performance. And I would even go so far as to say that anything that took place in his

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classroom was calibrated to be done in a manner that it would be spoken of outside that classroom, ensuring that the story would be certain to get out to where Quirrell would hear of it. Probably from more than one source.

It may not be so much a case of Harry “Hating his Savior” as “Teaching Him to Bite the Hand that Saves Him” (“[Dumbledore’s] Man bites snake?”).

And Snape knowing himself to be under observation that year is yet another one of those utterly elementary explanations once it occurs to you. One of the sort that ought to have been obvious. And yet just somehow wasn’t. I am embarrassed that it took me as long as it did to have figured it out. But since even Rowling appears to have missed it, I don’t feel quite as foolish as I initially did.

And yet it IS obvious. The Quirrell complication was *not* a minor side issue.

Not that Harry didn’t get some coaching in his “hate Snape” lessons from other sources, of course. Expert coaching, in fact. If Quirrell hadn’t introduced the “He hated your father, too” thread to the situation at the end of PS/SS, don’t you imagine that Harry might have managed to feel at least a *bit* of gratitude towards Snape for his actions over Year 1 after he discovered that Snape had been doing his best to protect him? Or at least felt a bit of embarrassment about his own suspicions of the man? But, *nooooo*, not if Snape had hated his father *too*...

Sheesh.

Not to mention the totally bogus “Snape’s life debt to James Potter” complication that Albus deliberately inserted into the mix. That poisoned the well very nicely.

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At this end of the series one seriously has to start wondering whether Snape had managed slip a few reminders of his dealings with Potter *père* into his fulminations about Potter *fils* in Quirrell (and Voldemort)’s hearing over the course of year 1. Because that apparently mutual animosity seems just too carefully planted and tended not to be subject to some closer examination by this time.

It was Harry who often took the offensive after that, and he who made an overriding issue of it. Snape has merely risen to the bait and occasionally taken a poke to keep the pot boiling. Harry, as we have repeatedly seen, has a problem with accepting responsibility for his own actions. Blaming Snape’s loathing for James for the man’s adversarial conduct toward himself, neatly deflects any suggestion that Harry’s own behavior toward Snape is hardly exemplary. To the point of consistently disregarding even the respect for Snape’s authority which is legitimately his due.

And Harry’s hatred of Snape also served as a very helpful protective buffer.

For Snape.

Looked at objectively, isn’t it obvious that the very best, and very surest protection that can be found for Severus Snape, and his ongoing mission over the course of the series was to keep Harry away from him.

Loudly, actively, conspicuously, away from him.

And over the whole course of the series, Albus never *once* made what could be interpreted as a sincere effort to correct the situation.

In a *rational* plot line, Albus, after all, had a great deal

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invested in ensuring Severus Snape's safety. Almost as much as he has invested in Harry's.

Even if it turns out that Rowling couldn't care less about rational plotting.



In CoS, Snape, no longer under observation by his Dark Master, remained in the background for most of the book, making only a choice few snide comments, and giving Lockhart a deservedly hard time. (To the entertainment of the rest of the staff, too.) His primary interaction with Harry in year 2 seems to have been some posturing over the Whomping Willow incident — which came to nothing — and to suggest the Serpensortia spell to Malfoy at the dueling club, thereby revealing Harry as a Parselmouth, as (I believe) he intended, with maximum embarrassment and inconvenience to Harry. And probably somewhat to his own amusement.

That was a mean trick to play on a 12-year old, but by this time we know Snape will carry a grudge until doomsday, and we don't know to what degree he blamed Harry for his near immolation during the broom hexing incident the previous year.

In PoA, Harry started casually breaking rules and Snape came down on him like a ton of bricks. The combination of Sirius Black's invasion of the castle, having to interact with Lupin, Lupin's passive-aggressive taunts, and Lupin's eventual relationship with Harry also would not have helped. And, even though I suspect that Occlumency on a high level (of which Snape is quite capable) may be of considerable benefit in resisting the effect of Dementors, the school and the village were

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nevertheless under a constant siege by the creatures for the entire year, and I very much doubt that it was without collateral effect on everyone's emotional well-being, either.

Indeed one belatedly wonders if that might have had some input upon the internecine warfare among the trio over the course of the year, as well.

And, by the time we had survived the Shrieking Shack and the escape of Sirius Black I think that we can safely say that Snape had acquired good reason to despise Harry Potter, on Harry's own account, for years to come.



As to the Occlumency lessons in Year 5; that was a no-win situation. Possibly deliberately so. Made all the worse in that the kid refused to pull his own weight in the fiasco or even try to close his mind. The boy had already been "got at," and was under the Dark Lord's influence. Not through his sympathies, or his values, but through his curiosity, and his frustration. And, causing Severus Snape to fail at one of his endeavors is not the way to win brownie points with him, either.

Not that Snape didn't *expect* to fail. Harry Potter does not have the sort of mental discipline necessary for competent Occlumency, and both Snape and Albus knew it. I soundly believe that the Occlumency lessons may have been serving a covert purpose to a different effect altogether. Which is explored in the essay entitled 'The Pensieve Gambit'.

What many fans, younger fans in particular, fail to grasp is that to personally despise Harry Potter (and for Snape it does appear to be personal, not political) makes you neither an evil,

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committed DE, nor even a particularly bad person. Although it certainly can make you behave like a wrong-headed git.

But, upon the whole, my own reading is that the relationship between Snape and Harry got started off on the wrong foot, for necessary and convincing reasons, and only became worse as time went on, with ample contribution from both parties.



But that still does not answer the question of whether there is a specific reason inside the story for why Harry *needed* to hate Snape. Although by HBP I was beginning to think that there might be one (ETA: no such luck, it was simply a deployment of “instant tension” on Rowling’s part).

Not that Snape wasn’t being fairly hateful. He was not at all a nice man. No. There was more than ample reason why he was one of the most unpopular teachers in the school. He pulled nasty little intimidation tactics on 11-year-olds in the course of sending out the message that you do NOT want to act up in his class. Put one foot out of line in Snape’s hearing or line of sight and it’s detention time. And there was always the possibility that he just might decide to verbally savage you for good measure.

He could also be totally unfair about using any excuse to strip house points off anyone who isn’t in Slytherin, too. With the Slytherins, I suspect that he would not strip a house point unless he is forced to it, (although we did see him do it) but he was probably a demon for detentions. The ex-Slytherin who could not walk out of Hogwarts straight into a job as a Potions ingredients preparer in any Apothecary’s establishment in Great



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Britain was probably a virtuous little snake indeed. Or “connected”. (Somehow one doubts that Malfoy himself served a lot of detentions from Snape, although his goons sometimes do.)

And even if you were not Harry Potter, Snape still would glower and glare and loom over your work, and he would murmur and sneer and pull all sorts of petty little intimidation ploys. And if you asked a question he considered stupid he would be blightingly sarcastic, and if you made a mistake in your work he might not merely savage you verbally but mock you in front of everybody as well. But unless you drew his attention with at least some degree of cause, he would not gratuitously attack you. He did not treat everyone the way he treated Harry.



Neville Longbottom is a student who drew his attention.

And then *went on* drawing his attention. By the end of his first or second term Snape had probably seen through Neville’s “duffer” act, and it enraged him. Snape takes the study of his subjects very, very personally. A student who — by his lights — is deliberately screwing around with them is not to be borne. But Potions is a *required* class and there was no ridding himself of this creature until after the OWLs are administered at the end of 5th year..

And then he got Longbottom again in DADA the following year. All together now: “One of these things is not like the other.”

Actually, I don’t think we ever saw Snape come the ugly with Neville in DADA class. By 6th year Neville had passed his own personal Rubicon and decided to buckle down and *be* a wizard, and to *learn* how to defend himself. Neville was actually fairly



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good at DADA by then. Snape must have recognized this, for he really did seem to cut the boy some slack. In addition to — in DH — having assigned him detention with Hagrid of all things, in a situation where he had to be seen to have done something towards maintaining discipline.

Once this observation gets entered into the equation, along with the fact that Neville doesn't seem to have stopped trying to get himself sent down for incompetence until some point well into his 4th year (exactly when we aren't sure, Harry wasn't paying much attention to Neville) all the rest of Snape and Neville's dealings with one another back in Potions class more or less attains inevitability.

On the other hand, in HBP Snape seems to have been determined to take Harry — who had become accustomed to regarding himself as the king of DADA class over the previous couple of years — down a peg or two. But with Harry, it's *always* personal. And yet you will notice that Harry still didn't reactivate the DA to work behind Snape's back, as he had done with Umbridge.

Hermione had openly opposed Snape in the Shrieking Shack by trying to shove her oar in and play the Voice of Reason. She got herself thundered at, ordered to shut up and called a stupid girl for her pains. None of which was surprising, under the circumstances. But apart from the infamous "I see no difference" comment (which, despicable as it sounded, did allow Snape to take control of a volatile situation) I cannot think of any incident off the top of my head wherein Snape has been shown in canon to be abusing his authority regarding any student other than Harry, Neville or someone who was clearly *with* Harry,

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such as Ron — who has also mouthed off at Snape in class, quite deliberately, and had rightfully earned what he got.

And for that matter, I am beginning to suspect that the reason the "I see no difference" remark was so shocking to the reader is that it is clearly an unprovoked attack on a non-combatant — which just is not typical — even for Snape.

And we cannot even be altogether certain of just what Snape *meant* by it. The remark may well have not been directed at Hermione at all, but at Harry and Ron for making a big production over Malfoy having inadvertently hexed Hermione — when Harry himself had just accidentally hexed Goyle!

I am not saying that if one combed through all 4000 pages of canon one could not perhaps find another such incident, but I certainly cannot think of one off the top of my head. There is a rising chance that in most (non-Gryffindor) students' experience, Snape's intimidating classroom manner is just a rather aggressive and more socially inept variant along the same lines as McGonagall's characteristically stern classroom demeanor. (Although, while she *will* snap at you, she doesn't mock.) And, of the two, McGonagall is much harsher on the House points issue.

But Snape's treatment of Harry is still appalling. Fortunately we will never have to endure another classroom with the two of them in it again. (Outside of fanfic.)



From the point of view of a reader: there is no question that the Professor has our attention. With good reason; he is still probably one of the most ambiguous and interesting characters in the entire series. (Hm. Perhaps that's why Hagrid

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seems to think so well of him. Hagrid *likes* “interesting” creatures.) And Snape has a great number of fans, and many of them would desperately like to believe that he isn’t quite as black as he’s painted by Harry.

Well, there is every chance of that. Harry doesn’t seem to take a lot of notice of how Snape treats everyone else, apart from his favoring of the Slytherins. Even if this doesn’t necessarily make him any “nicer” to be around. By the end of HBP I was still convinced that Snape really was one of the White Hats.

And Rowling ultimately proved me right. At least in the basics.

Here we had a man, who, as a child seems to have endured a family life which *appears* to have been classically abusive. From what little we saw of his recollections, there was a real possibility of his coming under attack by either emotional, verbal or, quite possibly, but not necessarily, physical means, or all three, at his father’s whim (if the bullying, hook-nosed man in his memory was indeed his father, which is still the most likely reading). That is, if his father stuck around — which we had no way of knowing until practically the end of DHs. We didn’t know whether the glimpse we saw was typical of his upbringing, or if it was a single, memorable incident, but there was at least that one incident and it was memorable.

What is more, *act*o Rowling’s statements on the subject (if we can believe those), he was probably not sent to a Muggle primary school even if he was brought up in a Muggle town. The resulting social isolation from other children can’t have helped. We’d also been given strong hints that his family’s financial status wasn’t of the sort which would have been likely to hire a string of tutors, so he was probably taught at home by



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a family member, as was the case with the Weasleys.

My first line of thinking, before we knew that Snape was a literal halfblood, was that since it stands to reason that it isn’t *always* the mother who teaches the children in a wizarding household, if Severus was taught by his father, what kind of teaching style seems to be the sort by which he is most likely to have been given his lessons at home, given our only glimpse of the man?

Sound familiar?

And if *he* was able to learn by those methods, maybe he honestly believed that this the only way that children *do* learn.

However, now that we know that his father was actually a Muggle, this line of reasoning is clearly off-target, although it may not be altogether wrong. We still know nothing of his mother’s disposition, only that in a photograph taken when she was a teenager, she looked plain, cross, sullen, and unhappy. And, post-DHs, we were also shown that she was sour-faced and silent when seeing her only child off on the Hogwarts Express. Which does not raise our expectations regarding the child-rearing practices of the Prince family, either. Nor do we know anything about Snape’s maternal grandparents, the Princes, or their opinion of their daughter’s marriage. Although he seems to have inherited what may have been originally their house. (I don’t off the top of my head believe that there is *any* statement *in canon* of her family having disowned her for that marriage. That may well be entirely a fanon overlay.)

Furthermore; as soon as he ventured beyond that household, his Hogwarts years were blighted by having — from the outset — become the target of a pair of exceedingly popular bullies,



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and the authorities were clearly ineffective about keeping the situation under control. Which cumulated in what he remained convinced was an actual murder attempt, followed at some point afterwards by a public humiliation of the worst sort.

I do believe that Snape is probably wrong about the werewolf caper being a murder attempt, but from his perspective, by that time he had been under threat of attack for his entire life, or at least his entire time at school, and to murder him would have appeared to be the next logical step for his enemies to have taken. After all, what else was there *left* for them to accomplish toward his destruction?



Another thing which is overlooked by most readers is that just because these people are wizards does not mean that what they are doing to each other is any different from what you can see happening to some kid across the playground at your local public (Council, for you across the pond) school. Boys do fight. There is a pecking order. And the authorities can be clueless, either willfully or otherwise.

There are literally thousands of Snapes out there. A good half of them, if approached at the age of 18 might have happily signed on with some nasty little hate group which targeted the actual people who had been going out of their way to make their lives a misery for the past 7 years. Particularly if they were brought up in the kind of atmosphere which underscores the idea that bullying people is perfectly all right, it is the victim's fault for *letting* it happen. Joining the DEs could have been Snape's very own personal Columbine.

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Or at least that's what we are clearly *supposed* to believe.

But the fact is that kids don't stay 18 forever, and if you leave them alone, they often make a considerable degree of recovery. Human beings really are quite resilient, you know.

But first they have to endure their situation to a point that people *will* leave them alone: when someone in a given classroom develops social "cooties" — which always happens to somebody in a class, usually around the age of 7 or 8 — everyone else knows it, and unless the classes get well and thoroughly reshuffled year by year, or there is a change of schools, that kid remains the "cootie kid" throughout the entire "educational experience." Everyone knows who the "cootie kid" is and passes the word to any newcomers. In a school like Hogwarts, there is no escaping this.

Seven uninterrupted years as the cootie kid will warp you. In fact, it doesn't take anywhere near that long. Treating a kid the way we have been shown that Snape was treated either makes them give up entirely or it turns them savage. (And it doesn't help if their home environment is dominated by a domestic bully of either the physical, verbal or emotional variety as well. Bullying becomes all they know.) These kids will develop the certain knowledge that there are people out there who are their enemies and that they are at all times at risk of being attacked.

It doesn't take long before some of them start attacking first. In Snape's case it looks very much to me as if he had more than ample reason to feel himself under attack for much of the whole first 18 years of his life and fell into the "do unto others before they can do unto you" trap. And everything else has simply built on top of that.

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And having your only close friend brush you off — and then publicly take your enemies' side against you will only make it worse.

Being given that kind of a foundation in life is going to leave scars. And they probably won't all ever completely heal. But it does not necessarily turn you into a monster. Particularly if the causes of the damage do eventually STOP.

Despite the inconsolable loss of the girl who — for whatever it was worth — *had* once claimed to be his friend, from the evening of Voldemort's downfall Snape could reflect that he had outlived the enemy who had tormented him all through school. And that his enemy's best friend and accomplice was in a living Hell before the next day was out, and could be expected to die there, miserably. (And that even their little toady was dead, too.) We do not know if the shouting hook-nosed man of Snape's childhood was still alive or even still in the picture by that time or not, but Snape no longer lived in that household in any case. He lived on campus now.

And that was half a lifetime ago.

There are a few key differences between Snape's experience and that of most Muggles: According to Rowling, the entire British wizarding world is not significantly larger than the High School I went to. Once I went off to college (which was only a bus ride away) I did so with the certain knowledge that I might never come face-to-face with anyone I had ever been in elementary or High School with again. When James Potter and Sirius Black made a spectacle of Severus Snape during OWLs week, every witch and wizard in Britain in their age range would have known about it by the end of the week. And that

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knowledge would follow them all the days of their lives. The survivors probably still remember it

What for you or me might be a petty schoolhouse rivalry, of no particular consequence in Real Life, in the wizarding world will probably follow its participants out into adult society and there is always the risk that it will come back to bite them. The wizarding world is small enough and insular enough for that kind of thing to follow you around long after you are out of school.

But then Severus Snape doesn't seem to have had a whole lot to do with the wizarding world's "adult society" since that time, does he? He was back at Hogwarts only three years after he finished. At the relatively tender age of 21, teaching at least one class which contained students as old as 18. Trying to intimidate kids who had *been* there the day that James Potter humiliated him in front of everybody; just in case they may have gotten the idea that he could still be picked on with impunity. (I suspect Quirrell may have been one of those witnesses.) I really don't think a lot of people have taken account of the fact that Snape returned to Hogwarts as a teacher while there were still kids in attendance who were there the day James Potter humiliated him in front of a sizable percentage of the student body.



Since then, intimidating his students has become a habit, and it does definitely give him control over his classroom. It is not a nice method of teaching, but it works, and it gets results. Umbridge informs us that in general his classes perform in advance of their ages. And we saw for ourselves that nearly 25% of his classes got not merely a "pass" on their Potions

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OWL but scored an “O”

Although I think that he may still not be quite as successful a *teacher* as Horace Slughorn. How many brilliant Potions experts have come out of Snape’s tenure? Or breakthroughs in the field that have been attributed to his teaching?

A few, undoubtedly. But how many has he scared off?

Snape may manage to challenge his classes, and some students respond quite well to a challenge. But I think he fails to inspire them. I suspect that most of his NEWT students were only taking Potions because they needed a Potions NEWT to qualify for some post-Hogwarts training program.

And he sees no reason to modify his style as the kids get steadily younger and younger in relation to himself. And a reputation that you simply Do Not Act Up in Snape’s class has served everyone very well, including the kids. The wizarding world, and Hogwarts in general, is less tender of its young than we Muggles usually attempt to be. From the PoV of the Ministry and the Board of Governors this was probably not a trouble that ever needed shooting.

Otherwise, he deals with his “peers” only during term breaks, and most of those peers probably do not know about Spinner’s End. As a Head of House he has ample reason to remain on campus during Christmas and Easter break. Which reduces his dealings with the greater wizarding society to the two months of summer break and perhaps the continuing outlet of some sort of professional correspondence.

As to spying; as I have stated elsewhere, he has remained in that game the whole time.

Throughout the period between Voldemort’s fall and his

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rebirth, Snape served as a conduit of information between Dumbledore and Lucius Malfoy. Small wonder he comes across as smug and pleased with himself. He was sitting very pretty.

I think that one could probably make a pretty fair argument that time alone went a long way toward some degree of healing. He had nearly 13 years wherein no one apart from some foolish adolescents had been attacking him! That is likely to have given him time to regain some sense of balance. One can well imagine that if offered the opportunity today, and the decision were his alone, he would not be signing up with any Dark Lords, thank you very much. And his continuing nasty manner towards children is easily explained by the very reasonable fact that he is all too well aware that children, particularly teenaged children, particularly *magical* teenaged children *are not harmless*.

A point of criticism that one might still reasonably level at him is in his resentment and treatment of Harry Potter — which is obviously quite personal and not necessarily related to the rest of his behavior. Because it is clear that Snape is a very sharp observer of what is going on around him, and yet he still has not added up the evidence and taken note that Harry is simply not a bully in the style as his father, even if he is another Quidditch star.



Early on in the progression of the series, it had occurred to me, and probably a lot of other people who were engaged in phrasing it differently, that there could be a rather interesting double-bluff going on regarding Snape’s vicious demeanor *vis-a-vis* the Hogwarts students. I’m not sure that I actually

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believe it myself any more, but it does just about read, and it's mildly amusing. It's not supported by DHs, of course. A sweeping majority of fan theories are not supported by DHs. Indeed rather a lot of established canon isn't, either.

Under this reading; it is not ALL an act, but, nevertheless, he IS acting. And it DOES serve a specific purpose. Aside from blowing off steam.

If this reading had been correct, he would have also had Dumbledore's tacit go-ahead for it, although Dumbledore may not have altogether approved of his methods. This particular interpretation does tend to presuppose that Snape was indeed one of the "White Hats," but, then, I was *fairly* convinced of that in any case, even before I finally got off the fence.

According to this reading, what Snape was doing was to very deliberately, very conspicuously NOT distance himself from Dark Arts associations. In fact if he was "famous" as a Dark Arts geek while at school, he sees no reason to even *try* to live that down. In fact, he was rubbing the kids' noses in it.

Given his basic temperament, and in his position as head of Slytherin House, the chances of his actually managing to live his House's somewhat spotted reputation down are vanishingly small to begin with. Particularly when a known personal interest in the Dark Arts is factored in. Despite the fact that he personally was never *publicly* accused of being a Death Eater (or not until Karkaroff's plea bargain hearing, anyway), even if he behaved the perfect gent — which, with his disposition, would be a strain, he still lived through the Voldemort years, he is associated with people who were Death Eaters, he is a Dark wizard, he is the head of Slytherin's House, and he is not a nice man.



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Rowling defined him in an interview once as "a deeply horrible person." We do not know precisely what she actually meant by that. It's yet another of the details which she has left the readers to fill in by themselves. But there would be rumors flying about that he had an ex-DE background regardless of what he did. And it would take next to no effort to confirm those rumors for anyone with the resources to really investigate. Karkaroff's hearing was not a public one, but I doubt the records were so tightly sealed that no one could get into them. There were too many witnesses and too many of them are still around. To the wizarding world, Severus Snape, Dark wizard, Slytherin, and within the suspect age range, with close associations to Lucius Malfoy — who is *known* to have been involved with the DEs, even if acquitted — is always going to be a reputed ex-Death Eater from somebody's point of view. And even more so after Malfoy's DE associations had been publicly outed beyond question.

It ought to stand to reason that whether Snape was a White Hat or not, Albus took him on staff with the understanding that he would try to do *something* to discourage other young people from making the same kind of mistakes that he supposedly did. Admittedly, post-DHs this line of argument is no longer so convincing. But, then, the "arcane power" of DHs seems to have been to render anything it touches — however peripherally — into dross.

Still, Snape's a pragmatic Slytherin, not a social justice-seeking Gryffindor. And even if he had been every bit as much a supporter of Dumbledore's goals as Dumbledore could have asked, he probably figures that the Slytherin kids with DE



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connections are already a lost cause. It isn't their *own* choices which are going to be exercised. Playing the wise and kindly councilor to dissuade them from taking that particular step isn't going to do anything but send a message back to their parents which will get him targeted for elimination, and what's the benefit to anyone in that? He might be able to scare off the ones who might be *allowed* to refuse with pointed comments that he would imagine that a Dark Lord wouldn't *want* half-hearted followers. But that's about as far as he can go with the hard-core Slyths.

But, by ghod, he can make an impression on the students of the OTHER three houses. And the Slyths can unwittingly give him a hand by helping spread and support the rumors. He intends to send all of those brats a clear, unambiguous message. ("Play to your strengths".)

Let's try for some aversion therapy.

If they want to see a Death Eater, he will **SHOW** them a Death Eater.

And see how well they like it.

Every day of the week for seven years straight those kids are getting an up close and personal demonstration of just what a Death Eater is, with **ALL** the pettiness, spite, partiality, injustice, treachery, contempt and (at least verbal) cruelty on full display. He may even have made a practice of singling out a couple of scapegoats in every year (one in each of his combined classes) and concentrates on them throughout their entire "educational experience" for the edification of all. Circumstances may have just ensured that Harry would happen to be "lucky"

You think you want to be a Death Eater someday? You want

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to have to work with people like me? You want to have to *associate* with people like me? *Depend* on people like me? If this is the tame virus what must the actual disease be like? Snape doesn't want the brats to *like* him. He wants them to *loathe* him. And more to the point, he wants them to **REMEMBER** him. And, by ghod, he is going to put on a show they won't forget.

And, maybe, just maybe, down the road if some smooth-tongued supporter comes around trying to recruit rather than just Imperio some promising young Gryff or 'Puff or 'Claw, maybe the impression will have been indelible enough to give them pause before being swept off their feet. And maybe they will even think to pass the word about someone to watch out for. And, who knows, maybe by counter-example he can even reach a few of his Slyths. Most of whom are probably **NOT** connected to the Dark Lord, after all.

Besides, it won't hurt the brats to learn to perform demanding and precise work under pressure. They're going to meet other bastards out in the real world, too. Guaranteed.

So, with all his justifications in place, he has effectively given himself a free ticket to play the bastard and act out his every natural frustration to the top of his bent. Right in their faces.

He may even realize that he is being a bully — however well he may dress it up in fine linen (and I think he probably does dress it up in fine linen. He isn't all **THAT** self-aware). If he weren't a bit of a bully at heart he probably wouldn't have been so quick to sign up with Voldemort in the first place. (Or would he? Was he given a legitimate choice? Or was it the "Join or die" argument?)

Make no mistake. This Severus Snape **ENJOYS** terrorizing

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adolescents. He *likes* tormenting Longbottom. He looked forward to every opportunity to needle Potter — whom he honestly resents, and thinks can stand to be taken down a peg, in his opinion — and he may have been positively hugging himself with glee on the red-letter day that he actually managed to make that irritating Granger girl cry.

In short, Severus Snape really did like his job.

He was having a ball. The rest of the staff, who at least dimly know something of what was going on, were rather scandalously amused by his antics, and Dumbledore trusted him.

In any case, Rowling was clearly having a ball writing him. And so were we in reading about him. And when somebody does such a good job of entertaining you, things go rather flat when they are not around.



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It is common knowledge that Professor Snape wanted the DADA position.

Common knowledge, like public opinion, or the law, is sometimes an ass. But in this case, if common knowledge is an ass it is one that comes heavily laden with a load of double-bluff. For, according to the Ministry records, as stated by Madam Dolores Umbridge, Snape apparently really did want the DADA position. He had applied for that position originally, and had regularly re-applied for it over his fourteen years on the Hogwarts staff. Eventually he got it.

Apparently.

Well, yes, one must keep up appearances, mustn't one?



But, if that was the case: why did Cornelius Fudge not appoint *Snape* to the position when Dumbledore was “unable” to find another applicant in 5th year?

Did Snape, by some oversight “forget” to apply for the DADA position that particular year? Or was he warned off from it by Malfoy, whose Master had other plans?

Or was he perhaps warned off of it by Dumbledore, who *wanted* a Ministry shill sent, in hopes that he would be able to get this new conflict with the Ministry raised and settled as quickly as possible, before Voldemort managed to regroup his forces?

Or did Albus simply refuse Snape's application as usual and let the Ministry do its worst?

For that matter, my fellow traveler Swythv raised the question of whether Dumbledore had actually *wanted* to advance

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his agenda, give Snape the DADA post, and bring Slughorn back from retirement as soon as Tom managed his return at the end of Year 4, and Sluggy thwarted Albus's plans by doing a bolt, and could not be found in time?

And while we are on the subject; had Snape shot himself in the foot by revealing his Dark Mark to Cornelius Fudge at the end of Year 4?

If *that* was the case, why was he not removed from the staff altogether? Was this also the hand of Lucius Malfoy at work?

Well, *maybe*. But what is more likely is that when Cornelius Fudge burst into the DMLE the next morning, demanding Snape's arrest as a DE, Amelia Bones looked up Snape's file (you know there is one) and informed Fudge that Snape was one of their own side's undercover agents, and to stop being so silly.



Or did Snape shoot himself in the foot at all?

Conversely, he may have intended to do exactly what he did do, in the service of some form of double-bluff that we were never let in on. After all, given that to reveal his Dark mark at just that point seems, perversely, to have lulled the *readers'* suspicions of him more than otherwise, it is possible that it had the same effect upon enough of his witnesses to be a risk worth taking. For he did not just reveal himself as a former Death Eater in that demonstration; he revealed himself as a spy. Their *own* spy. Which would have been confirmed by the first glance into his sealed file in the DMLE (and do not try to convince me that there isn't one. Of course there is one).

He also gave himself an alibi. If he was standing in the

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Hogwarts Hospital wing at the side of Albus Dumbledore, then he obviously wasn't off meeting with Dark Lords in unidentified cemeteries who-knows-where, as Potter is claiming, is he?



But wait, there's more.

Post-HBP we now also know that the DADA position really *is* cursed. And it was Voldemort who cursed it.

So, given that the post is cursed, and Voldemort *knows* it is cursed, and Snape has now tacitly claimed openly right there on the page that it was Voldemort who ordered him to take a job at Hogwarts as a spy, and according to Dolores's records, he first applied for the DADA position, you have to ask; why would Voldemort order his own agent to take a cursed position which will limit his period of usefulness at the school to one year only?

(For that matter, why did he send Amicus Carrow to take the position? Was Carrow in disgrace? Or just expendable?)

Voldemort certainly couldn't have anticipated that he was going to be soundly defeated before Snape's first (and only?) year at Hogwarts was even decently underway. And the manner in which we are given to conclude that he had been conducting his reign of terror toward the end of VoldWar I, he certainly wouldn't have been able to depend upon his campaign to overturn the legitimate wizarding government and bring the whole thing down into anarchy to be accomplished in no more than one additional year. Nor, looking at matters from this end of the series, can we be altogether sure that he necessarily even *wanted* it to be. He was stringing the whole thing out as long as

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he could, since creating mayhem and panic on all sides seems to have been the whole point..

So what gives?

Did Tom order Snape to take the DADA position or not?

Snape was definitely ordered to take a post at the school. I think we can probably take that much as a given. Snape tells us as much. And even if he hadn't told us so, Snape cannot have taken *any* position at the school before Voldemort's fall without his knowledge, and it is far easier to assume it was on his orders, than to float the theory that it was Snape's own bright idea presented after the fact as a sort of; "Master, guess what!" moment after he'd secured the position. Voldemort isn't the sort of leader who much appreciates that level of initiative on the part of his followers. Neither, for that matter, is Albus.

But it isn't clear that he ordered Snape to apply for the *DADA* post. Snape may have just applied for that post because it was the most likely post to be vacant.

Which raises the question of whether anyone bothered to inform Snape that the position really was cursed.

On reflection, I think Albus *might* have. For that matter, it's not impossible that both of Snape's masters had filled him in on that. But I still tend to doubt Voldemort would have been so forthcoming. And I'm no longer altogether sure about Albus.

Of course if my own speculation had been correct, and Snape had gone *into* the DEs undercover, he might have already known about it. In that case, Albus might have shown *him* the Pensieve presentation of the Life and Times of Tom Marvolo Riddle, just as he showed it to Harry. Sans the Slughorn memory, of course. And with a translation from the Parseltongue.



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Snape is not unobservant. That post has been cursed since well before Snape started his own schooling at Hogwarts; he must have registered that none of the teachers in his day completed a full year. The rumors that it is jinxed have been floating round the school for much longer than Harry's been there. Snape would have known to ask.

It isn't hard to work out a possible explanation for why Voldemort might not have informed him, of course. But not a particularly nice one. Nothing to do with Tom Riddle is ever particularly nice.

The first probability, of course, is that whatever he sent Snape into the school to accomplish was something that they both believed could be accomplished in under a year.

The second probability is that Tom considered Snape expendable.

A third is that Snape was uniquely qualified to perform a particular task.

Or, perhaps all three. Voldemort does not seem to have told his followers about the existence of a Prophecy concerning himself until the year of OotP, after his return, when retrieving the record of that Prophecy suddenly became his primary objective. I can't really blame him for not sharing that information. Given the caliber of his followers, he wouldn't want to be telling them about Prophecies concerning his downfall and giving them ideas about a future time that he might not be in charge. After all, he's the invincible Dark Lord Voldemort. Neither successors nor challengers are required, thank you very much.

But Snape already knew there was a Prophecy. He was the one who had reported it to Voldemort in the first place. Isolating Snape where he wouldn't be likely to pass that informa-



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tion to anyone else might have looked like a good idea to Tom. For that matter, given that he'd overheard it at a job interview between Dumbledore and Trelawney, perhaps he was under orders to try to find out the rest of it if he could. As well as, perhaps, to make a list of all the magical births to have been recorded in the year following the Prophecy.

And if the curse on the DADA position got him permanently, then that's one fewer person who knows about any such Prophecy, isn't it?



And for the hopeful sorts who avow that if Snape had gotten the DADA position then Voldemort would have "lifted" the curse; horsefeathers.

He didn't lift the curse for Crouch, his "most loyal servant."

He didn't lift the curse for Quirrell, when he was on-site *riding* Quirrell.

I don't think he *could* lift that curse, once he put it in place.

In fact, Rowling informs us (off canon, admittedly, so our acceptance is optional) that the curse only ended when Tom was finally, sincerely, dead.

After all, he wasn't likely to use any method of cursing it that Dumbledore could counter. Which means he probably couldn't counter it himself either. I suspect it was as unblockable as an AK. Or could only be canceled by means that no one with a sound moral compass would be willing to use.

Or perhaps he directly tied it to Albus Dumbledore's tenure as Headmaster, That plays too. That might have been a bit of luck for Amycus Carrow, anyway.



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After all, we were led to believe that Tom eventually intended to be running that castle himself. He would hardly want one of his own curses running about loose in it. Particularly not one that couldn't be canceled. He may have just intended to eliminate the DADA class altogether once he openly took the place over. And indeed I gather that DADA had been replaced by an outright Dark Arts class in the year of Snape's Headmastership.

Indeed, the fact that the curse turned out to still be in place at the end of the school year in June of '82 may be part of what convinced Albus that Tom wasn't really dead.

And yet, the curse itself does not seem to show any signs of serving Lord Voldemort's interests. Quite the opposite, if anything. It almost seems to be calibrated to do its greatest damage to those who are the greatest threat to Hogwarts. It was the agents which Voldemort had placed there himself (apart from Snape) who were the ones most deeply "bitten" by it.

I mean, look at that track record during Harry's time in the school.

Year 1 & Year 4: the DADA instructor was Voldemort and/or one of his agents. The result? Death and worse.

Year 2 & Year 5: The DADA instructor was an unaffiliated outsider. Result? Both were "hoist on their own petard." Both brought to grief through the defects of their own characters. Mental, emotional, or physical damage of varying degree.

Year 3 & Year 6: The DADA instructor was one of Dumbledore's agents. Result? Exposure, loss of reputation. Both driven from the school, without permanent or long-lasting injury. They both still had any problems that they brought with them, but they took no significant (additional) physical or mental



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damage from that posting, whatsoever.

That's hardly the way you would expect the curse to go if it were Lord Voldemort driving it. Evidently the spell is operating on automatic. I don't know how else one would account for it.

Although if my suspicions regarding the nature of the Dark Arts is correct, in that they are fueled by the powers of Chaos, then we may have a clue.

An awful lot of the Dark = evil arguments loose their teeth once you apply that reading. You *need* to learn to defend yourself from falling prey to chaos. Particularly if you are able to channel magic. Because if you don't you are going to do an appalling amount of damage to yourself and everyone around you when it decides to use *you*. And if you get too close to it, it *will*. It is not a *tame* magic.

So any wizard who IS committed to controlling chaotic energies, even a Dark wizard like Snape (yes, Snape *is* a Dark wizard. That's much of the *point* of Snape) is hardly going to be automatically disqualified from the post, unless there is something else going on. Like that jinx, which seems to consist of the fairly devilish trick of focusing the energies that the instructor of the class is forced to invoke in order to teach his students a defense from them, and turning them against the instructor.



But the fact is that the curse on the DADA position couldn't be counted on to "get" Snape permanently. None of the DADA Professors we've ever seen have lasted above a year (indeed we've never seen one completely finish out the year), but we don't *know* of anyone other than Quirrell who actually died on

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the job. And you'd think if Tom was just sending Snape in to spy, he'd want his spy in a more protected position, wouldn't you? How much spying can you get done in a year?

Ergo: if he told Snape to take the DADA post he wasn't just sending Snape in as a general spy. He had a specific mission for him. One that he expected could be accomplished within a single year.

Like the one he gave Draco Malfoy.

In fact, I very much suspected that it may have been the *same* mission that he later gave Draco Malfoy. And what is more, I still think so.

The first big difference was that Snape was probably not required to facilitate an invasion of DEs into the school.

The second big difference was that Snape was told to await Tom's orders before setting the assassination of Albus Dumbledore into motion. And those orders would not have come until after Voldemort had taken care of this pesky child of the Prophecy. Even after Tom's physical return, those orders never came.

Instead, Voldemort revoked them altogether, and gave the assignment to Malfoy, only instructing Snape to keep out of Malfoy's way.

And speaking of the Malfoys; according to Albus, Voldemort now appears to have entrusted the Diary to Lucius Malfoy at very much **exactly** the same time he sent Snape into Hogwarts to "spy." I don't think that was a coincidence, either. I'm not sure I want to even try to contemplate what was on the menu for the school once Voldemort succeeded in killing little Harry Potter and completing his planned set of Horcruxes.

But, I do suspect that Tom isn't likely to have put one of his

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Horcruxes, or at any rate not *that* one, into someone else's hands unless he was getting ready to deploy it.

Was the Diary supposed to pass from Malfoy, to Snape, to some expendable child in the school, and thereby raise some havoc on Dumbledore's turf? With Dumbledore's murder to be accomplished under cover of the resulting uproar, and the school closed as a result? It's definitely a possibility.

We know Tom wanted the castle.

Back then, he may not have wanted the school.



From Dumbledore's end of the equation, once the Dark Lord was no longer a clear and present danger, he needed eyes and ears inside what was left of the Dark Lord's organization. Lucius Malfoy isn't quite as much of a threat as he no doubt thinks he is, particularly after being publicly outed and kept on a short leash by his own father, but he isn't a safe man to overlook. (ETA: of course Rowling doesn't necessarily see the story from Dumbledore's end of the equation. In her mind's eye the whole universe was just marking time until the it could start revolving around Harry Potter.)

Besides, "officially" it was probably the Malfoys who got Snape his job, and Lucius probably would have wanted him to stay on board and pass him word on what Albus was up to, too.

And, while we're on the subject of the cursed DADA position: why not simply discontinue the class and replace it with a class in "Magical Self Defense" *decades* ago — which would include the sort of basic "Heath and Safety" instruction which is a required course in most secondary schools anyway. In addi-

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tion to defense against the Dark Arts, and the information on dealing with or avoiding Dark Creatures which the class already covers. For such an allegedly clever man Albus Dumbledore seems wonderfully deficient in common sense.

Or maybe he decided to leave the jinx in place in order that Tom Riddle wouldn't attempt to replace it with something worse.

Or, as I suggest above, it was clever and twisty enough that he couldn't get rid of it any more than he could get rid of Peeves.

It should also be noted, that in DADA the Marauders' (and Snape's) cohort seems to have been rather better served than Harry's. Nonverbal magic had clearly already been introduced to them, and possibly expected of them before 6th year. Not only did the Pensieve junket get played out with both Snape and James casting spells nonverbally, but the notation "(nvbl)" which accompanied the incantation for Levicorpus isn't likely to have meant anything to a student who was still unaware of this form of magic.

It was also interesting to note that Hermione, even despite the fine collection of reference books on the subject of Magical Defense provided by the Room of Requirement, to the D.A. in 5th year also seems never to have encountered what now appears to be such a fundamental form of spell-casting (given that once a student embarks upon NEWT-level studies, it is required not just in DADA, but in Charms and Transfiguration as well). And, considering her performance in the DoM of silencing, rather than stunning, one of the DEs and getting herself soundly cursed in response, clearly she *had* never encountered the concept, which now seems decidedly peculiar, and smells strongly of "idiot plot" device. (Especially since nonver-



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bal spellcasting turns out to have summarily dropped after HBP and everyone in DHs was screaming out their spells again, as if they were Firsties.)

Rather the way that the DEs all decided to throw away their masks after the graveyard muster in GoF. I don't think we ever saw a DE in a mask after that point.

And Snape, who was left to clean up the mess (10 different Potions to heal the damage), rubbed her nose in the fact by making certain that nonverbal magic was the very first lesson he gave the kids when he finally did get the DADA position!



Despite the fact that it was almost certainly the hand of Lucius Malfoy at work that sent Dolores Umbridge to Hogwarts in Year 5, it is still unclear whether the point was to encourage her to displace Dumbledore, or merely to get her out of the way after her stunt of sending dementors after Harry Potter without authorization.

— Although it does belatedly occur to me that it would have been much easier to have lured Harry into the Ministry to retrieve the Prophecy record if he had been expelled, and wandless, and was either living in London with his godfather or in Surrey with the Dursleys, rather than at school in Scotland. Assuming the dementors didn't simply Kiss him and take him off the board. Can we be altogether certain that the dementor stunt was really Dolores's own idea?

On the other hand: Umbridge is much quicker on the uptake than Fudge when it comes to smelling out a possible threat, even if she is incompetent about dealing with one. Those dementors

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might very well have been her own idea.

Umbridge also had what, to me, looked an awful lot like a personal axe to grind against Dumbledore and his perceived ideals, and a lot to gain by removing Fudge from Dumbledore's influence. Between she and Lucius Malfoy, they had kept Fudge surrounded for the previous year or more. Percy Weasley, a proven, and highly competent dupe, had also been reeled in to continue the good work. And we still aren't altogether sure just what the backstory is regarding that particular decision, from any of the participants' point of view.

And, it is, indeed, a very real possibility that Snape had already been specifically warned off from submitting any application to the DADA post for Harry's 5th year in preparation for the Ministry's attempted coup, which Voldemort, through the chain of Lucius-> Fudge-> Umbridge was using.



By that point, the story of Snape wanting the DADA position had been drifting around through the series for a long time. It was first handed to us in PS/SS by Percy Weasley (surprise, surprise) in the form of a modified crowing session over the fact that Quirrell had the position and Snape didn't. It had the ring of being a well-established student rumor by then. But what other support did we actually see of it?

Snape has certainly always been the first in line to sneer at the class, its teacher, and the way it was taught. But does that automatically mean he wanted to do it himself? Well, perhaps. But not necessarily.

In all justification, Snape had ample reason to sneer at Quir-

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rell's handling of the subject and even more to do so at Lockhart's expense. And the comment that Lockhart was hired because no one else wanted the position, on the surface doesn't say much for the soundness of the "common knowledge" which avers that Snape did want it himself.

Snape's dislike of Remus Lupin was even more acute than his dislike of Lockhart. But when we saw him actually take control of Lupin's class, what did he do with it? He sneered. He picked holes. He belittled the class, the lesson plans, the teacher, and the students, and then threw them an assignment for which he knew they had not prepared, and which advanced only a petty agenda of his own. Did he act like he actually *cared* whether the students learned anything about defending themselves against a werewolf? Given that he knew that Hogwarts was *harboring* a werewolf?

Hardly. He merely taunted Lupin with his own knowledge of Lupin's condition, and tried to make things uncomfortable for him. For that matter, Lupin left Hogwarts in the first week of June. Nearly a month before the year was out. Who took over his classes at the end of the year after he was gone? Not Snape, certainly. We don't hear of him having taken any of Lupin's other classes over the course of the year, either, do we? Just the one that *happened* to contain Potter. And, perhaps more to the point, the ever-so-clever Miss Granger. And he took that class only the once. The last thing it sounds like he wanted to do for that class, that year, was to actually *teach* them something.

Besides, what Lupin seemed to be teaching was a comprehensive course in dealing with Dark creatures. *Dark creatures* are not the *Dark Arts*.



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Stack this up against the obvious passion for Potions that shines through his opening salvo to the First years in his own class and by 5th year the idea that Snape wanted the DADA position began to look downright laughable. And the fact that — acto Ministry records — his Potions classes consistently perform in advance of their age group alone was a good reason why even if he did want the DADA position, it was unlikely that he would ever get it. Good Potions masters are probably rather thin on the ground. When the writing appeared on the wall, Dumbledore recalled Horace Slughorn from retirement rather than look for a new one. And I think his suspicion that Horace might hold a key to the apparently unanswerable Riddle was not his only reason to do so.

Dumbledore had other reasons to recall Slughorn, of course. He was bringing a man that he represented to Harry as both a colleague and a friend into the school and out of what appeared to be a rather precarious situation. He also wanted someone to whom he could entrust the Slytherins, since he was aware that by the end of the year, neither he nor Snape would still be at the school.

And, for my own part, I find it comparatively easy to believe that Dumbledore and Slughorn were, indeed, friends. Even if the friendship didn't go very deep. And there is no question but that Slughorn's knowledge and connections would have been a fine resource for Riddle to attempt to exploit. It makes one very curious as to just how the discussion in Albus's office in the summer of '81 went, when Slughorn retired the first time, and whether his retirement was his own idea.

Although if Albus was already asking inconvenient questions



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regarding Horace's recollections of Tom Riddle about that time, it probably was his own idea.

Now that Dumbledore claims that Voldemort is back, Slughorn claims to have been living as a fugitive for the previous year. Had he some other contingency plan in '81 which is no longer available? Or did he get burned the first time, turned into an Imperiused puppet, and was on the run to avoid being conscripted again? Is Slughorn one of the people who also was acquitted on an Imperius defense, and, in his case, his innocence absolutely true? Slughorn's knowledge and connections would have been just as attractive to Riddle in 1996 as in 1981.

I doubt we will ever be filled in on the matter, but it does bear consideration.



For quite a number of years I really did think that it might have been a conceit of the Headmaster's to only hire as teachers of the DADA class persons who had no history of being Dark wizards. Which could be one of the secondary reasons why Dumbledore found staffing that position so difficult. This further assured us that under most circumstances, even if it hadn't been cursed, if Snape did want it, as long as Dumbledore had his way, he wouldn't get it. However, in light of the actions over the course of HBP, when it was made plain to everyone that Albus finds Snape's expertise in dealing with the Dark Arts, and Dark curses to be all too obviously *useful*, I had to dismiss this entire line of reasoning. By that time I did so with few regrets, for we had seen little in canon to support it.

If it had ever been the case, it's clear that Dumbledore's views

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of the matter were apparently NOT universally supported by a society which regards the Dark Arts as a perfectly legitimate, if dangerous, branch of magical study. Dumbledore's intention might have been an attempt to ensure that there will be no more young Tom Riddles, but that point seemed to be being consistently lost on the wizarding public.

For that matter, it now appeared that Tom Riddle was the larger part of the reason that Snape *did* keep applying for it. From Umbridge's comments on the subject in OotP, and the timing of just when he came on staff, the simplest reading of the matter was that it was actually Voldemort who wanted to place Snape in the school — *as* the DADA professor. And that, in fact, Voldemort had originally sent him in to apply for it, the summer before his defeat at Godric's Hollow.

All of which *appears* to have turned out to have absolutely been the case. That Snape continued to periodically apply for the post established and maintained a paper trail accessible to Malfoy, and to Voldemort's other moles inside the Ministry that Snape was still dutifully and doggedly attempting to execute his original orders. (I suspect that very few if any of them are aware that there is a literal curse on that position, although they will have all heard the student rumors.)

By the end of OotP, Snape had spent Harry's first five years openly sneering at the class in a manner which led me to believe that he might have been contemptuous of the whole concept.

At the time, I suspected that he regarded the idea of teaching people to defend themselves against the Dark Arts without teaching them how the Dark Arts actually work to be ludicrous. To some degree I was correct in this suspicion, for the first thing

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he did, upon being given the post was to at least *attempt* to give the students some (long belated) idea of what the Dark Arts are, and how they behave.

Which is an issue upon which Rowling consistently short-changed both her readers and her characters. We never got an official explanation of what, precisely, the distinction between the Dark Arts and “normal” magic even is. And by the end of HBP it really looked as if she did not intend to ever make a coherent distinction between them. This was either inexcusably slipshod planning for a series in which a conflict with a Dark wizard is central to the action, or a strong hint that most of the wizarding public does not really know the distinction either. (Nor does the author.)

And given the way that the DADA class of the only magical training school in Great Britain has been hobbled for the past two generations, it doesn't really look as if they had much of a chance to learn one.

Which could have been Tom's intention from the get-go.



So far as my original interpretation went, Snape's attitude looked like it might be based on the kind of philosophical difference between Snape and Dumbledore which would have been impossible to resolve. It would have also been one of the few safe subjects in which Snape could have felt justified in sneering at the Headmaster. A fact of which Albus Dumbledore might have been perfectly well aware.

At the time I believed that Dumbledore might very well have been determined to keep that particular outlet available to

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that particular subordinate even if the class, as it stood, were a good deal less successful than it, in fact, is. Under most circumstances, it isn't a good idea to put a subordinate into a position in which they have no subject upon which they may safely oppose you. For that matter, Snape might not have even been the only staff member to make use of that particular outlet. And, in any event, the class is not a *complete* failure. The students generally do manage to learn at least *something* of use from it. Even if only how to recognize a phony when they see one. Or how to stage a mutiny.

You will also notice that there was no sneering from Snape's quarter during the year that the class was being taught by “Alastor Moody.” Just a great deal of wariness and dislike. Snape obviously didn't feel that it was safe to openly sneer at Moody.



Well, in the wake of HBP, my reading was obviously a bit off-target. Once you know that the post really IS cursed, you no longer have to ask why Dumbledore refused to give it to Snape. And my postulation of the repeated applications for it DO start to look like a deliberate “paper trail!”

It also would have also made a fine hook upon which to hang some periodic grousing sessions to Lucius Malfoy. Because I did believe that for 14 years, Snape continued to serve Dumbledore as a spy upon Malfoy's (and perhaps other DEs who escaped prosecution's) probable activities. And no doubt to serve Malfoy as a informant upon Dumbledore's activities in return. There was nothing new about his position as a double-agent.

Up to the last few months before the release of HBP, I really

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did tend to think that Snape would be given the DADA position only over Dumbledore's dead body, despite the widely held fanon conviction that he would be given the post in Year 7. However, the release of the cover designs for HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE, in the run-up to the release of the 6th book, kicked off an alternate theory on the matter which made perfect sense, and turned out to be correct.

The British "adult" editions of the books had a very good track record for depicting on their covers some object which really does closely relate to the central issue of that particular book.

The object depicted on the cover for HBP was an old ADVANCED POTIONS textbook stacked with other books on a tabletop.

The theory which this illustration gave rise to was that since clearly potions were going to turn out to be important in Year 6, and that there was no way that Harry, in view of his OWL score, would be able to continue to study Potions while Snape was teaching the class, Snape must necessarily become the DADA Professor, not in year 7, but in year 6. This did not require the death of Albus Dumbledore before it happened. All it required was the determination of Minerva McGonagall.

It was from Minerva that we learned (in the career advice chapter of OotP) that Professor Snape absolutely refuses to permit any student into his advanced class who has not received an Outstanding result on the Potions OWL. Or, in other words, that this difficulty was nothing to do with Harry, it was an established policy of Snape's which was common knowledge to all of the Staff.

Although Harry did not believe that he did so badly as all that on his Potions OWL, it looked unlikely to everyone, includ-

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ing himself, that he received an Outstanding on it. The probability was that he had passed. That his results were judged to be Acceptable, or that possibly he had managed to scrape an Exceeds Expectations. But this alone would not get him into Snape's advanced potions class.

On the other hand, Minerva had vowed before witnesses that she would assist Harry to become an Auror if it was "the last thing she ever did"

Still, for all the faint air of mutual respect between Professors Snape and McGonagall which we saw upon her return from St Mungo's at the end of OotP, it would probably be more difficult for her to convince Snape to bend his own rules in Potter's favor than it would be to convince Albus to let Snape take the DADA position, even if against his better judgment.

Ergo; Snape gets the DADA position at last; just as Voldemort wanted him to in the first place. The new teacher in year 6 is not the new DADA instructor. He would be the new Potions instructor. (And is just too late for Longbottom, more's the pity. Neville might have learned something in the class under Slughorn.)



I liked this theory. Unlike most fan theories it did not seem to be overly complex, it was not there merely to amp up the "drama," and it required only that all of the people involved in the issue behave according to their already-established characters.

Unfortunately, however much I may have liked the theory, and was not at all astonished to discover that it was right on

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the money, I could not in any kind of good faith look forward to the general fanon expectations of getting a satisfying depiction of Snape as a truly kick-ass DADA instructor who managed to finally give the kids some decent instruction. Indeed, the best instruction they have been given since year 3, in fact.

(The false Moody may have taught the rest of the school well enough, but Harry's class was probably undermined by Moody's concentration on teaching Harry — and *only* Harry — to resist the Imperius Curse to the exclusion of any other instruction for several weeks, if not more.)

The fact was that — as with Harry's Occlumency lessons — I did not think that Snape could *afford* to teach those particular kids truly effective defense. That is *not* why Voldemort sent him to take that position in Dumbledore's school. Consequently, I reasoned, if Snape is the DADA teacher in year 6, what we were most likely to see from him was a masterful performance of trying to serve two Masters without ever losing his balance on the tightrope he has been walking ever since we met him in Book 1.

In an unfamiliar context on something which is not yet his home turf.

To Harry Potter, his behavior would eventually look very suspicious.

Maybe not immediately, but I was sure that another collection of the sort of cumulative maybe-clues such as the ones we had been getting all along were likely to see Snape doing yet another stint as JK Rowling's favorite red herring.



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Well, it didn't really work out like that, did it? If anything, Harry got his nose rapidly put out of joint by suddenly no longer finding himself the star pupil — as he was under Lupin and Moody — or as covert alternate instructor of the DADA class, as he had been under Umbridge. (I wonder if Harry ever realized that this was probably exactly how Hermione now felt in Potions class?)

It was just as well that I wasn't completely convinced of my own infallibility on this issue, (and I would have been a fool to have been so. My average was about 1 correct theory out of 3, with no certainty of which theory was going to turn out to be the correct one). But I allowed that this time there might be some fire to go with all that smoke. Not that it would necessarily signify what Harry might think it did.

— And it can be seen that I was for the most part right. Although we got a lot of passing references to the homework that Snape assigned, we saw only a couple of instances of Snape actually teaching the DADA class. But I was way out in the out-field when I thought that he would not attempt to teach them effective Defense. For it appears that he was quite effective. We just didn't really get to witness it.

I also supposed that, in keeping with tradition, Snape would probably only have the position for one year. I didn't expect that he would die from it. But something would come up which had him back in the dungeons for year 7. Unless what came up was something that had him leaving the school. In which case he would *still* be back in year 7. Eventually.

And I was more-or-less right about that too, although I'll admit I never expected to see him installed in the Headmaster's office.

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But from what little we did see, it was very clear that Snape's passion for the Dark Arts was every bit as great as his passion for Potions. It finally looked as if there may actually have been something to Sirius Black's claims that Snape had been "famous" for being fascinated by the Dark Arts when he was a kid at school.



So, yes, I finally had to admit that I think that he did actually want that position. But he knew why he could not have it. Hermione may claim to have thought he sounded like Harry in a burst of intensity, while he was describing the Dark Arts, but I'll have to admit I was put most in mind of Hagrid rhapsodizing about dragons.

It really looks very much to me now as if all three of the known, or presumed, fatherless boys that seem to the reader to have adopted Dumbledore as a "father/grandfather figure" appear to be suffering from some variety of a death wish. Hagrid with his monsters, Snape with the Dark Arts, and now we have Harry, who is determined to find a villain somewhere, anywhere, and foil his plans. Personally.



But, Rowling loaded the dice this time. It was clear from Chapter 3 of HBP that Dumbledore was aware that this was going to be the year that he would die, and he was clearly putting his affairs in order from his first appearance. His visit to the Dursleys and his request that they continue to house Harry until the protection on him ran out upon his 17th birthday had

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all the feel of a "final request."

And I thought that Dumbledore would have almost certainly decided that once he was officially off the playing board, Snape would be of greater use deep inside Voldemort's organization than semi-isolated in what would probably be Minerva's school (actually, post-DHs we now know that he was very much aware that it was likely to be *Tom's* school, and Snape would be back in it, regardless). To finally give him the DADA position, which Voldemort knows to be cursed, would be sure to generate some circumstance that would eliminate any suggestion that Snape had abandoned his post at the school voluntarily.

And if my conclusion that Snape and Albus (and Slughorn, and possibly others) had all conspired to make a production of Albus's death and let Voldemort *know* he had gotten what he wanted ever panned out, then it becomes abundantly clear why Snape was not given the DADA position until Year 6. Particularly if Snape's original orders had been to eventually assassinate Albus Dumbledore.

After all, as I keep saying, who else among his own agents could Albus have trusted to *kill* him?



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Well. This particular piece is very much “parson’s egg.” It should be noted that much of the original reasoning was hashed out back during the 3-Year summer, when we didn’t know any better.



So now, post HBP, we know.

Or at any rate, by the end of HBP we knew enough to be able to make some rather more educated guesses. In point of fact, what we now knew was still heavily outweighed by what we didn’t know.

Upon the whole, I did rather better than average on this particular issue. I didn’t get it altogether right, either — but I did at least pick up on Snape’s “commoner” background, even before OotP came out, and I did also at least pose the question of whether he was *really* the pureblood that most of fandom was determined to paint him.

I *didn’t* guess that he was a literal halfblood however.

The wizarding world is a very small society. In such societies, particularly in the kind of subset of such a society which is obsessed with their bloodlines, everybody tends to be related to just about everybody else. And we saw ample evidence of that once Rowling released the Black family tapestry sketch. It should be noted that nowhere on that sketch is there anyone named Prince. Or Snape.

(Or, for that matter, anyone named Dumbledore.)

Snape, if he had been a pureblood from the same general social group as Malfoy, would probably be some degree of cousin either to Lucius or Narcissa, and quite possibly both of them. However, the glimpses we got in Phoenix, and what

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we had seen of Snape’s conduct (his *conduct*, not his *articulation*) since the beginning of the series did not at all support the typical fanon reading of his hereditary social status within the wizarding world, i.e., that he was “Snape, of Snape Manor,” regardless of whether he was a pureblood or otherwise.

We’d had a number of suggestions in canon that Severus might be from a very different social stratum than the Malfoys. Starting all the way back in PS/SS.

Permit me to direct your attention to the end of the Gryffindor/Hufflepuff match — the game that Harry brought to a premature end after about five minutes. As soon as Snape, who had volunteered to referee that match, landed his broom we watched him spit bitterly (and publicly) upon the ground. Somehow, I cannot square that little demonstration with a wizard who was brought up according to the sort of standards of behavior to which the Malfoy brat was being held. Not unless he hadn’t yet outgrown a severe case of adolescent rebellion and was still acting out from that sort of “I’m rough, tough and *baaaaad*” pose. Which might serve as a very good starting point for getting a handle on Sirius Black, but does not really match up to anything else we had seen from Severus Snape, who goes in much more for buttoned-up formality under most circumstances.

A degree of formality which is not really all that much associated with the true aristocracy, once you consider it.

From the clues that we did get in canon, it was very difficult to make the total add up to the traditional fanon interpretation of Aristocratic!Snape. The man spits in public. This is not “couth.” And, as sharp as he does certainly appear to be,

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he didn't seem to be what you could really call an "intellectual." He was unquestionably "street smart," we now also know that he was probably "book smart" as well (despite Rowling's last-ditch effort in DHs to retroactively paint him as terminally clueless), and he is *extremely* good with words, but outside of his own fields — where he is definitely, but *definitely*, on top of things — he doesn't really seem to have chalked up that astronomically high an accuracy rating. (Kappas, a specifically *Japanese* breed of water demon are not either "more usually found in Mongolia." He may know his Dark Arts, but he doesn't necessarily know his Dark Creatures.) Nor do we get any impression inside of canon of his having any notable appreciation for art, or literature, or any of the usual trappings of "culture."

And his method of "scoring off" of people is not at all in the sort of drawlingly "superior" style of a Draco Malfoy, but is more pointedly snide and spiteful. We never once heard canon Snape drawl. He sneers. He purrs. He murmurs. He does not drawl. For the most part, for all his uptight mannerisms, he behaves like a churl. And for the most part is *treated* as one. We never saw another adult behave toward Snape in a manner which would suggest that he could claim the sort of leverage that comes from a background of wealth and privilege. This really does not add up to the chances of his being Lucius Malfoy's second cousin on his mother's side.

What his behavior looked and sounded most like to me was something much closer to the (Crabbe & Goyle?) hereditary "retainer" class of (almost) pureblood minion, than to that of the Lords of the Manor. Traditional minions *do* also come in that scrawny, shifty, clever — and vicious with it — mode, as

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well as in that of the more obvious muscle-bound thug. For that matter, Snape's "thin, sallow, greasy" physical description is very much in the style of the visual tags that are not infrequently applied to this slightly rarer variety of traditional "henchman." The "tough, wily street kid" is the usual form that this one takes in other genres, such as gangster stories. Or the thin, usually oily, sharply-dressed, but dead-eyed — fellow with the shiv, who lurks in shadows or lies in wait in the dark of the alley. (Yes, *that* kind of "family man.")



It was also extremely easy to speculate that Severus was not the first Potions expert in his family. Which may still be the case, although we've been given no clear indication of it, and probably never will. I thought that he might very well have come from a long line of professional Herbalists and Apothecaries. In which case there could very well be a long history of shopkeepers in his background.

Well, in that regard, I was completely wrong. His mother's family may have been accounted as purebloods (or were they? Just because *Harry* assumes they were doesn't make it true. By this time we ought to know better than to take any of Harry's pronouncements at face value. Where it comes to Snape, the running joke is that Harry *never* gets it right), but they seem to have been complete nonentities, and they don't appear to have been shopkeepers, either. In fact, they also don't even seem to have lived in one of the wizarding enclaves, or even in one of the traditionally mixed wizard/Muggle villages, but in a defunct Muggle mill town.

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But then, by now over half of the wizarding population probably doesn't live in the secluded enclaves. Those are few, and small, and only seem to be actually occupied by the artisans or shopkeepers who ply their trades there. And it has begun to seem that most wizards actually live out in the world among Muggles, even if they do live separately from them, and try to interact with them as little as possible. (Which makes a complete pig's breakfast of Rowling's whole running joke of wizards who still have no concept of how to act or dress around Muggles.)

It also leads us back to the matter of there being several different kinds of pureblood. We know that in every generation there are fewer of the hard-liners who refuse to opt out, and marry a Muggle-born or choose a partner of mixed ancestry, instead remaining determined to intermarry within the same ever-narrowing range of families that they still regard as being "eligible," or to remain unwed.

With potentially rather nasty consequences to the mental or emotional stability and general dispositions of their offspring. From what we have seen of the conduct of the portrait of the late Madam Black and her niece Bellatrix, it would appear that the Blacks are no small distance down the same road that ended in the hovel of the Gaunts. This sort of thing is probably more prevalent the higher you climb up the social ladder into the more exclusive ranks of society. The operative term being "exclusive," which is to say that what they are all "about" is excluding as many people as they can find an excuse to.

But the majority of the remaining purebloods we meet seem more on the order of the Weasleys. Commonplace families

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whose pureblood distinction seems almost an accident. Some of these families could probably trace a fair amount of their descent from Muggle-born or halfblood wizards who were discovered and educated and recruited into the wizarding world before the act of wizarding seclusion was adopted, at least if you go back far enough. Rowling has admitted that after some probably arbitrary number of generations such wizards' descendants are no longer regarded as halfbloods, but as purebloods.

And various branches of even well-known pureblooded families probably have not remained pureblood throughout the whole of their history, but have periodically lost and then regained this distinction, after the typical 2–4 generations following the last recorded marriage outside to a Muggle, Muggle-born, or halfblood.



Which brings us to the Princes.

Do we even know for sure that they *were* purebloods?

No. We *really* don't.

Harry assumes it — because at that point in the story arc he was determined to draw a straight line between Snape and Voldemort, regardless of the lack of any evidence. But just how high has *Harry's* accuracy rating been so far? Particularly whenever it applies to Snape. I'd put him on about the same level as Sirius Black.

Of course I'm talking about the story as it stood in the course of the first 6 books, before his "hero's intuition" had him falling backwards into the correct solution by apparently divine guidance all through the course of DHs. Prior to that, his accuracy

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rating really wasn't all that good.

Indeed, if that silly Half-Blood Prince psuedo-subplot of the book bearing his name is anything to go by, the whole *point* seems to have been to underscore the fact that when the subject is Snape, Harry never *does* get it right.

And, y'know; I don't get the impression that — even obsessed by blood purity as some factions within it seem to be — the wizarding world has ever been obsessed enough to have ever taken the trouble to delineate all the different possible degrees of mixed blood in the way that the American south applied way too much time and effort into delineating the different degrees of "color." "Halfblood" may equate directly to mulatto fairly smoothly, but I doubt that the wizarding world has any specifically descriptive term equivalent to quadroon, or octoroon or all the rest of that particular catalogue.

But, then, of course, halfblood wizards are not regarded as marketable *property*, either

If Harry — who is accounted a halfblood — were to say; "Enough of the wizarding world," and then leave, marry a nice Muggle girl and produce some magical children, those children would also be regarded as halfbloods, not one-quarter bloods.

While we are at it, I'm not convinced that if Hermione Granger were to get fed up with the wizarding world and do the same, that her children would not be counted halfbloods as well, since their mother is a qualified witch.

It is not impossible that the whole "Half-Blood Prince" moniker was flying a jeering flag that *all* of the "Princes" are halfbloods. It's the sort of jeering humor that Snape might well have adopted. But we can't count on it. We can't count on anything

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to do with the "Half-Blood Prince." We haven't been given the punch line of that particular joke.

And in fact, we never were given that particular punch line. There was no punch line.



A brief side note here: I am reasonably certain that there is actually not a single word in the official printed canon which would establish either that the Princes were purebloods, or that they disowned their daughter for marrying Tobias Snape. The Princes were not the Blacks.

Both of those assumptions are fanon, not canon. I'm sure the Princes wouldn't have been *happy* about that marriage. But *someone* sent that marriage announcement to the PROPHET. I don't see Eileen doing that herself if she was *planning* to leave the wizarding world behind.



And, before the opportunity gets away from us, about that Potions book:

Yes. Again. During the interval after HBP it seemed likely that potions book was going to drive us all crazy before the series was over. After HBP lot of fans mounted a concerted effort to prove that the Half-Blood Prince's Potions text had been Snape's mother's book originally. In retrospect it isn't particularly clear what they expected to solve by proving that.

It's certainly not impossible. And Snape clearly had access to that book before his 6th year when he needed it for class, since Rowling put a great deal of effort into trying to convince

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us that we had seen James Potter using one of the spells in the margins at the end of 5th year. (It's a pity she didn't restrain herself, since we did not need that point of confusion, and it served no *purpose*.)

But if it was indeed originally Eileen's book then that would help to clarify at least one detail regarding timing. Eileen would *not* have been at Hogwarts with Riddle's cohort. Their time may have overlapped by a couple of years, but they were not contemporaries, and she would have been far too young (and a girl, besides) to have been considered "interesting" to him. She was also a nobody even if it turns out that she was a pureblood, and he wouldn't have regarded her as collectible. We also don't even know that she was a Slytherin. My guess would have been Ravenclaw. Although Severus's determination to be Sorted into Slytherin does at least suggest an association with the House. Or its reputation for helping its members "get ahead" in life.

(James Potter's disparagement of the House seems excessively rude considering that by the time DHs had been released, we had concluded from the Black Family Tapestry sketch that his own mother was probably a Black — a family which had virtually always Sorted into Slytherin, even if his father had been in Gryffindor. Rowling's abrupt invention of a different pair of Potters to be James's parents as I am told was posted on Pottermore — well after the closing of canon — does not invalidate anything actually written in the books, neither does it invalidate speculations by fans based upon data which we were given to reason from while the series was actually in progress. In the end, it just comes down to another one of Rowling's mean little taunts of; "Ha, ha, fooled you!")



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As to just when Eileen probably was at Hogwarts; Harry followed Remus's suggestion and checked the "publication date" of the Potions book on the night of Christmas Eve, 1996, and found that the book was "almost" 50 years old (we will assume that Rowling meant the date of that edition's printing, otherwise we lose any kind of meaningful context). Or, in other words, it would not have been published before around 1947, and probably more like 1948-'49. As we know, Tom Riddle finished Hogwarts with the class of '45.

IF the book was printed in '47, which is the very earliest it might have been sold. It would not have been available to students until the academic year of 1947-'48.

IF the book was Slughorn's specified text for 6th year NEWT-level Potions from the time of its first printing, and was not used before 6th year, then IF Eileen purchased it for 6th year Potions class in the summer of 1947, she would have finished Hogwarts in the class of 1949. Four years behind Riddle. i.e., The year that he opened the Chamber of Secrets would have been her first year at Hogwarts. If the book was dated any later than 1947, she could have missed him entirely.

Since Severus Snape was (acto DHs) not born until January of 1960, Eileen could have finished school in any year up to 1958 easily enough. Taking this school-leaving date as a starting point, Eileen could have been born anytime between the Autumn of 1930 and the early part of 1940.

But the book might not have been hers, after all.

And I wouldn't necessarily count upon her having married directly out of school, either. But since the glimpse of the shouting man and the cowering woman did not identify them as old,



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middle-aged or notably young, they probably looked around 30. The impression we get from that glimpse is that Severus might have been around 3–5, which would mean that what we saw took place sometime in the early to middle 1960s, so the dates above all still fit.



Still, I have been saying for years, that the Acts of Enclosure which forced the commons off the land by the thousands, and into the towns and factories could have resulted an upsurge in the births of Muggle-born magical children, as people from districts which shared, in common, an incomplete set of magical traits paired off with people from other districts whose own incomplete set had all the missing bits. Nothing in canon supports Rowling's assumption that the ability to channel magic is determined by a single gene. Indeed, everything we're shown flatly contradicts it.

However, I'm no longer sure that the genetics of this hypothesis even still works. Given that we now know that human DNA provides no shortage of places for additional genetic code material to stow away, it might. If nothing else, a higher population density assures that there would be more people in an area who will be carrying the Squib factor. But as soon as that fails to be passed on you'll get a "Muggle-born" wizard.

The simplest interpretation is that both of the elder Princes originally descended from the Muggle-born magical children of 19th century mill workers. Probably from the period of 1815–1830 or thereabouts. Possibly making them a part of the first crop of Muggle-borns to have been identified by the Hogwarts

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quill when it went into service. (Which I reckon as having been about 1820 or thereabouts.)

Their original Muggle-born magical forebearers may or may not have married someone who was some distance further from Muggle-born roots, but their descendants managed to do so, to the point that by the time of Eileen's birth — which was probably, but not certainly, some time in the late 1930s — she and perhaps even her parents were far enough removed from the original mill workers to be accounted as purebloods. But it isn't by any means certain. And the family appears to have continued to be employed in or around the mill despite the fact that they were wizards and witches. At least until the mill closed.

Or just possibly, not. There is, after all, that house in Spinner's End to consider. Which adds some additional context.

I was absolutely convinced that the house in Spinner's End was originally the Prince house. For that matter, despite the claim of wizards being exceptionally long-lived, given Rowling's reluctance to depict anyone of any age in the Potterverse as still possessing living grandparents it still could be.

But whoever originally acquired that house remained in the district, and appears to have ultimately purchased it. Which presents us with an additional cultural/historical factor to have to juggle.

That terraced house in which Snape lived is fairly overtly described as being consistent with what was once "worker housing," built to house the mill's workers, and *only* the mill's workers, with their families (who pretty much were also expected to work at the mill, in return for the privilege of being housed).

Consequently, it wouldn't have been privately owned. Such

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housing developments were usually a part of the mill's assets, the rents being an additional part of the mill's income. And such houses were only sold off to the tenants (or anyone who was prepared to buy them, really) after the mill would have closed and the company's assets liquidated. The house appears to be a classic 2-up, 2-down, back-to-back terraced house, opening directly to the street at the front, with a privy and a wash house in a small yard in back. But most of such housing was only sold off starting in the 1930s–1950s, when the mills were closing all over Britain. Whoever next owned it would have only acquired it then, which is to say, between the time that Eileen would have been a child, up to the period that she and Tobias would have been setting up housekeeping.

This being the case, there is no reason to automatically assume that anyone in either the Snape or the Prince families had actually worked at the mill since well before WWI (if the Potterverse had one. I'm pretty sure it did. It's a WWII which is problematic. Two Muggle world wars 20 years apart aren't at all compatible with the Grindelwald arc as we now have it).

We do not know for certain whether that house was originally owned by Severus's own parents or if was the home of his grandparents (on either side), but up to the time DHs came out, I would have said the smart money was on it being his grandparents' house. His maternal grandparents, that is. If Tobias Snape ever lived there he hadn't done so for a long time by the time we got a glimpse of it.

But it had pretty clearly been lived in by wizards for quite some time. Severus Snape finished school in 1978, He had returned to Hogwarts as a teacher by 1981, and was living on

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campus for 10 months of the year after that. "Extreme" theorizing aside, there is no overt reason in canon to assume that both of his parents were dead by the time he finished school, or even now, although we have not been given any reason to meet them, and they certainly are not at Spinner's End.

Post-HBP I suspected that he may have been effectively orphaned before he started Hogwarts. As to that, we still do not know one way or the other as to just how or when he lost or misplaced his parents.

Indeed, they could both still be living in another house of the same basic sort two streets over, Severus having inherited the house in Spinner's End from grandparents, and moved his stuff out of his parents' house as soon as he did so.

There is little to convince us that the current internal arrangements of the house must necessarily have been made by Severus Snape himself in a series of summer projects, rather than some years earlier by his mother. Or even decades earlier by the Princes.

A fan who was at the time going by the name of June Diamanti (later Zoepaleologa) made a very entertaining post on her Lj concerning the possible whereabouts of Spinner's End, concluding that it was most likely to be in Yorkshire, and roughly based upon Halifax or Huddersfield. Unfortunately, that Lj is no longer online.

She made a good argument, but there is no solid confirmation of it either in the books or in any of Rowling's statements.

But, by the time DHs was pending release, it had finally occurred to me that if Rowling really intended to tie everything up in a big shiny bow, that mill town would probably turn out to

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be Great Hangleton. And the original owners of that long-defunct mill, the Riddles.

Tom may have put countless Muggles out of work when the mill closed.

Of course the mill may well have already closed before the murders. Mill closures started a good deal earlier than the summer of '42. With the Depression in the '30s, I think. And they continued on all the way up through the '60s. There were once a lot of mills, all over Britain.

(ETA: Rowling has allegedly since identified the name of the town as Cokeworth. Which sounds more like a mining district to me, but what do I know?)

The relevant issue would, as I say, be the worker housing. As stated above, those terraced houses were usually only sold off after a mill finally closed. If the mill really was closed around 1943-1950, Eileen might have only just started Hogwarts, and her parents may have taken the house merely because it was available. As wizards, they took no interest in the status of the mill.

And they may have regretted it later, since the move threw their daughter in the way of Tobias Snape.



As to the house; my own observation is that while the fabric of the house is purest Muggle, the internal modifications are clearly wizard. A total lack of electric fixtures (which wizards wouldn't have bothered to add), and a sitting room completely lined with books, apart from one small window and the entry door (and maybe even the entry door is covered with book-

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shelves on the inside)? That's a wizarding setup. No question. And I doubted that this has simply been "Severus's summer project" for the last 15-18 years, although I dare say he has added any number of books to the current collection.

Consider: Muggles wouldn't be able to completely cover their doors with bookshelves. Not even if they wanted to. The extra weight load would have had them off their hinges in no time. Plus you need the extra clearance for the — now effectively 5-8 inch thick — door to swing, in whichever direction, so you couldn't have fit a door into an apparently *unbroken wall* of books, regardless of whether it opens in or out. There would have to be at least a couple of inches clearance at the free edge. And more than that on the hinge edge if the door opened into the room. Not to mention the doorknob. (Indeed, there appears to be no doorknob. One must open the door with a spell.) Covering a functional door with bookshelves would involve the use of wizarding space.

There is clearly some sort of magical arrangement to those "concealed" doors, and you will notice that when Snape actually opens one of them he does it with his wand. They were originally perfectly normal Muggle doors to normal Muggle rooms. But they certainly aren't anything of the sort now. And the fact that there is still no sign of the house having ever been fitted with electricity despite the fact that it was now 1996, and if Tobias Snape stuck around, he would have been living there from at least the 1960s to the end of his life, suggests that either he did not stick around, or this was never his house in the first place.

And Rowling's attempt to claim that he at least lived there to the early 1970s, when Severus started Hogwarts, is a weak one.

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Yes it is possible that the Snapes had still not laid on electricity by then. Quite a lot of working class people didn't until they'd owned those houses for quite a while (and landlords who had purchased a row of such houses as rental property after the mill closure might not have done so for as long as they could still rent the place without doing so). But it would have eventually come to pass that Tobias would have scraped the money together and insisted. That is, if he actually lived there.

The house probably wouldn't have had electricity laid on in the '40s or '50s, and a severe recession hit industrial areas later in the '70s which might conceivably have delayed any such conversion further, but a mid-century Muggle would have hardly continued to make do without electricity for the better part of 40 years in a Muggle town.

And even though Snape himself might very well not choose to pay to have his electricity reconnected for his 2-month stay over the summer, if the house had ever been fitted with electricity there would now be electric fixtures and switches visible in it. And there aren't.



Which brings us to Tobias Snape. Muggle.

With the image of that intimidating, hook-nosed man and the cowering woman to fuel them, in the interval between books 5 & 6, we saw a lot of fanfics featuring Severus Snape's abusive father and his poor terrorized and browbeaten mother. Now that we know that Tobias Snape was actually a Muggle, the question has been generally raised as to why a witch would put up with such treatment. *Especially* from a Muggle.



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Despite the fact that the well-known dynamics of domestic abuse can make such a question irrelevant, the snippet we were given in OotP is no real reason to absolutely conclude that the household was chronically abusive. This was only one memory. The situation may have been memorable specifically *because* it was atypical.

Of course, during that interval there was also a fairly large segment of fandom which had rejected that image from the get-go, postulating that the bullying hook-nosed man of Snape's early memory was not Snape's father, but one of his other relatives. This viewpoint got a great deal of amplification after the revelations of HBP, chiefly because of the question above of why would a witch let herself be bullied by a Muggle?

I have to confess to feeling a bit cross with JK Rowling. With that image of the shouting hook-nosed man she appears to have tap-danced past us with an "idiot plot" device which seems to have been completely unnecessary. It also has the feel of a manufactured clue which has been stripped of the information which it was supposed to be a clue *to*.

Consider: the memory itself is very brief, just a flash, really. Scarcely long enough to do more than to take in the situation and get a glimpse of what the people look like.

And yet Harry does not register that the man is dressed as a Muggle?

Convincingly dressed as a Muggle?

How many wizards has Harry met that can pull that trick off? Just how dense is he?

Well, obviously, from a meta standpoint Rowling cannot allow Harry to notice the Muggle clothing and get the clue that



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such an observation would provide, because that would ruin the psuedo-bombshell she has planned for the next book. Even though the bombshell of Snape being a halfblood appears to have no real impact upon the book in which she deployed it until the story was effectively over. Or even then, apart from justifying her choice of a title.

So why does she show Harry the hook-nosed man at all? Why not show little Severus weeping in his room with the sounds of shouting coming from beyond the door? It would give the same impression of an unhappy household without deliberately falsifying the evidence.

Were we going to meet Tobias Snape in book seven? So Harry needed to be able to recognize him? (ETA: not a chance.)

Or was the man somebody else altogether?

What gives?

Careless writing, evidently. Nothing regarding this issue was ever given any kind of a follow up. Even in that gawd-awful chapter of 'The Prince's Tale' in DHs we never got another glimpse of Tobias Snape.



And also, along about this point in the continuing debate I know I was only one of many who raised a general call for a reality check. We did not see the hook-nosed man striking the woman. We saw him shouting at her. And she appeared to be cowering in fear.

Well, she may have been. He was certainly pitching a fit, and there was a very real possibility that he *might* hit her, even if he didn't make a habit of it.

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But, what if he had a very good reason to shout? And what if she was not cowering in fear so much as cringing from guilt?

What if she had married him without ever telling him that she was a witch?

Apparently thanks to the Ministry's insistence on never letting Muggles know that magic exists, most witches who get involved with Muggles do not fill their Muggle intendeds in on that little detail, you know. In fact, to all appearances *none* of them seem to. We've already heard of two others who didn't in the series so far. And from Rowling's official site we know of at least one wizard who never told his Muggle partner the truth either. And, we've never met one either in or out of canon who *did* tell their partner beforehand. Nondisclosure seems to be the most common (Ministry approved) practice.

What if Tobias only found it out when one of young Severus's breakthroughs of accidental magic happened when he was around to witness it?

Now, I'd say that a bit of shouting might have been a perfectly excusable response, under those circumstances. However unpleasant that might be for anyone in range of it.

And for little Severus to be weeping in a corner would also be understandable, given that it was something *he* did that had provoked this scary performance.

That also could have been the last time Severus ever saw his father.

In fact, I thought it probably was.



In that regard at any rate, apparently I was wrong. Acto

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'The Prince's Tale' Tobias Snape stuck around at least until his son was 9 or 10.

He seems to have taken absolutely no interest in the boy, however. Not even to the point of caring that his kid was out wandering the streets dressed like a freak.

I really do think that Rowling's premise in this regard requires either more thought or more explanation than she gave it. We would have had a much higher degree of verisimilitude from that direction had Severus's father *not* stuck around.

And that would have even been a sketch more to her usual pattern, as well. The *leitmotif* of absent fathers was already well established by book 5.

In fact, that would certainly have fit the whole established pattern in this series much more closely than a Muggle father settling down and getting over it, the way Mr Finnegan did.

In which case, had Tobias walked out, Eileen would have either soldiered on alone, probably with little time for her son, or packed little Severus and herself up and returned to her parents' home.



That was one of the starting points of my exercise in "extreme theorizing" which is explored in the essay entitled 'The View from the Martian Canals'. But I will not go deeply into it here. That theory was constructed around the edges of the things that we rather pointedly did *not* have in canon by the end of HBP.

A number of fans contend that no one with Snape's nasty disposition can have gotten that way except by being raised

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in an abusive household. At least an emotionally and verbally abusive one.

And to be sure, we did get a few more glimpses of Snape's youth and childhood by the time we reached the end of HBP, and none of them were pleasant. But there was nothing else in any of them to suggest an abusive father. Or, indeed, *any* kind of a father.

And given that the only other glimpse we'd been given of Eileen, (plain and sullen and cross even when being written up in the newspaper as the Captain of the gobstones team) there was at least some circumstantial support for the suggestion that the unhappy household that produced Snape was in fact the Prince household. Even if the only Prince left in that household by then was Eileen.

And in fact I still am inclined to think so.

Rowling certainly didn't manage to convince me otherwise.



Which brings me to a slight digression regarding Rowling and the raising of her audience's expectations. In the wake of DHs, it appeared that Ms Rowling might actually regard the construction of her series as a sort of game which she is playing with her readers. For she made a conspicuous practice of laying out possible clues and flagging them as significant — when later it becomes abundantly obvious that she had no intention of ever referring back to any of them again. The whole *modus operandi* reeks of bait-and-switch.

This is not strewing red herrings across the readers' path. Red herrings lead you *somewhere*, even though it usually turns

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out to be a blind alley.

All of these threads ultimately led us nowhere: the Potions book? the Veil? the locked room? hell, the complete reversal of an entire established 5-books worth of the account of Voldemort's first rise being completely up-ended by the "official" Riddle backstory — which she then completely dismissed in turn, and in the very next book she went back to the original version *which she had already disallowed*.

Where was the ultimate payoff for these devices? All of them were flagged as "important" in their presentation. Yet they all turned out to be no more than set dressing. *Disposable* set-dressing, at that. Use once and discard. Even the official Riddle backstory devolves into nothing more than a piece of shameless padding serving no purpose whatsoever, until she could wrestle it around, sweep it aside and reveal the existence of the Horcruxes. She might just as well have merely been tossing us something to keep us occupied until she got around to writing out the next book.

By that time, I rather suspect she was.

More to the point, she established patterns, and then once the reader had registered them, was aware of them, and was looking for them, she abandoned them and went and did something else. "Ha ha! Fooled you!"

Well, that is certainly within her rights, but she appears to have done it without regard to whether it made for better or a more plausible story, and regardless also of what effect it would have upon the structure of the series as a whole. Or the matter of how quickly we were going to reach a point where we simply stopped believing her.



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And this *isn't* what she had *always* done. Any number of times in the first 3–4 books such a pattern would usually come back to bite us.

Hard.



But after OotP she started blatantly breaking patterns. *Established* patterns.

And substituting other ones,

After 5 books, over the course of which she had appeared incapable of depicting parents who did not love their own children — however they may have felt about other peoples' children, and regardless of how poor a job they may have been doing at raising theirs — she suddenly introduced us to the Gaunts.

That was a nasty shock.

Of course by doing so she completely blunted the impact of her insistence that the whole problem of Tom Riddle was that he loved no one and that no one had ever loved him. Implying that this was because he did not have parents of his own and was raised in an orphanage. After all, Harry is all right, isn't he? And he only had his parents for some 15 months.

Well, perhaps this could be the case, but that possibility distracted us from the dungbomb that Rowling smuggled in under her cloak in that by the time we encountered her, Merope Gaunt appears to have been every bit as unloved as her son *ever* was. Indeed, more so.

We don't know at what age she lost her mother, either.

The whole tragedy of Merope Gaunt is a nasty, ugly, cruel little ditty played off in a side hall in the middle of the sym-



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phony of Albus Dumbledore. In fact we are now expected to understand that it was the prelude to the overture of the grand opera that was Tom Riddle.

And, as in the work of a great many composers, various themes get replayed at crucial moments in the finished work. That particular one certainly was.

Go and reread 'The Prince's Tale'.

It's the SAME bloody story.

It's the story of Merope Gaunt, "lite." ("Lite" because Severus didn't do anything to coerce Lily, he just called her an ugly name and she dumped him.)

Harry was drawing his straight line between Snape and the wrong Riddle.

And regardless of any mendacious and insincere claptrap Rowling may decide to hand us off-canon about how Lily "might" have one day loved Snape if he had only renounced the Dark Arts, any suggestion along those lines — even from the author — is a total crock.

That association was never going to end any other way than it did.

Rowling's equally mendacious claptrap about how, yes, Snape was loved — "which makes even him more culpable than Voldemort," is another crock. He certainly was never loved by Lily Evans, and if he was ever loved by his parents, they seem to have got over it rather quickly. *We* certainly saw none of it.

And the melody is just as nasty, ugly and cruel as it was the first time we heard it



I've said for years that once you see something happen in this

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series it is exponentially more than likely to happen again.

Even the things you really wish wouldn't.

Merope ought to have served us as a dire warning. She turns out to have been a veritable canary in a coal mine. Somehow once it finally clicks, it throws the whole Lily/James issue into context. Particularly when you factor in Rowling's smug insistence over young Snape's "greedy" regard. (Ghods forbid that a child who is starved for some, hell, *any* kind of human contact should have the gall to appear hungry — unless of course he is also handsome!) I feel sure Rowling would have described poor Merope's longing looks after Tom Riddle Sr in exactly the same insulting tones.

And if the parallel is as tight as I think it was, Snape didn't truly *love* Lily, he *worshiped* her*. He never thought of her as his *equal*.

And, apparently, neither did she. She permitted his devotion for just as long as it suited her, and then brushed him off, and never looked back any more than Tom Sr did.

[* It was Swythyv who made an observation which offers an alternate reading. Although the resulting interpretation is just as tragic, it is, perhaps, not quite so vile. I tend to be allergic to Arthurian themes, so the reference had passed right over my head. She pointed out to me that Snape's devotion to Lily was a perfect textbook illustration of the medieval concept of the "courtly love" so beloved of troubadours back around the 12th–15th centuries. This was a form of love which was never designed to be consummated. Instead a Knight vowed to serve one Lady in "domnei" and to take her as his inspiration of all that was worthy. Under this interpretation the Pensieve junket was

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the horrible day in which Snape — a decidedly ill-made Knight — yielded to temptation, denied his Lady, and insulted her name. His eternal penance, even unto death is perfectly in keeping with this particular tradition. Of course it recasts Lily into a sort of ‘La Belle Dame Sans Merci’, but that’s pretty traditional, too.]

I now wonder whether perhaps Slughorn’s sorrowful statements regarding the power of obsessive love may have been on the order of a coal mine canary as well. He may or may not have taught Merope, and eventually learned the end of her story. But he certainly taught Snape. And Lily. And he’d have had to watch them show up at Hogwarts together, and he’d seen the whole thing play out to its end under his nose. And there wasn’t a damned thing he could do about it.

Perhaps it’s no wonder he never let out even a peep of that association to Harry.



But, back at that point in the series there wasn’t anything to point in one direction over the other. Like I say, it was entirely possible to speculate that Tobias and Eileen may have made up their differences, and could now be living quite comfortably in one of the other terraced houses a couple of streets over, while their son camps out over the summer in his grandparents’ old place, that he inherited from them, and comes over for dinner twice a week.

There is no question but that for a working class boy from a mill town, to marry a witch can maximize your standard of living. For that matter, when the recession hit Industrial Britain in the ’70s, while Severus was at Hogwarts, Tobias Snape may very well have found himself unemployed, on the dole, and such mag-

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ical maximization could have made a real difference between reasonable comfort and mere survival. Severus may simply have later inherited his Prince grandparents’ house and lived there in the summers in order to avoid having to fit his own comings and goings into a very small house with his own parents as a grown man who is pushing 40.

But I tended to doubt it. Although Eileen could yet have turned out to be alive and have a flat of her own elsewhere. (She wouldn’t be much older than 60.) The probability is still greatest that everyone in the Potterverse who doesn’t happen to live with their parents is not necessarily an orphan. Although it sure doesn’t look much like it from this end of the series.

There was always a good deal of reason to suppose that Snape had grown up in the house in Spinners’ End. Or at the very least had spent a great deal of his childhood there. Rowling informs us (although why we should believe her I don’t know. Ghod knows she’s reversed herself often enough by now) that it is only the actual Muggle-born students who are typically sent to Muggle primary schools. Wizarding families educate their children at home, largely for security reasons.

Snape allegedly turned up at Hogwarts at the beginning of his first year rather better educated, magically, than most of his peers (to put it mildly). Although how that claim is supposed to jibe with the parental neglect on display in ‘The Prince’s Tale’ I don’t know. I thought during the two-year interregnum after HBP that it may well have been his grandparents who saw to his early education. Given the economic situation of a defunct mill town in the ’60s, Eileen may have needed to take a job, herself, even if Tobias *had* stuck around. Particularly if her husband

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had lost his job, leaving her to take over as breadwinner. And the necessity of her finding some form of employment would be practically a certainty if she had been abandoned by her husband and had returned to her parents' house.

In the first case young Severus might well have been packed off to his grandparents' house in the morning, returning to his own home with his mother when she went off shift. And, upon the whole, either one of these possibilities seemed a more likely reading than that she had raised him on her own, on the dole.

I'm not of the opinion that Rowling's version is any kind of an improvement, because it leaves far too many of our original questions unanswered, raises a whole raft of new ones, and does not altogether account for what she had already told us some books earlier. Although it really isn't *that* broadly different in every particular.



In any case, the issue raised here that seems to be clearest is that Snape, unlike Tom Riddle or Harry Potter, was wizarding-raised, for the most part. Even if the wizards who raised him were living incognito out among Muggles, in a predominantly Muggle town, well away from others of their own kind. He was brought up understanding wizarding practices and wizarding culture, and by the time he boarded the Hogwarts Express, there was probably nothing in any of his speech or manner to tip anyone off to the fact that he was a halfblood.

Just that he was a common little prole, probably complete with a working-class, regional accent. Which he soon learned to suppress, adopting the speech and mannerisms of the chil-

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dren from better-connected families, of which there was no shortage in Slytherin House.

All of which undoubtedly did him few favors in the eyes of the likes of James Potter and Sirius Black who, already being at the top of the social tree, despised him for his refusal to remain at the bottom. Social-climbers rarely gain the approval of those on the level that they aspire to.

Regarding the "good Professor's" character; what, from our glimpse into the Pensieve, and was later confirmed by Rowling in a far more extensive trip into the Pensieve, seems most likely is that what young Severus Snape started off from was a poorly-socialized base, to begin with. And very little real awareness of the fact.

We have no data to confirm any supposition that he attended primary school with Lily Evans. Indeed, despite the fact that they were almost exactly the same age, it was Petunia who pointed out who he was. By that time Lily would have been attending school for some 3–4 years already. Indeed, turning the whole issue around and looking at it from another direction, it seems perfectly reasonable to assume that nosy Petunia was so high-handed and scornful about identifying him as "that Snape boy" might well have been because the "Snape boy" was known to not be in school. And if he was *not* in school, then it was assumed that there was something *wrong* with him.

I think that Snape and Lily's only point of contact was in that playground. He was educated at home, perhaps largely self-educated. He had probably never had to deal with other people his own age until he screwed up his courage to approach Lily Evans in the playground. And we saw about how well that went.

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It is not difficult to postulate an intelligent and under-supervised child with access to an extensive library doing some early perceptual damage to himself unwarily. And it certainly does appear that young Snape may have had access to a reasonably extensive arcane library, as well as a somewhat skewed outlook on the world. Although he may have gotten that from his parents. Or, possibly, his grandparents.

Such perceptual damage does not require a library, of course, nor is it necessary for the purposes of interpretation. Precocious magical development and a lack of proper supervision is all that would be required.

Tom Riddle certainly had no access to such a library, and doesn't appear to have needed one. Nor for that matter did Lily Evans, whose willingness to "use" friends until she made higher status ones is certainly no indication of a warm heart.

In fact, from everything we've been told in canon so far, if there is anyone else we've met who might have sustained some degree of this kind of perceptual damage — whether or not through a history of incidents involving precocious, wandless magic — one of our best candidates is probably Fred Weasley. Possibly George as well. I rather doubt that anyone outside their charmed circle of two ever really quite registered as "real" people to the Weasley twins. They certainly do not treat other people as if they considered them to be "real."

Severus does certainly appear to qualify as a candidate for this style of maladjustment. His level of mental discipline and strength of will could argue against the likelihood of his being much drawn into chaotic hallucinations, however. Or not on an habitual basis. Such damage in very young children while prob-

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ably not unknown would remain decidedly rare. And once they undertake proper instruction in modern wizardry, it probably does not usually progress further.



It is also easy to hypothesize a Prince family history of perfectly legitimate involvement in the Dark Arts to underlay Snape's long-standing interest in and early familiarity with them. After all, the Dark Arts are not illegal.

There is at least a bit to suggest that, as a Hogwarts professor, Snape's personal standing was, until the end of HBP, very much in the middle of wizarding society, both socially and economically. Potion brewing is not likely to be an inexpensive discipline considering its requirement of maintaining a broad range of physical equipment and its steady demand for consumable supplies, and I am sure that he maintained his own personal equipment and supplies as well as using those provided by the school.

He also appears to direct more than a passing interest in the cut and presumably the quality of his clothing and personal effects. (Reminding me forcibly of "My Father, the Clothes-horse.") Snape's robes may or may not come straight off the ready-made rack, rather than being custom tailored (I suspect that manual customizing is rare in the ww, magical alterations being so much simpler and widely available), and they may not be of the highest possible quality materials, however well he may wear them. These are work robes, after all, but we have yet to be told anything of such matters, and I doubt that we ever will be. Without knowing just how well the teachers at Hogwarts are paid (according to Slughorn, not lavishly, but Sluggy has

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expensive tastes) we cannot really postulate whether Snape was living up to the last knut of his salary, doing just fine and putting something aside for his old age, or supplementing his salary with private income from unidentified sources. And it is unlikely that Rowling will ever decide to take us there. But the fact remains that socially at least, teaching is inarguably a “profession” rather than merely a “job.”

Another major issue which is still completely unclear in canon is just to what extent Professor Snape may share the typical Death Eater attitude toward wizards and witches from Muggle families or those of mixed ancestry. The fact that the term “mudblood” was never heard to pass his lips until OotP, and then only during an incident which took place some 20 years earlier, under what must be admitted to have been circumstances of considerable duress, made this issue a particularly difficult one to draw any firm conclusion about. (In DHs we were finally given to understand that while he was brought up regarding Muggles with a degree of contempt, he did not seem to have any real objection to witches or wizards from Muggle backgrounds until he was Sorted into Slytherin and adopted the local protective coloring. And, unfortunately, its vocabulary.)

All of which, to me, had raised yet another interesting possibility as to his background, before the uncertainty was finally blown away in the course of HBP.

The fact that Snape joined, and was *able* to join, the Death Eaters at all seems to make it fairly clear that he at least did not give the appearance of finding their stated agenda repellent in itself. And, yes, I did assume that Snape’s early upbringing probably had all of the underpinnings of conventional wizarding big-

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otry. Particularly if his grandparents were indeed purebloods, even if very “new” ones.

Still, even if they were not, I suspected that he may well have gotten either the “it doesn’t really matter. A clever boy like you, you’ll do all right.” version, or more the “Arr, don’t y’ be expecting the likes of they to be extending the hand o’ friendship t’ the likes o’ you, boy. You’ll be finding out otherwise.”

But by whatever road, certain assumptions would have been bound to have slipped through. He was a sharp little thing. Before he ever boarded the Hogwarts Express he would have known that mentioning his Muggle dad was not a good idea. And if his dad was no longer in the picture it could hardly be wondered at if he identified with his mother’s family.

For one thing; it seemed that he was almost certainly raised in an atmosphere where it was considered acceptable to look down upon the Muggles all around them, or upon wizards or witches who were raised completely outside the wizarding world and, consequently, had no ingrained sense of what he would have been taught to consider the “right” way to regard matters. His grandparents or his mother may well have been the ones who first insisted upon the sort of “more pureblood than thou” stance that he seems to have adopted.

However, apart from the one incident which we saw in the Pensieve junket, which took place when he was 16, virtually every example that we had ever seen of Snape’s frequent attempts to “pull rank” were based upon some factor other than the purity of his bloodline. It was always either his age, or his position, or his knowledge, or his experience or his own personal worth. We never in close to 3300 pages of text ever

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saw him try to play the “family” card. We never — outside of the Pensieve — saw him openly waving the blood-status flag in anybody’s face, either.

Which, in retrospect, and, given the widespread acceptance of such bigoted attitudes within the wizarding world, particularly in his own House, began to look rather odd, even as early as GoF.

The fact that he might have been a pureblood (a possibility which was still more assumed than established. Slytherin House had accepted at least one notable halfblood to our certain knowledge) seemed not to be a fact that he regarded as holding sufficient weight for him to attempt to deploy it in his jockeying to maintain a position of dominance, even in direct conflicts with known Muggle-born, mixed blood, or even cross-breed members of the other Houses.

At the time it seemed most likely to me that his restraint on this subject was merely in accordance with school policy as regards the conduct of the staff. We’d heard that sort of bilge from none of the other teachers, either (apart from Hagrid who is one of the worst bigots in canon). But by that point it also began to seem entirely possible that Snape had some more specific reason for not attempting to invoke the advantage of bloodline.

Given that this particular consideration is of such absolute and all-absorbing importance among the ranks of pureblood supremacists suggested to me that it was possible that Snape did not raise this point because he *could* not raise this point. That, by the criterion of the likes of Malfoy and company, he did not quite qualify as a “real” pureblood, even if the unfortu-

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nate mudblood or Muggle ancestor could be several generations back in history.

It seemed not at all impossible that some of Snape’s more recent forebearers were not as exacting over the matter of their bloodlines as their descendants had since become. There could be a bonafide wizard/Muggle or Pureblood/Muggle-born marriage lurking somewhere in the Snape family woodshed.

I would have estimated at least 3 and more probably something like 4 generations back. Which would chime with my postulation elsewhere that there is some sort of a “4th generation” perception that designates someone as a halfblood in modern wizarding society. Under a 9th generation system, such a documented Muggle connection could even date to the early or pre-Seclusion period. Long enough ago for it not to really matter anywhere except in Slytherin House. But then he was Sorted into Slytherin House.



Post-HBP It can be seen that I was certainly on the right track in this reasoning, even though I just as obviously did not come Even Close, as far as guessing the truth.

Post-HBP I suspected that Snape had probably set off to Hogwarts confident in the awareness of being “as good” as any pureblood in either knowledge, power, or skill, but that it would be a mistake to allow anyone to know the truth that his father was actually a Muggle. I also suspected that he would, upon being Sorted into Slytherin, have got a very rude shock. I thought that however much he may have picked up from his family’s unconscious assumptions, the level of disdain held in

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common for wizards of mixed ancestry in Slytherin House was far higher than he had ever anticipated.

He would also have soon been made very aware that, even though he might have been assumed to be a pureblood by outsiders by default in having been Sorted into Slytherin at all, his own housemates would have been perfectly well aware that there are no Snapes listed in 'NATURE'S NOBILITY', or any other wizarding genealogy, and that given his poverty and lack of illustrious background it was soon made clear to him that he was only being "graciously" allowed to participate in the activities of his better-connected fellows for the sake of his skills and his potential usefulness.

This also suggested that the possibility of his having once been picked up by a group of older kids and summarily dropped would have smarted all the more.

His relationship with Lucius Malfoy, such as we had seen it presented to date, strongly supported the possibility of it having grown out of some act of patronage on Malfoy's part. Possibly in the wake of a prior humiliation at the hands of some other upperclassmen. And for that matter, Snape's overall prickliness of temperament might well be grounded upon a resentment over the fact that, do what he may, to a lot of the people whose opinions matter in that world, he will never be "quite" good enough to be accounted an equal.

In the event, however, his blood was certainly pure enough to be acceptable to Voldemort. But then, I suspect that the majority of Voldemort's own followers did not necessarily know for sure that their leader was the son of a witch and a Muggle.

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This piece wanders off into realms that Rowling quite determinedly did not explore. I cannot feel particularly motivated to care.

Along with many theorists, I originally thought, prior to HBP's release, that in the early days of Voldemort's first rise there probably were as many different individual reasons why people signed up in support of his movement as there were people who had supported him back in school. We were certainly led to assume as much. By Albus himself, too.

On a closer examination, we discover that Albus actually only tells us that there were a wide variety of reasons for why a collection of other *schoolboys* chose to trail about after young Tom Riddle. And subverting or overthrowing the legitimate wizarding government certainly hadn't had anything to do with *any* of them.



Although Albus gives us a number of different reasons why Riddle's hangers-on at Hogwarts might have been attracted to his circle, when it actually came time for Tom to set up the Death Eaters, and get down to the serious business of fomenting anarchy, with the exception of a few of his own contemporaries from foreign parts, who he managed to reel in during the years of his exile — or very soon after, Riddle's earliest followers turn out to have been handpicked individuals from among the most "promising" of his own ex-schoolmates.

i.e., He *chose* them. And they hadn't the sense (or just possibly had too much of a sense of entitlement) to tell him no. And there were probably no more than a handful of them. At least for the first several years.

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But seriously, I really doubt that all that many of his former tag-alongs actually made the cut. And his later followers were, for the most part, merely his first selection's descendants. No one really gave *them* a choice at all. Sirius Black's spoutings on the subject notwithstanding, Tom's was a very *private* club.

This original core group was later augmented with a number of recruits who were the first lot's younger siblings and cousins or from other families of similar background and sentiments who, by a mere chance of timing, had been without representatives at Hogwarts in Tom's own school days. In addition there seem to be a few like-minded individuals who were positioned well enough or were considered useful enough to have been approached by his recruiters.

Virtually all of whom were first roped into the gestalt while they were actually *at* Hogwarts.

And I solidly believe that by the time of his defeat in '81 there were never more than 50–60 of them at the most.

After the official Riddle backstory that we were handed in HBP, this makes perfect sense, once you consider it.

After all, when you can turn most people into puppets with a spell, why take the trouble to give them a big sales pitch?

That and the fact is that *no one* can reliably control mobs. But a well-organized gang of 50–60 can do an amazing amount of damage under such conditions.

Particularly when the population you are setting out to terrorize only numbers about 3,000–5,000 (acto Rowling).

But there do appear to be at least a few followers who were recruited from outside his typical demographic. These followers undoubtedly had their own reasons for signing on with the

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former Tom Riddle's band of merry men.

Assuming they were given any authentic choice in the matter.

We have all been given enough hints inside of canon to suspect that some of Severus Snape's biggest reasons for signing on might be traced back to something like Lucius Malfoy's influence. Or, at least I am sure his fellow Death Eaters may believe this to be the case.

They could be right.



Which brought me into the path of another toppling domino. This one hit me on the head during the first year of rethinking, after the release of HBP.

By that point it seemed to me that we had all turned out to be suffering under some assumptions that had been hanging on since the beginning of the series, back at a point that we really didn't have a lot of solid information to go by.

We've all seen how that works. You start with a premise which really is the best you can come up with from very little data. And then as you get additional bits of data you roll them into the premise wherever they seem to fit, or make them fit. And by the end of the exercise you find that you've created a chimera, cobbled together from odds and ends that makes no zoological sense whatsoever.

There are a lot of such chimeras roaming about in Harry Potter fandom. Not to mention canon. There are probably still a few lurking in this essay collection, too.

And it had finally sunk in for me that the whole fact that Snape was a DE *at all* is probably another one. It makes very

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little sense once examined. WHY should Severus Snape have ever *wanted* to be a DE?

He was ugly, and he was a Slytherin and he doesn't like Harry Potter. So? Are those the requirements? The younger fans seemed to all be content with that. But it doesn't really read, does it? It's a good thing that Rowling finally gave us the werewolf caper and the Pensieve junket right when she did or we would have no excuse to go on believing it at all.

Indeed, the readers' whole reason for having ever even suspected him of being a DE was that he was the Head of Slytherin, he openly disliked Harry, and that Harry and Ron disliked *him*.

And at that, all that those particular incidents really establish is that he had very good reason to hate Harry's father. Actually supporting Voldemort isn't a logical conclusion to be drawn from that. He'd have done rather better to have become an Auror himself and seen Potter and Black locked up the next time they tried to hex him.

I mean stop to think for a moment; just what do we know about the young Severus Snape?

He was a literal halfblood.

He was working-class.

His mother's family might be magical but they seem to have been complete non-entities. So far as we can tell they had no money, no status, no illustrious bloodlines, no "connections." I'm not even convinced they actually were purebloods.

He was ugly. Or homely at the very least.

He wasn't popular. People did not follow his lead.

He was clever.

Are ANY of these qualities that the DEs seem to be looking for?

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Even his cleverness makes an unconvincing reason for most of them to have wanted to keep him around. They care about *status*, not cleverness. And he didn't have any status to share. For that matter, does Tom Riddle sound like the sort of leader who likes to surround himself with *clever* people? Has he in fact done so? Frankly it looks to me like the more you can pass yourself off as a cringing, credulous moron — with good bloodlines — the better Tom seems to like it.

The DEs are Tom's *collection*. He set out to enlist and bring under his own subjection the very cream of wizarding society. What possible value would he have seen in Severus Snape? From that society's viewpoint Snape is nobody. Indeed, Snape's background is far too much like Tom's own, and if Tom had any inkling of just how sharp the kid was he would probably have killed him off him as a matter of principle. Snape would have looked too much like a potential rival.

Assuming that Tom Riddle recognized the possibility of his *having* any rivals, that is. Fortunately he doesn't seem to.



And from the other end of the equation, take away the fact that the Marauders were probably loudly against them, and what possible attraction would the DEs have for Snape? (Well, post-DHs we are now supposed to believe that some of the future DEs were the only people who would give him the time of day. But let's follow my original line of argument, shall we?) The Death Eaters are an *illegal* organization. Being a DE certainly doesn't guarantee you preferential treatment in society or professional advancement.

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The thing is that back when Lucius Malfoy was still standing in as the DE poster child, a reader could just about believe it might.

After all, who *wouldn't* want to be in Malfoy's position? If that is what the DEs were, then they sounded like just any other rather nasty-minded fraternal organization with a secret handshake and its own entrenched "old boy's" network that could push its own scions up the ladder to where they could advance their public agenda in the government. From inside the system. The idea of joining the DEs for the sake of sponsorship and personal advancement still made sense then.

Post HBP it didn't make any kind of sense at all. The DEs are Tom Riddle's private gang. Worse, they are his *slaves*. And he sends them out to take all the risks while he sits in the background and benefits. The DEs are, and have always been outlaws. Being a DE gives you *nothing*. Sure, it makes normal people afraid of the *idea* of you, but you can't even use that "advantage" openly by publicly admitting you *are* one. What use is it? Why on earth would anyone over the age of 25 want it? It's small wonder the gang uses Hogwarts as its recruiting headquarters. The whole concept makes no sense whatsoever except to pissed-off adolescents. And *they* are deluded.

And the slow-to-catch-up-with-us fact is that Malfoy was not even that big of a frog in the DE pond. Even the fan perception of his being Riddle's second in command turns out to be somewhat off-target by the end of HBP.

Riddle *had* no second in command. He never did. That perception was entirely due to the Ministry projecting a rational hierarchy onto an organization that is not rational. Instead, Riddle had 4-5 "pets" that he played off against one another

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and Malfoy was simply one of them. He was probably the youngest and most newly acquired "collectible" toy in the play-box. Or at least the latest one Tom acknowledged. He was the "new kid." It's small wonder Bellatrix despises Lucius so. He replaced her as the baby of the "family."

And I suspect that Snape would initially have only been accepted by Riddle and his followers under Malfoy's patronage. Essentially, Malfoy smuggled Snape into the organization under his cloak. A few of the younger DEs (Avery, Mulciber) were probably willing enough to let him tag along back at Hogwarts. The older ones might have happily just bullied Snape into doing their bidding if they thought he could be useful (and they would have enjoyed the bullying part of it), or Imperiused him to do their dirty work and laughed when he was caught. But they would never have invited a grubby little commoner like Snape into their secret club. Not even after he cleaned himself up.

No, the "join or die" option was reserved for scions of families that mattered, like the Prewett brothers, or Dean Thomas's biological father. Not for Snape, or anyone like him.



Malfoy's own motivations are easy enough to understand. Lucius Malfoy is essentially a political animal. And he does have some degree of leadership potential. He had also trained under Slughorn, and unlike Tom, had learned the lesson that was actually being taught. He viewed the situation through a political lens, and decided that by putting together his own crack team of operatives he could make himself look good and enhance his value to the Leader, in hope for advancement. He

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undoubtedly *did* have intentions of becoming second-in-command, and ultimately of inheriting the top position. In a normal organization, with a normal leader, he may have had a fighting chance to have done it, too.

It is uncertain as to whether Malfoy had ever quite realized, before Tom's first defeat, that he had advanced as far as he was ever going to as long as Voldemort was around by the day he joined up. Despite all Voldemort's speeches about becoming immortal, I doubt his followers believed he had managed it yet.

But you will notice that it was Malfoy, and no other who launched a (nearly successful) attempt to re-establish and take over the organization in Voldemort's absence. From *Malfoy's* perspective, Snape was a desirable acquisition, regardless of his bloodlines.

Because I doubt very much that anyone (other than, perhaps, Harry) would have been a bit surprised to learn that Snape was no pureblood. Stop and think about it. The wizarding world is a very small community, and no more than a quarter of its members are purebloods. It stands to reason that there are no more than 100-150 of what count as pureblood families in all Great Britain and Ireland. And anyone who really cares about such things already knows who they are. They will all have their own entries in 'NATURE'S NOBILITY', which appears to be the wizarding equivalent of Debrett's. And "Snape" is certainly not going to be a name that is found there.

For that matter, from Draco's parroting of; "My father says" upon our first introduction to him in Madam Malkin's, it sounds like it isn't actually wizarding *blood* that Malfoy was making into an issue, so much as it was wizarding *upbringing*. And

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Snape certainly had some degree of that.

Snape's peers wouldn't have necessarily known that he was a literal halfblood with an actual Muggle father. But with half of the population counting descent from Muggle or Muggle-born forebearers the fact that Snape was not a traditional wizarding name would hardly be remarked upon.

And besides, Snape was obviously wizarding-raised. He knew far too much about magic when he first arrived at Hogwarts not to be. The highest sticklers, like the Blacks, may claim that it makes no difference, but I suspect that among most of the wizarding public, that much really does.



We were finally told outright in Order of the Phoenix that Lucius Malfoy is some 5-6 years older than Severus Snape (and the Marauders) and that their years at Hogwarts would have overlapped by a matter of 2 years at the most. Barely long enough for Lucius to have noted young Severus as "that scrawny little kid who knows all those curses" and for Severus to have learned that the Malfoys were "important people that you really want to know."

We have also been told more than once that young Snape was openly fascinated by the Dark Arts, and there is no question that the opportunity to study and practice them would have served as a powerful lure, regardless of whatever other agenda was being trumpeted along with it.

But the fact is that apparently you can study and practice the Dark Arts quite legally within the ww without needing to associate with DEs in order to do it. So that argument is no longer

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an altogether convincing reason for his involvement, either.

Snape, I do think was a late bloomer — or even a *non-bloomer* — in any social or emotional context. Even at the end of the series he appears to be arrested in late adolescence with no desire or intention of moving on to any higher stage of maturity. I think we are supposed to conclude that in his youthful fascination with the Dark Arts he never thought to question the soundness of the values held by the typical sorts of people who practice them.

But we could also be being given a clear example here where the preoccupations of the dominant faction within Slytherin House did one of the House's members a considerable disservice.

As I have stated in the essay regarding the Hogwarts Houses, and elsewhere; Rowling is in her most spectacularly self-contradictory mode where she lays out the values of Slytherin House. First: it is presumably the house of the pureblood. Well, okay. That is easy enough to wrap one's head around. But: it is also the Dark Arts house. Well, that's okay too. No obvious contradiction there. If the Dark Arts are a part of what is now a largely obsolete wizarding tradition, it would probably be only the most traditional of wizarding families which might still gravitate to them.

But then she goes on to tell us that the criterion the Hat uses for sorting kids into Slytherin is ambition. Ambition? WTF?! What has *ambition* to do with being a pureblood? What possible effect could any amount of ambition have on *becoming* a pureblood?

No can do, Charlie. In a society in which being pureblooded assures you of preference, as a matter of course, any effect that

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being a pureblood might have upon ambition would most probably be to dampen it. If you've already "arrived," what further effort is necessary? What is there left to strive for? A sense of *entitlement* is not ambition. At least not on this side of the pond. Arrogance is not ambition. Ambition requires *drive* more than just greed. ("Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.")

"Ambition" would also seem to be diametrically opposed to the kind of semi-languid, drawling "Slytherin manner" repeatedly demonstrated by Draco Malfoy.

And yet the Hat recognized where to send Draco immediately. Can someone explain this to me? I just don't get it. Is this a clue? To what? Will there be a test?

However, given that Slytherin seems to be the only House that *has* a tradition of openly supporting the Dark Arts, and that within that House, in the absence of great charisma, it's usually the purest of the purebloods who are the social leaders, such considerations would tend to muddy the waters in the perception of a very poorly-socialized 11-year old on the order of what one now understands to be the case of the young Severus Snape. If all the Dark wizards he has ever met think like such-and-such, then it might be quite a while before he realizes that adopting this particular mental outlook wholesale is, first; not necessary, and second; not necessarily "him."



There is another factor involved here in that by the time Snape arrived at Hogwarts, Slytherin House was well into its second generation of feeling the "Riddle Effect" wherein the sons and daughters of Tom Riddle's hand-picked original Death

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Eaters were now working their way through the school, and there were enough of them to make them a dominant faction. They also were serving as Tom's recruitment team, actively attaching and recruiting others like themselves to Riddle's cause while they were there.

Now that we've finally met Horace Slughorn, it is fairly clear what must have happened. Tom Riddle showed up and coolly stole Slughorn's House right out from under his nose. Vain, weak, and opportunistic as Slughorn may be, he is clearly a man of good will, and also someone that Albus Dumbledore was willing to introduce as a friend.

And while Sluggo's disavowal of bigotry should probably be taken with a very hefty dash of salt, bigotry is certainly not the guiding principle of his existence, and he clearly *believes* that he has risen above what were obviously the attitudes of his upbringing. And for those good intentions he must be given some credit. The preoccupations attributed to Slytherin House today were certainly not introduced to it by Horace Slughorn.

I think that Snape did definitely want to *belong* somewhere by the time he got to Hogwarts (although not to such a degree as to get himself sorted into Hufflepuff). The capsule glimpses we got of his childhood during Harry's penultimate Occlumency lesson looked pretty alienating to me, and few youngsters manage to flourish in that sort of atmosphere. But he seems to have been not at all selective about what he wanted to belong to.

Serious self-esteem issues there? Perhaps. Who knows? Were the Death Eaters the only people who welcomed him? Well, it could be. Unlikely as it may seem when examined, I've

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certainly been wrong before. *Malfoy* seems to have encouraged him anyway. And found him potentially very useful. I doubt that Bellatrix and her lot would have.

But again, who knows? Clearly; however bright he may be, he appears to have demonstrated seriously bad judgment as a youth by the very fact that they managed to enlist him at all.



But now that the question has been raised, we are stuck with its corollary, another "rarely asked question," of; why on earth anyone with Snape's background would have *wanted* to have anything to do with the DEs?

You just don't get power and prestige from membership in an illegal organization that you cannot even admit to membership in. And it is turning out that the DEs really aren't on any inside track to an old-boy's network that could have given him a boost up the professional ladder. He'd have been far better off to have swallowed his pride and buttered up Slughorn if he wanted that. Slughorn would have happily obliged.

Yes, Snape despised James Potter and Sirius Black, and they had certainly been striking poses of being against the Dark Arts (although not enough against them to be able to refrain from using Snape's own hexes against him — assuming that those hexes had been even remotely Dark). So? Is Snape so lacking in confidence that he needs the backing of the DEs in order to get back at *that* precious pair? Hardly. Even at odds of four against one he wasn't doing that badly. And once out in the real world a sharp customer gets far greater latitude to play off against a rival than one gets while you are actually in High School. Par-

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ticularly against a rival with no ambition.

And Snape was a very sharp customer. And James Potter *had* no ambition. And we've got no indication whatsoever in canon that while he was still in school the DEs would have known James Potter from a hole in the ground.

So what's the connection? Assuming there is one.
I am no longer convinced there was one.



So why did Snape join the DEs? Did he join up because he suspected that to refuse might be seriously bad for his health? That could well be. It doesn't explain why they would have extended the offer in the first place, however. He just plain *didn't* fit their demographic.

Did he sign up just to oblige Malfoy? That's at least *marginally* possible. The Malfoys' patronage would *definitely* have been useful, quite apart from his little illegal pressure group. And we do get a distinct impression even as far back as CoS that Snape and Malfoy really are friends. Of a sort.

And just because Malfoy treats House Elves badly doesn't mean that particular behavior necessarily carries over to his own lieutenants as well.

But you have to wonder whether Snape would have joined up *only* to oblige Malfoy. And when clearly examined there really isn't much that the DEs could offer Snape that he wouldn't have had a rather better chance of going out and getting on his own. (Admittedly, without them he is unlikely to have been Headmaster of Hogwarts at the age of 37.)

Unless he had a covert motive that we simply haven't been

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told about yet. I do postulate that in some of the other essays in the collection.

Because I absolutely do not believe Rowling's brain-dead suggestion (from an interview, as usual, the majority of her most absurd statements seem to come from those) that he joined up in hopes of impressing Lily with how cool he was after she'd already dumped him. I think Rowling was deliberately tweaking our noses there. Or confusing Snape and Lily with two other people.

All of the usual suggestions, up to the aftermath of HBP, and the "official fanon interpretation" are that he may have come rather late to finally start thinking for himself. And that it may have taken a considerable jolt to get him started. Being taken up by Malfoy's circle wouldn't have helped matters. Nor would being gratuitously targeted for persecution by the "other side" have been likely to encourage him to question the soundness of his own "side".

Which raises the question of whether those earliest "bad companions" were, properly speaking, Malfoy's circle at all.

Bellatrix Black was by all accounts a staggeringly beautiful young woman. With all the confidence that one might expect from a girl who had clearly adopted her family's attitude that being "one of the Blacks" made you practically royal. Her family wasn't exactly suffering from penury, either.

Within Slytherin House, and possibly even outside it, she may have been decidedly popular. Indeed, regarded as a considerable "catch".

That "gang" of Slytherins that Sirius cites as having been the people Snape ran about with (dismissing the dates on the

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dodgy tapestry sketch since it flatly contradicts what's printed in canon); "the Lestranges", Rosier, Wilkes, Avery, et als., I am suddenly noticing that we don't seem to get the names of any other girls in that list, do we? Not even Narcissa's, although we now know that she was at Hogwarts too. She'd be maybe a 4th year in the Marauder cohort's 1st year.

Nor do we get Lucius Malfoy's name in that account, although Malfoy was also at Hogwarts at that time. He was at the very least a 6th year to Bellatrix's 7th year. Indeed, we later saw him there in 'The Prince's Tale'.

Which leads one to wonder how many of the names Sirius gave us back in GoF when he was recollecting Snape's "gang" were the names of 7th years. Or, indeed, how many were actually still at Hogwarts at all. Sirius Black has a track record of making grand pronouncements which later turn out to be complete fabrications. During the course of GoF he could still be conflating the names of future DEs who were at school with him, with those of the DEs who were sentenced to Azkaban after he was there.

Indeed, it might well be safest to just dismiss anything that Sirius Black ever had to say on the subject. But by this time we have rather a lot invested in trying to make it make sense.

From DHs we have now been told that Avery was still in the school at least as late as the Marauder cohort's 5th year. Although I doubt that he was in the same year as they were. We didn't see him sitting the OWLs. Or discussing them with Snape afterwards.

There was evidently also a Mulciber at Hogwarts. Who Sirius did not mention. Probably because Rowling did not

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recall from what context she had previously mentioned a Mulciber. The only Mulciber we had ever heard of prior to DHs was originally one of Riddle's contemporaries, not Snape's. So now we have two Mulcibers.

Frankly I suspect she wrote Mulciber but *meant* Evan Rosier — and was too burnt out to double-check her notes.

However, for the moment treating the information as if it were legitimate, let's follow this thread and see if it leads us to anything worth having.

For that matter; I think that if an 11-year-old Snape showed up knowing, if not more hexes than half the 7th years, he certainly knew some different ones — for he very good reason that he had made some of them up himself — and if he was still naïve enough to boast about it, some of that clique of 7th years may have swooped in to flatter the common little tyke, and pick his brains to their own advantage, even while holding him in contempt for his poverty, his gullibility, and his undistinguished background all the while.

I'm inclined to think that the hexes he showed up with were actually rather mild ones, but they were clever and they were unexpected. And they probably allowed for a degree of variation. He was soon being encouraged to come up with more aggressive ones, and he was pleased to comply.

Bellatrix is not very good at gratitude, however, neither is she a master at concealing her true opinions of people. Nor — however surprisingly for a Slytherin — does she seem to have the least bit of political acumen. For that matter, I think it most likely that Bellatrix would have disdained the little halfblood from the outset, and let him know it. It would have been someone else in

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her circle who had taken him up. Probably over her objections.

And Snape — even a socially-backward, 11-year-old Snape — was still probably pretty sharp, at least in some areas. I don't think that it would have taken until the end of the year before he realized that he was being used. And if he got surly about it to their faces, they would have not hesitated to slap him down and have thrown some of his own hexes at him for good measure. In any case, I doubt that Snape was sorry to see the backs of Bellatrix and her friends at the end of the year.

Malfoy, by then at least 6th year (if not already a 7th year himself), might have been a very different proposition. For one thing, arrogant as he is, he probably had a better idea of just how useful a clever, inventive kid like Snape could be over the long term. He was also in a position to give back some tangible return for Snape's cooperation.

And if Malfoy was a prefect, and he was one of Slughorn's pets, so that was almost a given, (which was confirmed in DHs), he might even have been in a position to come to the rescue when Snape was being "punished" for impertinence in the above scenario.

For whatever reasons of his own. I don't really get the feeling Lucius ever had any more time for Bellatrix than she did for him. Or if he did, he got over it pretty quickly. He might have interceded on Snape's behalf just to annoy her.

Where Bellatrix would only exploit, Malfoy was willing to cultivate. And Malfoy may well have already had his nose out of joint as regards Bellatrix as well. I very much doubt that Bellatrix Black was anywhere near as deferential in her recognition of the glories of Lucius Malfoy as Lucius Malfoy considered that

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she ought to be. And we get no sense of there being any love lost between them to the day she died. He might very well have taken up the little commoner, just to spite her.



Still, we've also seen the way Malfoy reacts as soon as anyone thwarts or challenges him. And Snape has a temper. I'm not convinced that a Malfoy-Snape alliance was necessarily a smooth-running machine. But it did run — the traditional Slytherin network of favors and obligations (which Slughorn does enthusiastically teach and endorse) would have assured that much, whatever the two principals of the alliance happened to really think of each other.

But Malfoy was gone from Hogwarts by the end of Snape's Year 2 at the very latest. And Narcissa probably at the end of Snape's Year 4, the year her younger cousin Regulus had first shown up. We do not know who among those circles were left by the beginning of Snape's 5th year other than Avery and "Mulciber" (Rosier). The probability is that Regulus Black started his first year in Snape's 4th, and, we assume, Barty Crouch Jr in his 6th (although it was a real missed opportunity not to have him starting — probably over in Ravenclaw — in Snape's 2nd). But we have no information to support the idea that Snape was in the habit of hanging around with any of these three; Narcissa, Regulus, or Crouch.

And well before the end of his 1st year he had discovered that he had managed to pick up some enemies. Probably before his first year was even properly underway. Four of them. In his own year.

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I am inclined to suspect that if just being pegged as a long-haired sissy whose best friend was a girl, as early as their first trip on the Hogwarts Express wasn't enough, and being taken up (and taken advantage of) by the crowd around "cousin Bella" wasn't sufficient reason all by itself to draw the Marauders' attention, most of the damage would have been done when Snape first started getting a name for himself as a Dark Arts dweeb.

That Snape was getting a fuss made over him by Sirius's gawd-awful cousin Bellatrix's crowd would have been enough in itself to put him on Sirius Black's black list. And, consequently, Sirius would have made a point of doing Snape a bad turn by setting up a system of "Snape Sniping" the minute the opportunity arose. Not at all coincidentally, this would have also deflected any of James's residual knee-jerk aversion to any Dark Arts associations in Sirius's own collection of baggage.

And if James had already decided to target Snape off his own bat — which is perfectly possible — Sirius would have happily egged him on.

James Potter, by all accounts, had been brought up to honestly abhor the Dark Arts. Although, given that it appears that the energies that fuel the Dark Arts are the ones that underpin *all* magic, this sounds like a remarkably silly claim. But Sirius Black, who, however bright, appears to have consistently acted more upon instinct than considered thought; would have instinctively understood that to provide James Potter with a convenient outside target would deflect any of James's potential Dark Arts-related disdain and contempt away from Sirius himself. It was a classic case of "let's you and him fight." It may



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not have been entirely conscious, indeed I very much doubt it originally was conscious at all; but it was certainly deliberate.



In canon, we have been given any number of contradictory bits of information regarding Snape's school days. These chiefly relate to the widely adopted fanon concept of a young Friendless!Snape.

This interpretation certainly appears to be supported by what we saw in our trip into the Pensieve in OotP, where Snape's general unpopularity and solitary behavior would seem to confirm it beyond question. But, in contrast to this, just one year earlier in GoF, Sirius Black had directly tried to convince both Harry, and the rest of us that Snape was *not* friendless at Hogwarts. He had quite clearly stated that Snape was a part of a whole little *gang* of Slytherins, nearly all of whom went on to become Death Eaters. And in DHs we were handed the appearance of a close association with Avery and Mulciber (Rosier).

So, in our trip into the Pensieve, where were they?

For that matter, even in 'The Prince's Tale' in DHs, did we ever see Snape *with* those alleged "friends" Avery and "Mulciber"? I don't remember that.

We do not see Snape and his friends evaluating their performance in the DADA OWL over the lunch break together. Or distracting themselves with talk of Quidditch. All we saw was Snape sitting alone in the shade rereading his test questions.

Even allowing for the fact that that particular memory was almost certainly hand picked to show up James Potter and



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Sirius Black in the very worst possible light (see the article entitled 'The Pensieve Gambit' for details), it still seems just as certain to have depicted an actual incident, as it actually happened.

And from that, we were originally forced to wonder whether Snape had taken up with that Slytherin "gang" only *after* the incident that we witnessed. Or, to ask if, in contrast to what appears to be typical Gryffindor behavior, these friends of Snape's were all in different year groups and were already either out of School by Snape's 5th year, or off stewing their way through the NEWTs, or even, possibly, not yet of an age to be concerned with the OWLs.

The longer one thinks about this possibility, the more likely it seemed. We have since been given additional confirmation that both Bellatrix and Malfoy were out of school for quite some time before Snape was sitting his OWLs. And yet he is implied to have had early associations with both of them.

The only premise which we must accept for an "improved" interpretation along these lines, is that Lucius Malfoy is sharper, more effective, and far more of a "natural leader" (or at least has a good deal more political acumen) than Draco was being portrayed as having at any time up to HBP (when the "new Draco" was as much of a surprise as the "new Ginny" had been the year before).

And this premise is not at all difficult to accept. For one thing, Lucius Malfoy would have had the advantage of Horace Slughorn as his Head of House, showing him "how it was done."

Mind you, we never really got that clear of a view of Draco Malfoy through the "Harry filter," but the impression that we had up to the end of OotP was of a preening little poseur

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with more style than substance, content to take whatever is offered to him but without any real sense of knowing how to effectively go about getting whatever wasn't simply handed to him on a silver tray.

However, in our own defense, having almost immediately identified Malfoy as "the enemy," (at least inside the school) Harry *paid attention* to Malfoy. He kept an eye on what Malfoy was up to, and who he was in contact with. And what Harry was noticing and seeing hadn't suggested anything more. (Except that the kid could actually write a verse that scanned.)

Nor, from what our Harry's-eye-view had shown us up to the end of year 5, did Draco Malfoy even seem to know what to do with the advantages he *did* have. For this hypothesis to work, we need only be willing to consider that Lucius, by the time he reached his son's age, had managed to get a clue about the proper way to build yourself a following.

For one thing, you don't limit that potential following to people in your own year group. And you don't shut out your followers' (or your rival's) younger siblings. Instead, you build a network of patronage with them as your clients.

If this premise may be allowed, then we can postulate a young Lucius Malfoy routinely casting an eye over the incoming first years, and the developing 2nd, through 7th years with a mind to making overtures to those who might be the most potentially useful, either by individual skills or through family connections. And then extending to those who made the cut a show of approval, condescension, patronage and acceptance into his "circle." And to do enough favors to create some mutual obligations.

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Even if the young Lucius Malfoy's family was not "connected" to Voldemort at this point in his career, Lucius had evidently always been geared toward establishing himself as one of the Leaders and "patrons" of the wizarding world. He, unlike his son, was clearly *not* lacking in ambition. And, after six years trailing in the wake of what we now know to have been DE kids like Lestrangle, Rosier, and possibly even Bellatrix, and coming from the very same demographic as Riddle's most desirable acquisitions, he wouldn't have known how not to listen to the party line.

And he also eventually married Narcissa Black. Whose mother had been a Rosier. I really don't think Malfoy ever had much of a hope of dodging that particular bullet. He was just too collectible.

Snape might have also appeared to be a natural candidate for collection from Malfoy's point of view, even if he wasn't from Riddle's. Except for the halfblood thing, of course. But that could be glossed over, if the kid was prepared to make an effort. And he obviously was. He was already ironing out that working-class accent and making himself at least marginally presentable by the time Malfoy finished his 7th year.



For Lucius Malfoy to have been 41 years old in the autumn of 1995, as was stated in the DAILY PROPHET article related to the appointment of the Hogwarts Inquisitor, he would have needed to be born in 1954 (or late '53). He would probably have started Hogwarts in 1965 and finished with the class of '72. There is, however, the possibility that he may have an autumn birthday, in which case his Hogwarts years would have been 1966–1973,

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instead. The Marauder cohort we now know were for the most part born in late 1959–1960.

With birth dates in this period, the Marauder cohort would have started Hogwarts in the Autumn term of 1971, and finished in the summer of 1978. Overlapping Lucius's assumed period at Hogwarts by, at the very most, 2 years.

Under this reading, Severus Snape, who showed up at Hogwarts at the beginning of what was probably Lucius's 6th year with a remarkable knowledge of hexes and curses, and sorted into Slytherin House might have been a natural shoo-in for Lucius Malfoy's circle of Slytherin House's "cool kids." And indeed Rowling did toss us a brief glimpse of Malfoy welcoming Snape to Slytherin at his Sorting. Unfortunately, IF we are to believe Sirius Black, Bellatrix's crowd got their bid in first. Given Sirius Black's track record, I'm not sure we can accept it. Or whether we should even bother to attempt to.

We do not know whether or how many of these kids were also invited into the Slug Club. Slughorn's aversion to known Death Eaters is probably not new, but in the first war he probably didn't know, or admit to himself, that these children were future Death Eaters, and his current aversion to their families is a more recent development. I suspect that in the Marauders' day most of the "well-connected" were members of the Club in good standing. It is less certain, however, whether Snape also made the cut.

Still, I suspect that Snape, like Hermione, probably was much better at projecting a favorable image to people older than himself than he was at relating to his own immediate peers. Once he was accepted by Lucius Malfoy's circle (after

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any hypothetical abortive association with Bella's), he didn't bother with building alliances within his own year group, and rapidly got the reputation of being "stuck up" which would not have gone over well. Particularly since his own antecedents were clearly not out of the top drawer.

Ergo; right off the bat, even without Sirius's help, Snape would have been immediately identified as a future Dark wizard to James Potter, whose loathing of the Dark Arts reportedly was quite sincere. Although it now seems likely that James wasn't altogether sound on identifying what the Dark Arts actually are. By Book 6 in the series, it was growing apparent that the wizarding public, in general, *isn't*. As it is, if Snape was even briefly taken up by Bellatrix and her lot, that would have tied it all up in a shiny green bow.

Neither James nor Sirius were likely to have kept their mouths shut about their opinions either, and Snape, secure in the knowledge that he had the backing of upper-classmen might have been more than willing to take up his end of the hostilities. In fact, with that kind of backing, Snape may have *had* the upper hand in the hostilities for at least their first year at Hogwarts. And a willingness to call upon that backing, could also be what earned him the delightful sobriquet of "Snivellus". (Crying to your friends again Snape? Snivelling?)

But even an autumn birthday'd Malfoy was gone by the start of Severus's 3rd year and the tables may have started turning. And most of Malfoy's successors may not have shared his eye for the art of long-range team-building. Or at least not to the point of extending the benefit of it to Snape. Although a couple appear to have continued to tolerate him.



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For that matter, if by his 5th year the rest of the established clique could have even been kids a year or two younger than Snape, it is possible that they had looked to him to lead them, and when he didn't take the hint but burrowed into his own more solitary interests instead, they regrouped without him. Or perhaps, being cast predominately in the "young scion" mode, they decided among themselves that Snape may be clever, but he just wasn't really one of "us".



By his 5th year, with its grueling pressure over the OWLs, Avery and the dubiously identified Mulciber notwithstanding, Snape could have been on his own a lot. Lily was doing her best to brush him off and James and company didn't regard their superior numbers as any reason to ease off on their "get Snape" directive. Nor did it occur to any of them (including Lily, apparently) that four against one was not particularly fair. There was too long a history between them all by then.

The only thing to give one pause before completely accepting this reading, of Malfoy having taken Snape up at Hogwarts, is that Sirius Black did not at any point in GoF mention Malfoy in his list of Snape's Hogwarts associates. (Although he is quick enough to throw their association in Snape's face in OotP, so he was certainly aware of it.)

He didn't mention Mulciber either. I really *am* convinced that the Mulciber in DHs was originally supposed to be Evan Rosier.

Of course, Sirius also didn't mention that Malfoy's wife and one of "the Lestranges" were his own first cousins either. And since his cousins all were gone from Hogwarts by his 5th year,



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after 12 years in Azkaban Sirius may have simply forgotten that Snape had been taken up by two different gangs of future Death Eaters.

For that matter, Black may have been slow to discover that Malfoy had even *been* a Death Eater. I doubt that people were still discussing Malfoy's Imperius defense 12 years later. Although Sirius did manage to find out about it. And I doubt that it had ever been that much of a point of conversation inside Azkaban. Or at any rate, not for long.

And, for that matter, It might also be reasonable to reflect that in GoF we did not yet know about Regulus's existence, either. Sirius could have regarded Malfoy as another "stupid idiot," in much the same style as his own younger brother. But not, perhaps, an inherently *vicious* idiot like Bella. He clearly doesn't much like Malfoy (and nobody ever filled Sirius in about the Diary caper, so far as we know) but he may have been willing to give him the benefit of the doubt.

Sirius also claims that he didn't even know that Snape was teaching at Hogwarts. Despite the fact that we've later been told in OotP and HBP that Snape started teaching a couple of months before either Voldemort's defeat, or Sirius's arrest. Clearly either Sirius had taken no interest in the doings of Hogwarts once he left it, or his memory is just plain faulty. (12 years of getting up close and personal with Dementors will probably do that to you.)

Another fan theory concerning Sirius Black offers an alternate reading of these memory lapses. That is gone into in more detail in the essay entitled 'Man's Best Friend'.

So let's take a pause, and think about what else all this

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peripheral information about Snape implies.

Here is man who is stated as having been a member of a little self-contained group when he was at school.

But the two most dominant figures of rival circles, Bellatrix and Malfoy (who Sirius didn't even mention) were both probably gone from the school by the time Snape was 13, and we know of no point at which he caught up with them again until after he was 18, when he was out of school himself, 5 years later. That doesn't really sound like the closest of friendships to me. There is also room for a hell of a lot to have taken place behind the scenes in that interval. And, just for example, the single incident during the Marauders' era that readers are most interested in also took place during that interval. We still hadn't heard the end of the werewolf caper. Or its aftermath.

Sirius was in Azkaban within a day after Voldemort's fall, and in no position to know what went on in the outer world for more than a decade afterwards. But if Sirius never heard any accusations against Severus Snape — and he claims he didn't — that implies that none of his fellow prisoners mentioned Snape. Or Malfoy, either, probably, for all that they had spoken bitterly and often enough of "Wormtail" for Sirius to have come to the conclusion that Peter had been spying inside the Order for close to a year before he finally betrayed the Potters.

As to Snape's continuing exile at Hogwarts; we knew from Draco's comments as early as CoS that Snape seems to have been in good favor with Lucius at least up to that point in the series. And he appears to have continued to be so favored, from comments made over the course of OotP, right up to the point that Lucius Malfoy was taken off the game board.

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It is easy to conclude that Snape had been feeding information regarding Dumbledore and the school to Lucius, ever since he went to work there. And, by the time Harry and Draco started at Hogwarts, Lucius was on the Board of Governors. Lucius, or his father Abraxus Malfoy, may even have had something to say about getting Snape that job in the first place, at least according to all of the “official” records. We now know that Snape was ordered into Hogwarts, and since Voldemort had managed to recruit Lucius by then (we do not know about his father), he would have instructed him to smooth the way.



I'll have to admit that I DID think that the bombshell Rowling was most likely to throw at us in the final book was the discovery that Snape had *always* been Albus's agent, from the very beginning. It's a theory that has been floating around ever since the start of the 3-year summer, and the apparent contradiction in the reports of the night of the Prophecy offered some hefty circumstantial evidence in support of it. It also did not require 11th-hour personality transplants on the part of both Snape and Albus in order to support it, unlike the pasted-on explanation that Rowling finally dumped on us in DHs.

But even I had to admit that it wasn't a done-deal. We have 3 years between the Marauder cohort's leaving school and Tom's defeat at Godric's Hollow. And about 16 months between their all leaving school and the earliest likely date for the Prophecy. That is adequate time for Snape to have made a legitimate turn-around of allegiance once the essential sham of Voldemort's message became evident to him.



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The problem with postulating a legitimate turn-around is that we had still not been given the slightest hint of any plausible event that could have prompted one. The mutual “likely story” of remorse over Snape's reporting of the Prophecy at the time he started teaching simply does not work on its own. The timing is wrong, it requires additional data before it becomes plausible, and Rowling was holding out on that data. From all sorts of hints and suggestions in the text, Snape was almost certainly working for Albus before he ever started teaching, and indications even suggested that he was already on Albus's team by the time the Prophecy was made.

And if Snape really was permitted to run off and report what he overheard after both Aberforth and Albus had him in custody, when we've already seen it demonstrated in canon that Albus does sanction the use of memory spells at need, and that to suppress any record of Prophecies is established Ministry policy, you have to wonder what kind of fools the Dumbledore brothers are.

But just because we hadn't been given a clue, doesn't mean that it couldn't have happened. 16 months is long enough for Snape to have got in, had second thoughts and to have hedged his bets by cutting a deal with the other side. Particularly given that there was nothing in the standard DE rhetoric that would necessarily have offered an advantage to *him*.

Of course Rowling doesn't agree. But then Rowling has never attempted to do Snape justice other than grudgingly, and some of the excuses she gives for his actions are right out of Cloud-Cuckoo Land. Just about any of a whole spectrum of fan theories on this subject play as well as her thoroughly lame excuses,



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and I think are somewhat less mawkish, besides.

I have also been toying with a back-up theory that might also account for a legitimate turn-around. I don't really find it as satisfying as the "Dumbledore's man from the beginning" interpretation, but it combines with the "Dumbledore's Man — later on" scenario without any real difficulty. It also works reasonably well from the material that we actually have to draw upon.

Which is to say, the Malfoys.



Rowling has solidly established an association between Snape and the Malfoys. She's established that association six ways from Sunday, and I really do begin to think that this might be taken a bit further than it has been.

For example, is the association only between Snape and Lucius? Or was there a history between Snape and Narcissa Black as well?

There are rumors on the internet which claim as much. I'm not sure I buy them, but there is nothing in canon actually against them.

We now know that Lucius was probably at least a 6th year when Snape showed up at Hogwarts. Narcissa, born in 1957 (Adjusted date [unauthorized]; see the 'House of Black' essay for details), would have probably been a 4th year.

We have been told — in canon — that Snape had some sort of dealings with Bellatrix and her crowd while at school. In order for that to work we have to dismiss the dates on the dodgy tapestry sketch altogether, but, frankly, by this time that seems

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no more arduous a task than to dismiss the early version of PS/SS in which James and Lily had stolen the Philosopher's Stone. (A snippet from this particular iteration of the story used to be posted as an Easter egg on Rowling's original official site.)

Since Bellatrix, born in 1953 (unauthorized adjustment, see the 'House of Black' essay), had to have been at least a 7th year in Snape's first year, any association between them has to have been both brief, and very early in his school career. The lack of any kind of charity between the two of them these days suggests that it didn't turn out well for either of them.

On the other hand, Snape's association with Lucius and his family seems to still be going strong 25 years later. As I pointed out above, just because Lucius treats his servants badly, it does not mean he treats his friends or family the same. And Narcissa turned to Snape without a moment's hesitation when she learned of a threat to her son. I tend to suspect that Snape may not have been only Lucius's friend.

So what might a theorist make of that?



Well, the Spinner's End chapter set off a number of the sort of fans who are determined to cast Snape as a romantic lead (oh, really?) into speculating that there was something between Snape and "Cissy" once upon a time, and that it was only his being a halfblood that convinced her to marry Lucius instead. I have to admit that I cannot really see it myself.

Mind you, I *can* easily see Snape, along about 4th year developing a crush on Cissy Black — possibly in common with half of his year in or out of Slytherin House. She was a very good-look-

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ing girl (and one of the Blacks!). Cissy also probably treated Snape rather better than her sister Bella had, too, even if all that boiled down to would have looked a lot like simply ignoring him to anyone else. But Cissy would have been a 7th year by then, and I cannot see her regarding a stringy, scruffy 4th year Snape as anything but a very clever “little boy” if he showed up on her radar at all. We are talking about the same age difference as the one between Ron and Fleur.

(Hm. Wait just a darned minute here; is that another inter-generational echo?)

Even throwing his worship of Lily Evans into the equation doesn't dismiss the possibility of his developing a crush (particularly a *first* crush) on someone else. Lily was his “best friend”, the girl he had known ever since he was nine or ten. And yes, he worshiped her. But it may have not yet occurred to him that he might someday dream of *marrying* her. In fact, their long proximity practically disqualified Lily as a candidate for a first crush all by itself. First crushes are not typically the people you are closest to. They are far more likely to be that good-looking specimen glimpsed from across a room that you barely know.

And just where was Lily Evans in this dynamic? Just how would one expect a popular, self-loving, rather shallow 13/14-year-old with a huge sense of personal entitlement to be most likely to respond when her faithful acolyte started sighing and mooning over someone else. Particularly a someone else that I can practically guarantee you little Miss Evans regarded as a stuck-up cow.

It's not that she wanted him *herself*. She didn't. She was fully in agreement with all her girlfriends that he was a total geek. But

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he was *her* geek, and his stupidity over that cow was disloyal, and it reflected badly on her. Why, it might serve him right if she were to start paying attention to someone else just to show him!

However; you get a fairly consistent impression that the rest of Snape's closest associates at school seem to have all been older than he was. He probably came across much better to his elders than he did to his contemporaries. And skill, power, and intelligence are valued in the wizarding world, even if you *aren't* one of the Blacks. And Snape clearly had all three in good measure.

We also get the distinct impression that Severus Snape has pretty thoroughly reinvented himself in something sort-of like the image of his social “betters.” He has ironed out what was probably a working-class regional accent, learned to dress decently, to move well. He hasn't the ease of the “born” aristocrat. But the buttoned-up formality that he has adopted enables him to move among such without comment. As social climbers go, he is quite a successful one. (Probably another one of the real reasons Sirius and James so despised him. They probably had no objection whatsoever to oiks who were content to remain oiks, like, say, Mundungus Fletcher.)

It stands to reason that Snape must have had a reason to engage in such a complete makeover, doesn't it? And Lily already *accepted* him — for certain values of “acceptance” — as he was.

It's not necessarily to have *just* been in hopes of professional advancement, is it? I rather suspect that Lucius would not have had that much objection to oiks who are content to remain oiks, either. Although he'd probably never have invited them to sit down to dinner at the Malfoy table. And I rather think that

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Snape probably has done that. A few times at least.

So, from the standpoint of pure theorizing, maybe the fans who kept hoping for a star-crossed romance were looking in the wrong direction. Maybe they should have been looking at Narcissa Malfoy. I admit I tend to doubt it, myself, but quite a few fans are convinced that there is something there.

A rumor has sprung up since the release of HBP (the novel, not the film) which attempts to claim that there *had* been some form of crush between Severus and Narcissa while they were at Hogwarts. This particular iteration seems somehow to have attached itself to the movie crowd. Some hopeful fans have claimed that Rowling was the source of it. This is almost certainly incorrect.

Frankly, the idea of a romance between 4th year Snape and 7th year Cissy is hopeless. It just didn't happen. But an apparently unattainable Narcissa Black might have offered a 14/15-year-old Snape a world of motivation.

And, around the edges, Andromeda could have just set something like a precedent by defying the whole Black family and marrying Muggle-born Ted Tonks right about the time that Snape started Hogwarts, even if he wasn't yet viewing Cissy as his Ultima Thule. We might want to keep that complication in mind as well. It may not be completely irrelevant.

And for that matter, an 18-year old Snape (who had now lost any chance with Lily Evans) may have looked like a much better prospect to a 21-year old Narcissa than anyone watching through the Harry filter would be likely to credit.

Oh *really*?

Well, I agree, probably not. But the concept can't necessar-

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ily be *completely* dismissed.

The prospect really does seem to be worth considering. Even if it did all boil down to being no more than a neutral pleasantness on her part and unsupported hopes and dreams on his. Because he was still a halfblood. And Lucius was still in the running.

But I can very easily see something on the order of a crush developing on Snape's end. I can even see a certain degree of approval on hers — particularly if he had ever done her a favor. But I can't see actual reciprocation.

Of course we don't know just when she married Lucius, either. Draco wasn't born until June of 1980, and the wedding could have taken place any time up to mid-'79. At the very earliest. The Prophecy isn't likely to have been made until around Halloween of that year.

And it would hardly be the first time that two associates harbored hopes concerning the same girl. And neither would it be the first time that the lady made her choice without destroying the association. It really does happen far more often than not. At least in the real world.



But when you take a reality check, if it was anything at all, it is most likely to have been no more than a one-sided crush on Snape's part. Probably his "first" crush, too. And those just do not last. Although they may leave a bit of a soft spot in their wake.

Which suddenly makes me wonder if I really *am* hearing an echo, and the whole Spinner's End performance wasn't a

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bizarre sort of replay of a Harry/Cho moment.

Of course I do still prefer my theory that Albus may have offered Snape the option of going into hiding if the DEs ever approached him in the aftermath of the werewolf caper. The boy was certainly at risk. And that when the time actually came, Snape offered to infiltrate the DEs and spy instead.

But I also think that it is not absolutely impossible that he — and Lucius also, perhaps — may have signed up with Voldemort hoping to impress Narcissa when they both had hopes (or at least dreams) of Narcissa, and that after she married Lucius, Snape may have reconsidered Albus's offer and contacted him.

He may have even done it in hopes of being able to help the friends who had trapped themselves inside the DE organization with him. Even if he couldn't tell them about his change of alignment.

It's not nearly as dramatic as most fan theories, but I don't think any of it is beyond what we can draw from the behavior of the three characters involved over the course of the actual books up through HBP. And it makes a reasonably plausible back-up hypothesis. One which, as I say above, does not require complete personality transplants in order to make it work. Just a bit of minor tweaking.



But really from what little we have — and we do have a lot of very tiny scraps, just nothing that actually *connects*; we are imposing connections that may not really be there — Snape being Malfoy's mascot makes a far better argument for why (and how) he would have gotten into the DE organization than any of

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his antagonism with James and Sirius — who had nothing to do with the organization — at what is presumed to be a time that they probably hadn't even drawn the DEs attention to themselves by meddling in DE activities yet. There certainly wasn't any *public* advantage to be gained from Snape's signing up.

The only thing we haven't got to support it is any canon indication that Snape is the sort of devoted über-Hufflepuff-cum-Gryffindor friend who follows his leader into the cannon's mouth to his own disadvantage purely for loyalty's sake. (Er, well we *did* get something very like that in DHs. But I'm not sure that I believe it, since it's one of the aforementioned personality transplants and looks pasted on to me.) But I suppose that the same observation needs to be applied to the "Dumbledore's Man" interpretation as well. It's just easier for me to believe that Albus might have once inspired that kind of a reaction from Snape than Lucius. But that also is without factoring in the additional complication of Narcissa.

Or Draco.

Who, now that one thinks about it, Snape really does tend to have treated in a manner that one might reasonably expect from a man who may have once been in love with the boy's mother. Even if that particular fire has long gone out, or settled into just a friendly glow. Certainly more so than Snape has ever treated Harry.

Still, it really is easier for me to extrapolate Snape's having had an axe of his own to grind in the matter, and nothing that we know about him would suggest that any cause of Snape's would necessarily match up with any cause of Tom Riddle's. Regardless of how much rather superficial background circum-

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stance they may have in common, they really don't seem to want the same kind of things at all. And certainly not on the same scale.

I mean, we're talking about someone who *really liked* the idea of being publicly awarded an Order of Merlin for catching a bad guy for heaven's sake! And who threw a monumental hissy fit when the opportunity was snatched away from him.

A basically clueless kid with a profound sense of entitlement like Malfoy might very well join up with the DEs expecting one day to take the whole thing over. But that is not likely to have been Snape's problem.

Once you stop and evaluate what the DEs actually seem to be and how totally ineffective they are as a force of social direction, it really does seem more plausible that a genuinely bright and aggressive kid like Snape would be easier to enlist to help to destroy them than to support them. Particularly if my "extreme theories" in the 'Out on a Limb' collection are anywhere on target.

But from what we have been allowed to see of Snape's relationships with his "old school friends" up through HBP, every appearance suggested that he does indeed still tend to ally himself with Lucius Malfoy, his family and their interests. He also clearly regards Bellatrix Lestrange with some degree of contempt.

His current feelings for Narcissa are a good deal more unclear. He did appear to take a fairly sincere interest in Draco, however.

And, he was willing to put his life on the line to protect both of them from the Dark Lord.

Regarding Potterverse People

Other Persons of Interest

I take it back. A couple of the characters in the first of these essays were definitely *not* introduced before the 3-Year summer. They have to share the essay with one who was, however. *Most* of this collection of people are not at all backward about coming forward. Indeed, they tend to be determined to draw attention to themselves. Regarding the two who don't, one is too much of a celebrity to escape the limelight, and I'm sure the other would have just as soon continued to slip under the radar. (Sorry about that.)

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It used to be pointed out to me that this particular essay reads like another Hermione essay. But that it wanders off elsewhere having nothing to do with her.

I'm sorry. That misinterpretation is entirely my fault. But the fact is that this really *isn't* an essay about Hermione Granger. It never has been. It is, exactly as it claims to be, an essay about some of the series's enemies. Which is to say, enemies who are NOT Lord Voldemort. In fact, in two cases out of three, we can't even be certain that the persons referred to even knowingly support Lord Voldemort, and the third isn't necessarily a Death Eater, although he is certainly a hanger-on.

Although, really, if you are looking for connections among the subjects of this piece, you'd be a lot more productively occupied in taking a closer look at Lucius Malfoy. He has had dealings with all of them.



Where the confusion alluded to in the intro above arises is that in two cases out of three, it was Hermione who finally dealt with the problem. And that was Rowling's decision in the writing of the series.

Which, for the record, I think was rather a poor one. Rowling seems singularly unwilling to allow anyone but Harry or Hermione to actually *do* anything about any of the problems which stand in their paths. Ron may be permitted to step in in the heat of the moment and do *something* that matters. Neville finally got his chance to prove that, yes, he really was relevant after all. But it is usually only Harry and Hermione who are



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confronted with a problem and are permitted to deal with it.

Under those circumstances, even Albus merely retreats until the situation cools down, or his opponent has blotted his copy-book and then returns to say "See, I told you so!"

The Weasley twins subversively cause all sorts of disorder and, if anything, make the underlying problem worse. But they never do anything that actually makes the opponent stop, *either*. In the end they just run away as well.

Flitwick goes passive-aggressive, Minerva carps and refuses to cooperate. Snape seems never to be put in a position where he *could* do anything without blowing his cover. So we will probably never know whether his average would have been any better than any of the rest of the ensemble's.

It's small wonder that the reader comes away with the impression that wizards are an incredibly ineffectual lot. Rowling never allowed them to be anything else.

And at that, Harry seems only to have "solved" the problem of Lord Voldemort (or, rather, the Elder wand did it for him). At a glance, Hermione's track record seems to be at least twice as good as his. Unfortunately, by this time it is hard to believe that Rowling planned any of this consciously. For all of her allusions to some "Master Plan," I'm inclined to think it crept in while she wasn't paying attention. For there never was a payoff for the situation that she spent the first half of the series setting up.



Opponent #1, Rita Skeeter:

Coming out of Goblet of Fire it looked very much to me like Hermione Granger was headed for a very nasty comeuppance.



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And by that point she was certainly due for one.

She continued to be. In fact, overdue. She'd been right about so many things that she had started to believe that she's right about everything. Her average was still higher than most, but it sure wasn't perfect.

And yet, even when she ended up being tortured at Malfoy Manor it was more on the order of collateral damage. It was *Harry* who got the three of them captured that time. She wasn't being hoist on her own petard.

In fact, she seems to have managed to dodge that particular bullet to the very end of the series.

Although not by any exceptionally prudent action of her own. She'd just been allowed to Get Away with it.

And there is no rational reason **WHY** she should have been allowed to get away with it. She'd left a backtrail that a baby could follow.

Miss Granger never seems to have figured out that there is a big difference between being "right," and being Right.

There is a huge difference between being right when you are figuring out the answer to a puzzle, and being right about deciding what to do about that answer. By any rational standard, Hermione made a considerable blunder in not taking Rita directly to Dumbledore when she caught her.

That's where, in canon, the whole premise that actions supposedly have consequences began to come unstuck. And it seems to have spent the whole back half of the series continuing to unravel.

Which is one of the main reasons why so many fans ended up profoundly unsatisfied with the series by the end of it. Actions,

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even, or perhaps I ought to say *particularly*, the hero and his friends' actions, ought to have consequences.

Figuring out what was going on and finally catching Rita in the act was certainly clever. But Hermione didn't think the situation all the way through. At that point, for all her cleverness, Hermione Granger was still a kid, and still thinking like a kid. She was still looking at each problem as an isolated element. She did not remember that it all connects.



For one thing, upon any sort of closer consideration it seems very unlikely that Rita was really an independent agent, operating alone. She was a good deal more likely to be one of Lucius Malfoy's hired hands.

Think about it.

Rita's "secret" was demonstrably already *known*.

Pretty *widely* known, it would appear.

By a whole troop of fourth years in Slytherin House!

And do you really think that Rita would have approached that particular bunch of kids and volunteered the information that she was an illegal unregistered Animagus, trusting to their charitable natures not to blow the whistle? I don't think so! I don't even think that she would claim that she had an operative/partner who was an Animagus that she would send into the school for them to contact, and count on them not adding up 2+2. It is much more likely that *they* were directed to approach *her*.

By someone who already knew that particular secret.

And finds it very *useful*.

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It is possible that the kids, once primed, simply approached Rita with mischief in mind. But is Rita's desire to create mischief on Dumbledore's turf so great that she would just hand that lot as potentially damaging a piece of information as the fact that she is an unregistered Animagus? Again, I don't think so. At least one of them already *had* that information. It was their bargaining chip. Or, rather, it was their spokesman's bargaining chip.

And we were tipped off that she was *already* laying a groundwork to discredit Dumbledore before they approached her. Before she even showed up at Hogwarts, in fact. She started making slurs against his mental competence all the way back in her coverage of a meeting of the International Confederacy of Wizards. Before the school term ever started.

And we don't know of any particular reason *why* she, or the PROPHET would have had an axe to grind against Albus Dumbledore that early in the proceedings. The Ministry certainly didn't.

But someone else certainly did.

By this time, shouldn't we be asking ourselves; if Rita was working with the Slytherins — by arrangement — in book 4, and the tone of the insinuations that SHE planted over that year was the obvious foundation for the approach taken up by the Ministry the following summer to discredit both Harry and Dumbledore, and that over the following year Lucius Malfoy was waltzing in and out of the Ministry like he owned the place, doesn't it occur to anyone that this is unlikely to have all been a coincidence? Isn't it much more likely to have been an intrinsic part of a whole long-term *plan*?



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Malfoy was already making inroads at the Ministry as early as year 3! He used Draco's injury by an insulted hippogryff and his stance as a concerned parent as an excuse to spend any amount of time making himself a fixture around the place.

And we know that he and Rita were both at the World Cup. He was sitting in the Top Box, she was covering the event. He even handed her a major scoop with that Muggle-baiting stunt...

Rita was quite deliberately laying the groundwork for exactly that level of smear campaign over the course of GoF. She can hardly be held exempt from suspicion of complicity in the Ministry's subsequent smear campaign simply because she didn't have a recognizable axe of her own to grind. (And for that matter, who is to say she doesn't? We just don't know of one.)

Year 5's smear campaign was already well underway by the middle of year 4, and at that point it was flying in under Rita Skeeter's byline. From Malfoy's end of the operation, Rita's part was to lay the groundwork of the media assault by turning public opinion gradually against Albus Dumbledore, while Malfoy (and Umbridge) chipped away at Fudge's trust in Dumbledore. In aid of which Rita's steady line of innuendos were of invaluable assistance.

When Harry's name came out of the Goblet they spread their net farther to encompass him as well.

We definitely know that this little conspiracy finally paid off at the end of GoF. It had probably not been without some effect over the course of PoA as well.

In fact, in retrospect we can see that it did. Looking back, it seems likely that the Ministry's interest in Sirius Black, which went from blanketing his suspected location in Dementors to



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the flip-flop of putting only one lone Auror in charge of the hunt for him in the course of the rest of his duties, to the almost suspicious quickness of his exoneration as soon as he was safely dead, suggests that Albus probably *did* mention the possibility of Sirius's innocence with Fudge during the summer that he was helping the setting up of the TriWizard tournament.

And while Fudge was willing enough to withdraw the demen-tors from Hogwarts (particularly after the close escape from a public relations nightmare they provoked when they attacked Harry Potter) he refused to altogether play ball. Sirius Black remained, at least officially, a wanted man.



The big question is; who was Malfoy's plan supposed to ultimately benefit?

Voldemort? Or Malfoy?

It's difficult not to conclude that it was probably intended to benefit Malfoy himself.

From our vantage point, it all seems to have been "obviously" set up by Malfoy. He probably contacted Rita and set up her end of the mission as early as the World Cup. They are both known to have been there. But why? And why just *then*?

In HBP we finally learned that Malfoy had deployed the Riddle diary off his own bat. He had not been sent any message (from QuirrellMort) to do that on Voldemort's behalf (which had always been an outside possibility, but, still, a possibility). Therefore, I think the smart money is on the likelihood that after Voldemort had attempted a return in PS/SS and failed, Malfoy thought that the way was clear for him to take com-

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mand of what was left of Voldemort's organization.

Unlike Voldemort, Malfoy *does* have overt political aspirations, and he *does* sincerely intend the advancement of pure-blood supremacist interests. He might take the lead in a bit of Muggle-baiting, just for the fun of it, but under his leadership, any such violence would not be just to ramp up terror, it would have to serve a discernible *purpose*.

Which raises the question of why such a blatant public demonstration in such a place as the World Cup at such a time? What did he intend to accomplish by it? Did he set it up, and take the lead, in order to establish that *he* was to be regarded as their Leader going forward? With media coverage in order to send a heads-up to any outliers who didn't attend the Cup?

And, knowing Malfoy, he would have been far less interested in overthrowing the government than he was in taking it over. Preferably from inside.

But he had overplayed his hand in Year 2, lost his gamble, and his place on the Board of Governors of Hogwarts, and needed to start over and establish a new power base.

Draco's injury gave him an excuse to start haunting the Ministry, firing up any old contacts in the Dangerous Creatures Dept., or elsewhere, and, eventually, to start sending out feelers to Fudge's staff and see whether anyone took the bait. Obviously Dolores Umbridge did.

There must have been either a considerable degree of mutual negotiation between Rita and the Slytherins to set up that little sweetheart deal, or — and far more likely — the whole thing was set up by a 3rd-party, offstage. The easiest explanation is that Rita was advised to hang around to be approached during

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one of her visits covering the Tournament. Eventually, one of the Slytherins, most probably Draco, approached Rita, informing her that he already knew something of the plan, and wanted in on the action. And in order for them to have done that, they had to have been instructed (or Draco at least was instructed) to cooperate with her by someone else. Whoever that was had tipped her off to expect them.

Or, I suppose, just as an outside possibility, Rita may have intended — and may even have managed — to Oblivate the lot of them after her stint covering the TriWizard Tournament was over. But I doubt it.

If that last is the case; she got pretty lucky, because we are talking about at least 8–10 kids who needed to be tracked down and neutralized before they did her any damage. She may have managed it. But we don't know that for sure.

Crabbe and Goyle may not be bright enough to figure out what the “bug” actually was, but Draco and Nott both are, and I suspect so are some, if not most of the others. Most of the Slyths we know of are still wild cards, not all of whose names we were ever given, such as the rest of Pansy's gang of Slytherin girls, for example. Upon the whole, the reading of everyone remaining conveniently clueless simply doesn't play particularly well.

Of course, Rita *could* have shown them a picture of the beetle — which I very much doubt is a species native to Britain — and told them that it was a recording device which would be connected to a dicta-quill. That way they could talk to it, without being seen talking to her.

I mean, it's not like she could ask them questions while in her

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Animagus form, could she?

If the 3rd-party setup is the case, however; just what does Rita have on [Lucius Malfoy?] in return that has kept him from hanging her out to dry before this? He was already quite publicly outed as a DE back at the end of VWI, for all that his father got him off with an Imperius defense.

For that matter, are Rita's Animagus ability and 5th estate credentials a valuable enough resource to him that he grudgingly helped to tide her over the enforced period of unemployment that Hermione demanded of her in Year 5? I am developing a strong suspicion that Rita and Lucius go back a long way. All the way to Hogwarts, in fact. And Rita was no Gryffindor. While Rita's quick-quotes quill's description of her as blonde, attractive and forty-three comes across as being just about as accurate as the rest of its statements, if it is actually correct that would put her only two or three years ahead of Lucius at Hogwarts, and if Lucius, either then or later, managed to discover her secret and has kept her dancing to his tune under threat of exposure ever since it would be in character. Blackmail and extortion seem to be Malfoy specialties.

Or it might simply be an arrangement of silence and patronage in return for cooperation.



At any rate, it certainly looks like Hermione really didn't have as big a bargaining chip as she thought she had.

Of course in a slightly different iteration of the Potterverse she could have demonstrated to us that she really was sharp and decided to offer Rita something she hadn't already got.

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That is, if Hermione was willing to risk her neck on the gamble that, for all her unpleasantness, Rita is no Death Eater.

I'd like to believe as much myself, but I'm still not quite convinced. I suspected that Rita may at least be a supporter. From a pragmatic, rather than an ideological standpoint, probably. I don't get the feeling that Rita gives two hoots for ideology.

And at that point of GoF, in the hands of some other author, it was entirely possible that Hermione could offer Rita something she *would* have wanted. Something like a major story that would make parts of the Ministry look *particularly* bad. Something Rita may have already gotten an inkling of before Hermione caught her.

Something like a *cause célèbre* over a gross miscarriage of justice dating from the time of the first defeat of Voldemort.

Something that only a handful of people and the Death Eaters actually know.

Something like the fact that Peter Pettigrew, Order of Merlin First Class (posthumous) faked his death and lived in hiding for over a dozen years in the Animagus form of a rat, and was now standing at Voldemort's right hand.

While the Heir to the Ancient and Noble House of Black had been deliberately railroaded into Azkaban, without benefit of a trial. Which could probably be readily confirmed with a just bit of investigation.

If the Ministry would do that to someone from that level in wizarding society, just how safe was anybody?

And by that time a movement to exonerate Sirius Black might have been the sort of mass misdirection of public attention that Fudge might have leaped at.

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Particularly since the man who had actually ordered Black to be thrown into Azkaban without a trial was now so conveniently out of the picture and presumed dead.

And if she didn't choose to print it, then we would have a good deal better idea whose side she was probably on.

But, obviously, Rowling didn't choose to go there.

(Side note: do you think the fact that Rita *did* ultimately publish Harry Potter's account of Voldemort's return, complete with Peter Pettigrew's contribution to it might have contributed to Sirius Black's speedy exoneration at the end of that year?)



And, meanwhile back in the version where Rowling *did* choose to go; just because we didn't watch it as it happened, can you confidently say that Lucius Malfoy *wasn't* waltzing in and out of the Ministry all of year 3, building new alliances in the wake of the embarrassment of being tossed off the Hogwarts Board of Governors the previous year? Draco's hippogryff injury had already given him an excuse to be there. From all of our subsequent information, this is most likely to have been the period in which he managed to flatter Dolores Umbridge into supporting him in his "divide and conquer" ploy to cut Fudge off from Dumbledore's influence.

We still don't really know Rita's own political position or her own personal leanings regarding either pureblood supremacy or Voldemort's return. At a guess, I would say that the fact that she was getting her personal interviews from the Slytherins suggests nothing good. At the very least, she was probably at

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Hogwarts with some of their family members and has kept in touch with them since, either socially or professionally. The probability that she is another alumna of Slytherin House is pretty damned high.

Mind you, none of this means that Rita automatically supports Voldemort. But she is in pretty thick with people who do, and she is clever enough to know that their public lip service to the Ministry isn't all it should be. She may not be a DE herself — and, given Tom Riddle's apparently low opinion of females, I very much doubt that she is — but she will quite willingly work with, or for them.



We have another, somewhat more disturbing, complication here as well.

Draco Malfoy *also* knows that Hermione caught Rita and kept her in a jar. He was eavesdropping outside the trio's compartment on the Hogwarts Express and he *heard* her tell Harry and Ron all about it.

It was his barging in to taunt her over the fact that now he knew it too that led to him and his goons being hexed into unconsciousness at the end of Book 4. Nobody thought to Obliviate this piece of information (and the kids wouldn't have known how to cast an Obliviate, anyway). Lucius could have heard of it by dinner time.

Draco's sneering at Cedric's memory may have crowded that little bombshell out of the Gryffindors' heads. But it probably won't have dropped out of *his*. And if he isn't talking, it is because he has been clearly instructed by somebody *not* to talk about it.



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Who, at that point, did Draco Malfoy *listen* to?

I was certain that that could not bode well for Hermione's chances of remaining safely in the background while Harry drew all of the attention. Not even with Rita, to all appearances, knuckling under to Hermione's demands — and Rita'd already demonstrated that she has a nasty, vindictive streak, certainly where Hermione is concerned.

We also don't know just how much Rita actually saw or heard in the hospital wing. Hermione had already figured out how she was getting her information and was on the watch for her. But everyone got distracted by the shouting match between Dumbledore and Fudge and we don't know just when Rita buzzed her way up to the window sill. We also don't know whether Hermione was checking all of the windows in turn, or whether there was only the one window in the room where Harry was, either.

In the first case, Rita could have been listening for some time before Hermione got to that particular window and caught her.

In the later case, we could be in luck. Hermione was on alert, and may have caught her before she had a chance to hear too much. Otherwise, Rita had easily enough information to make all kinds of trouble for Dumbledore without needing to resort to the PROPHET's smear campaign. (Opposing the Ministry, harboring fugitives.)

And there Hermione is, taking the woman to London to turn her loose. During school holidays when she isn't supposed to be using any magic herself? Oh, smart move!

I just can't see how she was allowed to pull that off — other than by authorial fiat. Either Rita had already been warned



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what to do if caught, or she must have an unexpected streak of decency in her. It would have to be very well hidden.

In Rita Skeeter we have a witness who had very likely just seen that Sirius Black was alive, and an Animagus, what *form* of Animagus, and, moreover, has seen that Dumbledore was aiding and abetting him. She has even seen that Snape *knows* this, and is going along with it. She knows that Snape is probably in with Dumbledore's plans up to his neck. She probably does *not* know that he is a double-agent. But she may now know about his Dark Mark. She has also seen that most of the Weasley family (and certainly Molly) is privy to this information. She heard Dumbledore send Sirius to stay with Remus Lupin, and heard Dumbledore tell him to spread the word to his supporters. She heard their *names*. It just gets better and better doesn't it?

And Hermione didn't tell Dumbledore *any* of this.

And the Death Eaters all *let her get away with it*.

Then.

Unless Rowling was a sloppier writer we'd like to think (and by that point in the series I suspect that Rowling was already dealing with a serious case of burnout), I was sure we hadn't heard the last of this.

It was generally insisted upon by the Order that Sirius's Animagus form was known some six weeks later. But I'm not sure that wasn't just to keep him in the house where they could all keep an eye on him. He was effectively under house arrest all Year 5, after all.

But no. I was wrong. Evidently being Harry's best friend (and part-time comic relief) means you never have to face up

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to the consequences of your less ethical actions. Even your enemies will give you a pass. To say nothing of your author.

What is more; by the end of OotP, Hermione had managed to do it *again*.

It took me some time after my first reading of Order of the Phoenix when I was so indignant that the 2nd shoe regarding Rita *hadn't* dropped, that I didn't at first realize that what *had* been dropped was another shoe from a different pair altogether. Rowling appeared to have established a pattern there. (Which later turned out to just be me connecting dots that were no more than spots before my eyes. *sigh* Them's the risks when you specialize in theories.)



Enemy #2. Dolores Umbridge.

Well. So, as of DHs we finally knew. Madam Umbridge, indeed does claim to be "connected" to the DEs. (So much for Sirius Black's contention that the world is not so easily divided — although he was at least literally correct.) We couldn't be sure until she claimed to related to the Selden family, and followed that claim up with another; that you would have a hard time finding a pureblood family to which she was *not* related.

By that time we had already discovered that there was at least one DE by the name of Selden. I doubted that we were handed that discovery by accident.

In which, if one accepts the information posted on Pottermore (I generally don't. It's not in the books, and Pottermore is never going to be canon) we turn out to be wrong. Acto Rowling on Pottermore Dolores Umbridge is another literal half-

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blood with a Muggle mother. According to the Pottermore bio, she also possesses an apparently Muggle brother. By which it must be assumed that the Mr Umbridge who was their father must be either a very low-powered wizard — given that the predisposition to be able to express magic generally activates if it is present at all — or that their mother is a carrier of the Squib factor which Dolores did not inherit, but her brother did. In any case, apparently Umbridge *is* a legitimately wizarding name, and Dolores is thereby able to fly in under the radar.

However, while Dolores Umbridge and Aleo Carrow would make a fine pair of bookends, I still doubted that Madam Umbridge is a DE herself. After all, she had no need to be. The DE's agenda already serves her interests without requiring anything from her but her cooperation. And that she will quite happily give them. Or, indeed, anticipate.

And, again, by this time we have a pretty good idea of what our Tom thinks of women. I suspect that Bellatrix and Aleo are only in the boys' club because they refused to be left out. Even Narcissa wasn't actually a DE, if Rowling is to be believed. And Narcissa is neck-deep in their dealings.

And yet, to state that Umbridge was "unconnected" was in fact not literally true by the time we caught up to her in DHs. By that time she'd been wearing one of Tom's Horcruxes for nearly a year (the Diary had taken over Ginny in about 3 months) — and no one had noticed any difference!

Umbridge's nerve broke after her abduction by the Centaurs, but nobody obliterated her. She is going to remember exactly who it was that spun her a banbury tale and led her off into the forest. And just what would you rate the chances of her



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not telling anyone this until after the end of book 7? I think it is a good thing that Hermione didn't let herself be seen publicly once the Muggle-born registry was set up.

What still seems likely is that someone (and I am not talking about that fool Fudge) gave Umbridge a debriefing at some point between her escape from Hogwarts and the end of the term to find out what exactly went wrong on her end of that year's mission, and made some promises. All of Voldemort's supporters inside the Ministry hadn't been unmasked. Or, rather, after the graveyard muster at the end of GoF they seem to have all retired their masks. We certainly never saw a DE in a mask after that point.

But whoever it was that debriefed Umbridge, it wasn't Malfoy because he was off the gameboard by then. Indeed, in fandom, it is most generally understood to have been Yaxley

That makes two years in a row that the cause of a botched or aborted mission has turned up with Granger's signature across it. And could anyone really think that this wasn't going to have repercussions down the line?

Yet it didn't.

For that matter, how much did Lucius Malfoy ever learn about how it was Hermione who single-handedly unraveled the riddle of the Basilisk? This is information that the DEs could have been given via Peter Pettigrew. If anyone had thought to ask him. Fortunately, no one ever does.

And Hermione is so sure that everyone is gunning for Harry that I seriously doubted that she was watching her own back.

After finally recognizing this, I distracted myself with the belated realization that we had a whole collection of 'other shoes'



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that might not drop for a while yet. (Or, as it turned out, ever.)

Throughout OotP, we also saw that little Miss bossy-boots was spreading her wings and growing, at least outwardly, more confident than ever.

To the point that she was beginning to make the kind of mistakes that usually *do* have consequences, even if not yet ones that had come with a high ticket price to other people.

It was Hermione who decided that the Dumbledore's Army should formalize their plans at the Hog's Head, where they were overheard and ratted out before they even got it off the ground. (In HBP we learn that the Hog's Head is a known low-ranking DE hangout, from way back.)

She silenced, instead of stunning an enemy in combat. That's a mistake she won't make again. That particular mistake only cost her directly, at least, no one else had to pay for it, although Harry could have certainly used more of her help in that adventure, and she was in no state to provide it.

It also raises the question of how come she hadn't ever come across the concept of non-verbal magic. James Potter and his yearmates were demonstrably familiar with it by the end of their 5th year. Didn't that stupid textbook of Umbridge's mention it at all? Or the one that Moody had used? What about all of those supplementary texts in the DA's training room provided by the Room of Requirement? It's not exactly an obscure skill. Indeed it is a *required* skill for NEWT-Level Charms and Transfiguration as well as for DADA. She makes a practice of reading ahead, and indeed it was established that she was picking up NEWT-level magic in 5th year, how did she manage to miss it?



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And she has repeatedly demonstrated that she has as nearly as big a blind spot regarding sentient non-human beings as Dolores Umbridge does.

A certain amount of slack ought to be cut for the fact that Hermione is Muggle-raised and hasn't altogether yet grokked the concept that even if House Elves do communicate in a sort of pidgin-English they are not simply funny-looking humans. She obviously hasn't a clue as to their motivations, and she doesn't seem to be making even the slightest effort to acquire such a clue. This seemed awfully likely to turn around and bite her someday, but no, even in this regard she turns out to be bullet-proof.

And she damned well ought to have known better than to suggest to a herd of Centaurs that she assumed that they would offer even the slightest bit of help to human trespassers in their own forest. The Centaurs' general opinion of humans is amply documented in *all* of her textbooks. And the Forbidden Forest is called that for a reason. (Plus; "I've never really liked horses," ranks right up there along with "He deserved it!" or, "I see no difference." in a collection of insensitive-to-the-point-of-inadmissible statements)

Readers of this series have made a continuing practice of trying to see echoes and parallels drawn between characters of different generations. It's a difficult habit to break. But Hermione Granger, by that point, was just plain no longer coming across as "Minerva McGonagall lite"

In fact, the most prominent other character who we have watched deploying the same kind of ruthless methodology of deciding what other people are going to do, and coolly making



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it impossible for them to do anything else is Dolores Umbridge, herself. This is not a comfortable observation. If Dolores Umbridge scared Harry for life with her Kafka-inspired quill, Hermione appears to have done nothing less with the cursed sign-up sheet for Dumbledore's Army. And Hermione scared a teenaged girl across the *face*.

And, throughout OotP, such methods on Hermione's part began to give me increasingly serious cause for concern. It looked like it wasn't just Harry who had entered into an unpleasant and rather disturbing stage of adolescence.

And, post-HBP, the verse just gets worse, and the end was not in sight.

So, yes, I agree that when one actually looks at what was going on in books 4 & 5 and who was responsible for much of the conflict, and who appears to have managed to put a stop to it, it IS easy to get the impression that this was another Hermione essay. But it isn't. It's an essay regarding enemies. In a lot of respects, Hermione seems to be her own worst one.

And Hermione certainly wasn't any help at all against the one that made his debut in HBP.

Speaking of which:



Enemy #3. Fenrir Greyback.

Werewolf Zero.

This time we can be sure that it was not Hermione who petrified him, when he had his go at Harry during the invasion of Hogwarts. She and Luna were off in the Hospital wing with Professor Flitwick, and stayed there. But the circumstances

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under which it happened were such that it seems impossible not to conclude that Greyback was captured during the "flight of the Prince."

Not that it made a lot of difference, since all of the DEs swept up in that raid as well as the ones caught in the raid on the DoM the year earlier were out again by the middle of July and the opening of DHs. *Weeks* before the Ministry officially "fell"

We were never given an explanation for that.

We never even heard of it having been reported in the PROPHET.

But, as to the invasion of Hogwarts, from all the indications at present the person who petrified Greyback was Neville.

He was the only defender who was not already fully occupied at the time.

Right at the point that Harry made it down from the top of the Tower, after petrifying "Brutal-face," Greyback broke away from another fight and tackled him. Someone then got Greyback before he could do Harry any lasting harm.

When Harry scrambled out from under Greyback's body the situation was:

Ginny vs. Amycus Carrow. Harry hexed him, he broke away. Escaped.

Minerva vs. a DE — it is implied this was Aleto. Aleto also got away.

Tonks vs. "Big Blond" (aka Thorfin Rowle). Harry hexed him, he broke away. Escaped. I had thought at the time that this was probably the elder Goyle. He and Crabbe had been described as the largest DEs at the muster in Little Hangleton two years earlier. Crabbe had taken part in the raid on the DoM and was

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captured at that time and landed in Azkaban. But no, Rowling claims she doesn't reread her own work once it's published, so it turns out that this was Thorfin Rowle, whose name we only found out as a retrofit in the following book. We don't know whether he was another one of the Azkaban escapees or not. Not all of them in the newspaper article when they escaped the first time were identified by name.

Ron vs. an unidentified Death Eater

Lupin vs. an unidentified Death Eater.

One Death Eater, Gibbon, down. Dead from one of Rowle's AKs.

Bill Weasley: down. Unconscious.

And, Neville, down, but conscious, holding his stomach. (Neville had not been given any of Harry's "liquid luck potion," he had been hurt early in the battle, but not seriously. He had also been tossed across the hall by the alleged barrier charm on the staircase.)

Ginny, Minerva, Ron, Lupin and Tonks were all fully occupied, thank you. Greyback had broken away from his fight to attack Harry. Evidently, he had either been fighting Neville — who seems to have managed to defend himself well enough for Greyback to decide to have a go at someone else, or one of the other defenders had been fighting at 2-against-1 odds before Harry got down the staircase.

We hear nothing further regarding the fates of DEs 7 & 8, but it is probable that Ginny, Neville, Tonks and Minerva went to Ron and Lupin's assistance and they were captured as well. They certainly didn't make it out of the castle in the escape, or if they did, Harry didn't see them, and he was between the castle and the main gate. Of the eight invaders, only the Car-

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rows, and Rowle made it down to the front gates after Snape and Malfoy. So five of Draco's eight "helpers" were either killed or captured.

I imagine that if everyone had not been so shocked over the death of Albus Dumbledore, or worried about the future of Bill Weasley there would have been a great deal more jubilation over Greyback's capture.



As presented in HBP, in Fenrir Greyback we apparently did not have simply one of the followers, but a bonafide *ally* of Lord Voldemort. Or at least so it had originally appeared. Rowling threw this issue into confusion by flip-flopping on us again. In DHs Greyback is no more than one of a frowsy group of "Snatchers." Truant officers, effectively.

In HBP, back in Spinner's End, Snape speaks of Greyback in a manner consistent with his being yet another known DE, who, in common with most of them, had gone underground after Voldemort's defeat, believing him to be dead. Neither of the Black sisters challenged or contradicted this statement. Rowling appears unaware that her later depiction does not support this interpretation.

As HBP progressed and we learned more of Greyback's history from Lupin, it appeared that he was not merely a random DE, but a considerable villain in his own right with a following of his own, who had chosen to ally himself with Voldemort.

And then, in DHs, in the chapter of the Prince's Tale, in a scene which took place just before the Black sisters' visit to Spinner's End, Albus and Snape are shown discussing Voldemort

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having only just recently enlisted Greyback to his cause.

Say what?

And just where do Draco's earlier "friend of my father" claims fit in this version?

This contradiction is yet another one of the cumulative list of reasons why I find myself flatly unable to accept very much of anything that we are told in DHs. It just doesn't add up. It doesn't reveal misdirections given us by partial information fed to us over the earlier books. It simply makes a hash of the whole story, as it had been told. Things like Dolores Umbridge being a Selden, yes, that will work, we had never been told anything to contradict it, but this? No. I just don't buy it.

It is also clear in DHs that the whole gang of werewolves thread (which actually only materialized in HBP, and served no purpose to the story arc whatsoever) has been completely dropped from the storyline. We don't even get the impression, let alone confirmation, that the rest of the Snatchers Greyback is leading are part of his band of werewolves.

Not that one can exactly blame Rowling for dropping it. It clearly wasn't well-thought out enough to go prime time. Ultimately the werewolf threat was just set dressing and local color.

I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the whole idea of introducing the Big Bad Wolf didn't suddenly occur to her somewhere during the writing of OotP (where she did introduce the existence of a recent victim at St Mungo's). She hadn't any reasonable way of deploying it in that book (which was already getting long enough to be daunting) so she held it back, built it up, and threw it at us in HBP. Without thinking through any of the implications she had lumbered it with.

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About the only purpose Greyback ever served was to make the reader understand where the ww's horror of werewolves came from, for it certainly wasn't based on Remus Lupin.

In other words, it's yet another disposable plot device. Use once and discard. Not that she *made* any discernable use of it.

However, we're stuck with him, so we might as well try to force some sense out of the mess. This is going to be a lot more solidly based on information we got in HBP than on anything we were given in DHs. To all intents and purposes, where the series is concerned, the werewolf thread only existed in HBP. It certainly never materialized to any *purpose* during DHs.



The Death Eaters all had the luxury of going underground during Voldemort's absence. Greyback, and his werewolves would not have had that option. There is no hiding from the moon regardless of who is calling the shots in the Ministry.

And Greyback remained active throughout the period of Voldemort's absence.

Now that we finally *met* Greyback, we could at last believe we knew the reason for much of that apparently unjust prejudice against lycanthropes in the wizarding world. Remus Lupin, our representative example, is clearly NOT typical.

And the indications we had been given up to that point were that Fenrir Greyback (not his legal name I suspect, btw, that handle sounds every bit as bogus as "Lord Voldemort") was yet another of Lucius Malfoy's odd-job men. Even werewolves need cash, sometimes. And no one will hire them to earn it honestly. Malfoy's specialties seem to be blackmail and extor-

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tion. Greyback is probably of no particular use regarding the former, but he could certainly be very helpful with the latter. A “family friend,” eh?

Lucius’s fellow Governors on the Hogwarts board supported him in his campaign to remove Dumbledore as Headmaster because Lucius had threatened to “curse their families,” eh? In the light of 20/20 hindsight I rather doubt that Lucius had threatened to curse them *personally*. And there are curses that are incurable.

Or, quite possibly, there is something more to it than that. Blackmail and extortion can go in more than one direction.

From everything we were told in HBP it seems likely that Fenrir Greyback somehow got roped in under Voldemort’s banner “last time.” We’ve been told more than once that Voldemort had werewolves at his command (although it is hard to come up with any effective manner in which he could have deployed them). And Greyback’s activities seem to have been fairly widely known last time, too. Which makes it hard to understand why he is still at liberty.

We don’t know how early their alleged association was formed, either. Our only information on that account was that Remus Lupin, who was born in March of 1960, was bitten before Hogwarts’s Autumn term of 1971. And that we have also since been told that Greyback bit Remus to get back at Remus’s father suggests that Voldemort may have had nothing to do with it at that point.

Or perhaps he had. The Death Eaters were known to be active by the mid-1960s even if their leader wasn’t yet unmentionable, or possibly even publicly known. The elder Mr Lupin may have offended more than just Greyback. And we’ve been

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told by Rowling that Remus is a halfblood. We do not know whether he is a literal one.

Or even that “Lupin” is actually his family name. Assumed names don’t appear to be that uncommon in wizarding Britain.



But, apart from Remus Lupin, we never encountered another werewolf (aside from one new victim in St Mungo’s) until after Voldemort had already returned.

So where were they?

You can’t hide from the moon.

Particularly given that Fenrir Greyback allegedly holds it in the light of a holy mission to create as many werewolves like himself as he possibly can. To create them young, and to raise them away from normal human society and influence. To bring them up with an ingrained hatred of “normal” wizards.

Now, that’s strange.

Within our context, to date, of the Potterverse, that seemed *truly* strange.

Within the context of the Real World™ it’s not, *particularly*.

If I may digress; there is a phenomenon which has managed to attract some attention in our own, all-too-workaday world. It is not all that *recent* a phenomenon, either, but its move to the Internet does tend to signal a new phase.

It is abundantly evident that The World As It Is is not nearly enough to satisfy some of its tenants. The concept that there is nothing more to it than they can see is insupportable. They crave wonders, the unknown, the hidden, and the Dark. They hunger for mystery, and they long for Magic. And they are not

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all readers who are content to merely seek it by immersing themselves in speculative or imaginative fiction, or the fandom thereof. Or even by adopting various neo-pagan religions which uphold the existence of, and offer the promise of potential control over other presences in the world around them.

They want there to be "Others."

They want to BE those Others.

I am not making this up.

If you choose, you can find the websites of groups of people that claim to BE vampires. And, yes, they really do drink blood. Or try to. I gather that they have nightclubs as well. I think they got the idea out of Anne Rice, but I could be wrong. I do not know whether there are similar sources for would-be werewolves. Between the 'Twilight' phenomena and others, there may well be by now.

If I may repeat myself:

"It should be noted that some of the atavistic horror with which Muggles regard both of these maladies [vampirism and lycanthropy] has also in many cases been applied to the practice of Magic itself by normal wizards and witches. It is currently believed by some of the more prominent names in the field of Muggle Studies that this is largely because, among Muggles, it is only as a result of sustaining such infections that a Muggle is able to channel magical energies at all. Muggles have no experience of channeling the forces of magical energies by the noninvasive methods currently practiced by most wizards." [JOdel: 'A History of Magic', Red Hen Publications, Potterverse essay collection]

The above statement was made in the very first posted

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version of the essay referenced above, all the way back in the spring of 2003. It has been repeated in every subsequent iteration of the collection since that date. Another postulation made in the same essay a little earlier, referring to the hypothetical development of Dark Arts-related dementias proposed:

"It should also be noted that long-term damage of this sort is commonly observed in the victims of certain Magical maladies such as vampirism and lycanthropy." [snip] "The social stigma which has traditionally been applied to the victims of such maladies is largely in recognition of this degenerative process, gradually producing the symptoms of DA-related dementia which ultimately affect the vampire during all periods that he is conscious, and the werewolf even while in human form. [Note: This statement was made in 2003 and the last thing I expected to encounter in canon was an example of it!]"

At the end of HBP I was convinced that "Fenrir Greyback" had once been a Muggle.

The DE robes he was wearing didn't fit him. Were they even his? (In DHs, it seems strongly implied that he is not, in fact, actually Death Eater. Tom wasn't willing to extend his offer of an alliance as far as that.)

And at that point, we hadn't seen him threaten anyone with a wand, either, had we? In fact when he was acting out his "big bad wolf" routine on top of the tower, Brutal-Face had no compunction about hexing him, and telling him to knock it off, and he didn't even try to draw a wand in retaliation. I didn't think he had one.

The possibility that he was a former Muggle, and that that

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may have accelerated the degenerative process of lycanthropy, since, as a Muggle, he is not naturally capable of channeling magical energies. Rowling states in 'FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM' that both wizards and Muggles can contract lycanthropy. And as a Muggle he might have less resistance than a wizard to the distortions of perception which accompany the channeling of Dark, i.e., chaotic, magic.

I am absolutely confident that if such infections existed in our world, some of the people on those websites I refer to above would be lining up to catch them. And somewhere, there would be somebody, maybe more than one, who whether originally among that group or not, might, once having caught such an infection, very well decide it was his mission to spread it.

And most Muggles don't know enough to come in out of the moonlight.

They are sitting ducks. Wizards, after all, know to stay indoors on the nights of a full moon.



Well, not, apparently. In DHs Greyback is presented as really being a wizard. He is not, however a true DE (Ergo; the robes didn't fit). He's just a hanger-on. In Rowling's worldview, Muggles might be comic villains, like the Dursleys, but are not permitted to be real ones.

It's easy to see why Rowling suddenly felt she had to establish that, yes, he was a wizard. She wanted to bring him back onstage as a bogymen threat during the Malfoy Manor segment of the story, and he would had to be a wizard to be able to Apparate in order to be where the plot needed him to go. But it

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clanks. It really does.

I still think his being an ex-Muggle would have made for a more *interesting* character arc, and his presence at Malfoy Manor could have been explained in some other manner. He could have already been there awaiting orders when the Snatchers brought them in.

Indeed, under the DEs' reign he was nothing more than an itinerant Snatcher that the real DEs regarded with contempt. So much for promises kept.

Well, okay, the pay was probably not much, but at least he was *getting* paid. He was better off than under the previous Ministry's reign. And it put him in the way of capturing children. Or at least, minors.

Although probably not during nights of the full moon. Sorry about that.

But if he actually had a band of followers of his own, as everyone was insisting all through HBP, he seems to have mislaid them. He is the only werewolf apart from Remus Lupin who was ever identified as such. Of course nothing of note in the whole 7th took place during the full moon, so how would we know? (Werewolves? *Where* werewolves?)

For there is still that pesky issue of his alleged followers. What happened to *them*?



Back in HBP Greyback was said to be quite ambitious. He allegedly claimed that he intended to create as many of his followers as possible from young wizards. Or, in plain language; he wants to have *wizards* at his command. And he meant to have

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them. Young ones. *Untrained* young ones (since of course young werewolves cannot attend Hogwarts). Ones that he can control. Their magic is not a threat to him because they cannot effectively utilize it. To the wizarding community, the children that Greyback “turns” have been “ruined,” and are unrecoverable. They cannot be trained, they cannot find jobs, the wizarding world disowns them, and regardless of the need, it will not reclaim them.

And the more wizards he ruins, the fewer of them are out there to oppose him. Or his ally Lord Voldemort. I’m inclined to doubt that the DEs quite realize that, although their leader probably does.

And he does not oppose it.

It is small wonder that Lupin, a trained wizard, found it so hard to infiltrate the group.

The Muggle society of the Potterverse, however, has been guided into an even more “rational” and unimaginative model than that of our own world. Such a discovery as that magic not only exists, but that one can actually *become* a magical creature has a lot of potential to send someone poorly balanced to begin with right over the edge.

In Fenrir Greyback, Rowling has conflated the “Wolfman” with the “Mad Scientist” attempting to produce a “master race.” I thought that making him an ex-Muggle would have been an extremely interesting twist. But, alas, no such thing. Rowling’s imagination did not stretch that far.

He is still completely deluded, of course. And dangerous with it. He needs to be confined (or disposed of) for the good of everybody. And his condition has clearly progressed to the point that he is no longer “safe” apart from on the nights of a

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full moon. He is a “dangerous creature” at all times.

And at the end of HBP his “pack” was now leaderless, since he had been captured.

Well, temporarily.

Maybe that’s what happened to them. He was absent long enough over HBP, off loitering about in Knockturn Alley to intimidate Borgin, followed by being clapped up in Azkaban for 5–7 weeks in the summer, that they chose a new leader and wanted no further part of him.



But his being an ex-Muggle wouldn’t have explained an association with Lucius Malfoy. Rowling may have dropped that thread entirely, but that consideration may have been a factor of making sure we knew he was a wizard. I can think of few characters to whom we have been introduced over the course of the series who would be less likely to strike up a partnership with an infected Muggle than Lucius Malfoy.

But maybe it wasn’t exactly a *partnership*.

As I pointed out above: Lucius Malfoy was very publicly “outed” for his involvement with the Death Eaters. Everyone in the ww *knows* he was one, even if his father did manage to get him off with an Imperius defense. Everyone knows who he is.

Which means that unlike nearly all of the rest of the known DEs, he was not sent to Azkaban at the end of VWI.

From Snape’s comments in Spinner’s End, it sounds as though Greyback’s association was originally through Voldemort, not Malfoy. Indeed I would not be all that astonished to learn that the “family friend” threat to Borgin was a

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bit of play-acting on Draco's part, put on to intimidate back when he was still all excited about having been assigned a real honest-to-ghod mission.

I mean, really, does Fenrir Greyback come across as anyone that Narcissa would ever invite to sit down at her dinner table? Even before we saw her opinion of him for ourselves in DHs?

For that matter, does Draco act like Greyback is old "uncle Fenrir," his daddy's friend, who he has known since he was a tot?

If he behaved according to his usual *modus operandi*, Voldemort probably gave Greyback permission to do his worst, provided occasional material support, and just possibly some minor degree of protection over the intervals between full moons. On the strength of that, Greyback started building his own little empire. However, Greyback and his werewolves would never have had access to sensitive information related to Tom's plans.

For that matter they probably largely served as a distraction, since there is no way that one could have profitably deployed a bunch of irrational frenzied wolves which are as much a danger to your own side as they are to the opposition. The werewolves were strictly a terror weapon, to be turned loose when Voldemort hadn't anything else planned. Their purpose was merely to keep the wizarding populace *frightened*.

But if you are *that* close to the edge, even limited support is support. And once Voldemort had disappeared, Greyback was stuck, with an indeterminate number of followers, few resources, and nowhere safe to turn.

Fenrir had gotten used to relying on the DEs and where were they now? Oh, that's right. Azkaban.

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With a couple of exceptions.

Like Avery. And Malfoy. Both of whom had managed to dodge the bullet. There might have been one or two others that Greyback knew about personally.

We don't know anything about Avery's circumstances, but Malfoy was known to not be hurting for funds.

Maybe Greyback felt he should look him up. And, for that matter maybe he should look up Avery, and just about anyone else whose identity he knew that had managed not to be swept up in the aftermath.

Charity is one of the cardinal virtues, after all.

And Malfoy has a small child, too.

Fenrir does so love children!

I rather suspect that the Greyback complication did not go over well with Abraxus Malfoy, but he agreed that whatever sent the creature away was probably well worth every knut of it.

But, yes indeed, blackmail and extortion can certainly go both ways.

Not so much "old family friend" as the wolf at the door.

And Lucius did, at least occasionally, find Greyback, or the threat of him, useful.



A Survey of Lucius Malfoy

Lucius Malfoy can hardly be defined as any sort of a Man of Mystery. But there are still rather a lot of fairly important things about him which we do not know. Rowling will ever get around to telling us any of them, either. We didn't really expect her to.

He does certainly count as one of Rowling's more successful creations. Lucius Malfoy makes a thoroughly satisfactory villain.

Far more so than Tom Marvolo Riddle ever did.



It is readily apparent to the reader that if Lucius Malfoy had been the primary villain of the piece, we would be reading a rather different story. Lucius does not have any sort of an instinct for epic endeavors. He is, at heart, a political animal. If he took over the wizarding world, he would do it by subversion rather than violence, and *he* would want to *rule* it. Openly, and to all appearances, legally. And he would make a concerted effort to do so.

And he *did* want to take it over. Or at least to take over wizarding Britain.

Legally. From the inside.

Which is a part of why the portions of the series in which Lucius was acting on his own behalf (Years 2–4) have such an unequivocal political reading once you examine, in retrospect, what appears to have been unfolding at the Ministry in the background of the central story as Harry understood it. Malfoy was trying to stage a palace coup.

And he almost pulled it off.



A Survey of Lucius Malfoy

One of our most recalcitrant and persistent conundrums is; in GoF, why didn't Sirius Black mention Malfoy when he was giving us his little list of the baby Death Eaters that Snape hung out with when he first showed up at Hogwarts?

Although post-DHs that conundrum has almost been eclipsed by the question of why he didn't mention Mulciber, either.

But the question is all the more confusing since it had been quite evident since about CoS that Snape has had *long* associations with Lucius Malfoy. Yet, although Sirius gave us the information that Malfoy, like Avery, had gotten off on an Imperius defense at the end of VoldWar I, he did not include Malfoy among the future DEs in Snape's schoolday "gang".

So why not?

Well, who *did* Sirius name in his little list? Rosier and Wilkes. Avery. The Lestranges, described as a married couple, now in Azkaban. What do these all have in common?

Well, they were Slytherins. But that doesn't really get us any forwarder.

Post-HBP, we now knew that all of them except possibly Wilkes, (and *maybe* Bellatrix) share family names with known contemporaries, or early associates of young Tom Riddle.

Ergo: they were probably all 2nd-generation Death Eaters. And it is not much of a stretch to suppose that Wilkes might have been as well. Sirius forgot that he was speaking to a pair of Muggle-raised kids and that Ron was completely apolitical. Sirius probably had expected those family names to mean something to his audience. To set off unpleasant associations. Instead, the references passed straight over their heads.

Admittedly, the ballots are not all in regarding Bellatrix. But



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her mother was a Rosier. So there is indeed a potential connection to a young Riddle to have been invoked in her case as well. With the belated adjustment to her father's birth year on the Black family tapestry sketch, there is a strong possibility that Cygnus Black might have also been persuaded early to follow Tom Riddle, or to have been recruited by his in-laws, off the rest of the Black family's radar.

And it also finally occurred to me that Sirius Black must have only learned about Malfoy getting off on that Imperius defense *after* he escaped from Azkaban. And we have absolutely nothing in canon to say whether his father, Abraxus Malfoy was "connected" or not.



If Abe was out of Hogwarts before Riddle started gaining influence there — which would have only needed for him to be, say, 4–5 years older than Tom — he probably wouldn't have been one of the followers that Riddle himself recruited. Riddle made few overtures toward anyone significantly older than himself. He'd *use* them happily enough, but he didn't induct them into his circle. He targeted their kids instead.

If Abraxus was five or six years younger than Riddle he'd have missed falling under his influence at Hogwarts as well. Riddle didn't stick around Hogwarts after he left it, and within 2–3 years had disappeared from the British wizarding world altogether. Most of Riddle's "first generation" followers were probably born between, oh, say, 1924 and 1930.

Sirius Black was inside Azkaban within a day or two after Voldemort fell, and he tells us as a preface to his tale of the

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decline and fall of Barty Crouch Sr, that he only pieced most of it together in the year he had been dodging the Aurors — after he escaped. I think he'd had very little word from outside until Fudge showed up on an inspection tour and gave him a newspaper.

He might well have remembered that Malfoy had a social circle of his own. And that his was a rival circle to Bella's. He clearly knows that Snape was taken up by Malfoy after Bella either dropped him, or finished school herself. Which might be why Sirius states that there was no suspicion about Snape having been connected before the end of the war. Snape had ended up in Malfoy's crowd, not Bella's.

So if Sirius didn't grow up knowing that the Malfoys were also DEs or on a fast track to become so, he probably *wouldn't* have brought him up in that context.

Particularly since Malfoy almost certainly *wasn't* a part of Bella's gang. He had probably *never* been a part of Bella's gang. There was clearly no love lost between Lucius and Bella to the day she died, and I am coming more and more to the conclusion that there never had been.

Some of the fan suspicions that the Malfoys are jumped-up nouveau riche rather than "old guard" purebloods may have something to it. But, regardless of the cause, Lucius certainly never made the cut where Bella was concerned. (Of course that may simply be because Lucius was too arrogant to defer to her.)

And, let's face it, Sirius Black clearly had every reason to know that you can easily be a pureblood extremist twerp *and* a Dark wizard without being a DE as well.

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So what else does this tell us about Lucius Malfoy?

Well, Malfoy married Narcissa Black didn't he? Possibly as early as 1975 the year Narcissa probably finished Hogwarts.

How do we know that Malfoy wasn't recruited by his father-in-law?

We don't.

Which could mean that he may NOT have been, himself, a DE kid. Just another snobbish, bigoted pureblood, who fit the profile, and was receptive to the message.

Malfoy, at least a year younger than Bellatrix, had his own gang which did not intersect with Bellatrix and her circle. After all, they were coming from two slightly different contexts. There was a certain degree of "shared awareness" which ran through one of these circles that was not necessarily present in the other.

And if Sirius Black's mouthing off can be trusted, it appears that Snape seems to have been taken up by, and then later left (or been dropped by) the one group, only to be picked up by the other. Or, if he was indeed the sort of "pushing, thrusting young man" that Sybil paints him, Once the leaders of the first group were out of Hogwarts, he may have transferred his attentions and deliberately attached himself to the other most influential group still in range.

For that matter, I can't readily suppose that Andromeda Black hung about much with her sister Bella and her crowd, either. And Narcissa, four years younger than Bellatrix, would probably have been beneath Bellatrix's contempt while she

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was still a scrubby schoolgirl. Cissy would have gravitated to a younger group. Evidently Malfoy's.

But we still have been told nothing of any sort about the character and/or loyalties of Abraxus Malfoy, Lucius's father, apart from having been associated with Horace Slughorn in some undetermined context, and *any* ex-Slytherin could say *that*. Nor do we know who Lucius's mother was. And it looks like we never will.



Until the publication of HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX, one of the issues with the widest degree of controversy in fanon was Lucius Malfoy's age. The animosity displayed between Lucius and Arthur Weasley in the Flourish and Blotts encounter at the beginning of Chamber of Secrets is so clearly "personal" that it gives a strong hint of there having been a long history between them.

Prior to the 3-year summer, one could easily have seen Lucius and Arthur being the pre-eminent Gryffindor/Slytherin rivals of their mutual years at Hogwarts (with Arthur narrowly beating Lucius out for the honor of being Head Boy.) The alternate, and, actually rather more widespread fanon theory placed Malfoy in the same year as Severus Snape.

Well, neither of these readings turned out to be correct. In OotP Lucius Malfoy was stated in a DAILY PROPHET article to be 41 years old in the Autumn that his son Draco was appointed a Slytherin 5th year Prefect (1995). Given the ages of the oldest Weasley sons (now believed to have been at least 21 and 23 at that point), Arthur Weasley is bound to be at

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least a few years older than Lucius.

It is still quite evident that the two of them share a long and acrimonious history, however. And their time at Hogwarts would have overlapped. I cannot really see Arthur Weasley throwing a punch at a man who was either very much older, or very much younger than himself.

Another indication of some kind of personal history is the fact that Draco starts spitting slurs at the whole Weasley tribe the minute he lays eyes on Ron on the Hogwarts express all the way back in PS/SS, which by the internal timeline of the series took place in 1991. That had to come from somewhere.

We have absolutely no reason to suppose that the Burrow is located anywhere that the Malfoys would be required to have any interaction with the Weasleys, so it is unlikely that Draco had ever seen Ron before. And, now that we know that Arthur was one of only three brothers (and no sisters), the contempt for the Weasley's overly large family had to have been deliberately aimed at Arthur's family rather than that of his parents'.

Draco has clearly been sent off to school well-primed with overheard fulminations regarding penniless redheads who breed like rabbits from his father (who he clearly idolizes). One glance at shabby, red-headed Ron is enough to identify him as the "hereditary enemy."

According to Pharnabazus's theories related to the underlying patronage networks which underpin the wizarding world,, [<http://www.livejournal.com/users/pharnabazus/715.html>] there may be an indirect indication that the Malfoys and Barty Crouch Sr cut some kind of a deal in the aftermath of VoldWar I. Now that Crouch has been shunted to one side in the course

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of a rotation of Department Heads, he is no longer able to hold up his end of the agreement, with the result that Ministry raids are now affecting wizards dependent on Malfoy's sponsorship.

Indeed, Malfoy himself appears to have been subjected to at least one raid by the opening of CoS and Arthur Weasley's position as the Head of a Division (however minor) of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement is of a sort which might well have required that he take part in it. The possibility of a widespread personnel rotation inside the Ministry attendant upon Fudge's accession to the post of Minister of Magic in 1990 would certainly fit this reading.

However, the HBP information that Malfoy's father Abraxus Malfoy had still been still alive at the end of VoldWar I would dictate that some degree of modification to Pharnabazus's original theory be made.

What now seems most probable is that it was not Lucius who cut that deal with Barty Crouch (if deal there was), But Abraxus.

And, for the record, I rather suspect there was a deal cut.

For that matter, I can easily picture an old martinet of a Malfoy paterfamilias keeping the son who had publicly embarrassed him by getting involved in a terrorist organization firmly under his thumb thereafter. Even after his partner in the cover-up, Barty Sr had been shunted sideways out of the DMLE.



One thing that a lot of people are a bit slow at picking up on is that even among the Pureblood extremists, Lord Voldemort's actual DEs are a considerable minority. Wizards may

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individually be scofflaws, but the majority of them still uphold the concept of a rule of law. And it is obvious that Lord Voldemort doesn't.

Riddle never put any real effort into trying to recruit the older generation. He'll put pressure on them, or use them as Imperio'ed puppets without compunction, but even Karkaroff may have been not *much* older than Riddle, for all his silver hair (It had still been black only 10 years earlier). Pretty much anyone more than about, say, 3 years older than Tom were fairly safe from attempted recruitment. Tom wasn't interested in them.

Tom will go for the sure thing whenever he can. That's why just about all of his followers are the descendants of his own schoolmates, plus a few similar types that he picked up on the Continent. For all that Sirius Black raved on about how LV wanted to enlist more DEs, we don't seem to get a lot of indication of this in the books.

Despite the fact that the *rest* of the pureblood extremists are perfectly willing to fall into line once he starts laying down the law, and designating them as the "ruling class," it doesn't necessarily mean that they are actual members of his exclusive club. Because that club was *very* exclusive.

On the other hand, prior to the release of OotP most fanon writers who produced Marauder-era fics seemed to have been determined to put Lucius Malfoy into the same year as Severus Snape. Which was another widely adopted theory that the DAILY PROPHET article in OotP exploded.

Lucius, now revealed to be some 5–6 years older than Snape,

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is old enough to have been a 7th year in Snape's first year, unless he has a birthday after September 1. Therefore, their time at Hogwarts is canonically shown to have overlapped, but not by much, and they are not exact contemporaries. I'll admit that I never could quite believe the Malfoy/Snape year-mates theory, but it has made for some lively and engaging storytelling, both dramatic and comic. At least one example of which can be found posted in the Publications collection, elsewhere on the Red Hen site.

It has also been pointed out to me that if Lucius Malfoy had only *just* turned 41 when the DAILY PROPHET article ran after September first of '95, then he would have been only five years ahead of Snape, which would certainly make an even better argument for their continuing association afterwards. But I would tend to suspect that it might be unwise to depend upon that being the case. Not that we will ever be told.

As to Lucius's circumstances; We have known from an early point in the series that the Malfoy's do indeed own a "manor." In Wiltshire. (We do not know whether it is in proximity to Salisbury Plain.) For that matter we have known about Malfoy Manor since we first encountered the Malfoys *pere et fils* in Borgin & Burke's at the beginning of CoS.

It should be pointed out that a manor house, is not necessarily on a scale to be classified as a stately home, although it can be. And the Malfoy's manor house is unlikely to be the Georgian confection that fanon seems determined to paint it. By the time of the Georges, the wizarding world was in formal

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Seclusion and unlikely to be drawing attention to itself by building mansions. And, indeed, when we finally got there in DHs, Malfoy Manor does in fact appear to be no more recent than the late Tudor to early Stuart periods. Which would fit the timeline very nicely.

That the Malfoys did at one time also have a House Elf would imply that this property is probably neither small nor even remotely modern. We do not yet know for certain whether Dobby was the Malfoy's "hereditary" elf or whether he was awarded to the Malfoys by the House Elf Relocation Department of the Ministry of Magic at some point before, during, or after VoldWar I. But the probability is that he was "hereditary."

Our information has some gaps on this issue, however. The story suggests that a number of fine old families may have met their ends during the previous conflict. And due to the tendencies of families to eventually die out anyway, some relocation of House Elves may continue to be ongoing. But the likelihood is that even if Dobby had not been the Malfoy's Elf originally, he had been bonded to another family of Dark wizards during the "war." His statement that House Elves were "treated like vermin" when Voldemort was "in power" does not suggest that he had been formerly the Elf of a family like the Potters. (Or at least not as the Potters are usually depicted.)

Although Pharnabazus raises a very good question, in his excellent 'Expecto Patronum' series, as to whether Lucius Malfoy is really as rich as he appears, there is little question that throughout the British wizarding world he is accounted a wealthy man. It is not difficult to regard the Malfoys as one of those families who have been living on the proceeds of their

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investments for generations.

Wizard or Muggle, once a fortune reaches a certain level, the holder's primary job is managing their money. No other occupation is deemed necessary. Lucius is probably *at least* the second or third head of the Malfoy family who has been in the "business" of money farming.

Or, if the Malfoys go back anything like as far as the Blacks, quite possibly much, much more. There is no assurance of that, however.

Nevertheless, Lucius's determination to make a public parade of his wealth, and his son's tendency to boast of it leads many fans to conclude that the Malfoy fortune might be very "new" money. This may or may not actually be the case, nor does it matter. But it must be admitted that their obsession on the subject is certainly as vulgar as any stereotypical sketch meant to be representative of the nouveau riche. Indeed, "rich, rude and snobbish" is a description which fits the Malfoys every bit as well as it did the Riddles.

Astonishingly, such underbred behavior seems to be a manner to which a surprising number of people somehow manage to respond with great deference and admiration.

A minor point in support of this reading is that — rather to our surprise — the Malfoys do not appear to rate a seat on the Wizengamot. Since the members of the Wizengamot appear in the main to also hold posts within the Ministry of Magic, or other branches of the government, it is at this point uncertain whether this is a relevant factor or not.



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My own interpretation of the Malfoys' background, which is just for fun, completely irrelevant, and altogether unsupported, is that they did not come over "with the Conqueror," despite a determined effort later to give that impression. But that they did settle in England around the end of the reign of the Plantagenets (possibly coming over in the wake of Henry Tudor after the Battle of Bosworth in 1485), but rather than being landowners, at that point they were engaged in trade, at some reasonably successful level. Or, possibly, they were engaged in law or some other generally respected profession.

At some point prior to the establishment of Seclusion, possibly during the brief reign of Mary Tudor, they managed to make enough of a killing in their commercial enterprises to enable their eldest son and heir to "marry up," which is the point at which the manor came into Malfoy hands, either directly by marriage or by purchase enabled by young Madam Malfoy's dowery.

The family, which clearly has long-established isolationist sympathies, probably went under cover on their own initiative some decades before wizarding Seclusion was imposed by statute, possibly as early as some point during the reign of James I, certainly well before Parliamentary rule, and upon the formal establishment of Seclusion they liquidated all of their holdings but the manor itself in order to buy into the Ministry-sanctioned cabal of wizarding traders established to ensure a steady provision of staple items into the wizarding world. The bulk of their current fortune dates from the Seclusion period.

That trade cabal has done very well for its shareholders.

Like I say, there is absolutely no support of this reading in canon. Nor any contradiction of it, either.

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Although farming his money appears to be Malfoy's primary occupation, his most active one seems to be to farm his influence, which, of course, protects the sources of his money.

To this end he probably has a finger in just about every pie worth the baking in the British (and possibly international) wizarding world into which he or his forebearers have been able to insert one. This draws in any number of additional advantages.

For one thing, natural-born toadies in high places, like Cornelius Fudge, are easily guided to follow policies which further the Malfoy agenda. A reasonable "donation" here and there and some judicious flattery — balanced by some misdirection in the form of drawing attention to phantom threats to Fudge's authority, and Fudge, even if he is not "ever-so-evil" is eating out of Malfoy's hand. By the end of OotP, Fudge, as any reader will notice, had become second only to Draco in the cast of characters with a habit of quoting "the world according to Lucius Malfoy."

For the record; I believe that for the previous couple of years, Malfoy had been fostering the impression that it was he who had helped keep Fudge where he was and didn't let him forget to whom he "owed" it. It is also evident that Malfoy had very early won Dolores Umbridge's support in this campaign to separate Fudge from Dumbledore's influence.

Fudge, for his part, is only slightly cleverer than he comes across (he could hardly be less so) and he does use that pompous, fussy, bumbling manner to disarm critics, much as Peter

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Pettigrew uses his cowering little wimp mode to deflect his enemies. But where manipulation is concerned, Fudge is seriously outclassed by just about everybody around him, with the exception of Percy Weasley. The only uncertainty remaining is just how deeply aware Fudge was of exactly whose purposes he had been serving. He can certainly never have been unaware of Lucius's sentiments, and he seems in general to share them. Just how thoroughly shocked ("Shocked! I mean! *Shocked!*") he may have been by the unquestionable evidence that Malfoy actually *was* a Death Eater rather than one of their formerly-Imperio'd tools remains uncertain.

For another thing, the right donations to the right worthy causes gets you a place on the Board of Directors, and into a position to set the policy of institutions, as well as to convey a sense of those institutions' obligation to oneself.

We know that Lucius, or more probably his father, enabled the means for him to elude justice in the first round of Death Eater trials by convincing the Court (and had he purchased that Court? Even under Crouch Sr? I've come solidly around to the view that Abraxus Malfoy and Barty Crouch *did* cut a deal there) that Lucius had acted under the force of the Imperius curse during Voldemort's first rise and could not have been held accountable for any actions he had performed during it.



And, while we are on the subject of Malfoy's Imperius defense: from the outside looking in, to the majority of the wizarding public this defense might have appeared quite plausible. It has become evident that Voldemort and his followers employed

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extravagant use of the Imperius curse in his campaign to disrupt the wizarding government. Malfoy and Avery could hardly have been the only wizards who used that defense, and most of the others who did so probably *had* been bewitched by it.

We also know from Karkaroff's plea-bargain hearing that *many* people were used to facilitate the Dark Lord's agenda under the force of Imperius. And Malfoy's public profile probably fitted very well with that of the people who were most likely to be used in this manner. (For the record, Horace Slughorn fits it even better.)

Consequently, during the Voldemort trials, a strong case could probably have been made that the Malfoy heir would be one of the first people that Voldemort wanted under his control, both for the sake of his family's influential position, access to the Malfoy resources, and also to limit any potential damage Malfoy might have done to Voldemort's cause had he been allowed to continue to act independently. If Malfoy had any kind of connection, either social or through family to Mulciber the elder, one of Voldemort's Imperius specialists, this particular claim would have looked even more plausible.

We the readers all believe that this claim was manifestly untrue, of course, but such a defense would have been readily believed by a wizarding world primed by the articles covering the trial in the DAILY PROPHET. (Did I mention that there was probably a Malfoy appointee on the Board of the PROPHET? Did I really need to? There still is, if you ask me. Possibly Lucius himself. Or, by this time, Narcissa.



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As to his standing as a father; Up to the end of OotP Lucius does appear to be rather coolly fond of his son, widely indulging the boy, yet holding him to higher standards in public behavior and accomplishments than the boy wanted to put in the effort to meet. Nor was Lucius impressed by whining and general brattiness. I do not know — given the fact that for the first five books of the series the boy seemed to have next to no common sense and even less sense of self-preservation — whether Lucius actually took a lot of pride in him. But by the end of DHs it is clear that Lucius values his son very highly indeed.

I have always tended to very much doubt that he was a physically abusive parent. Draco shows none of the behavior of a physically abused child. But as parents go, Lucius does seem to be a somewhat remote and intimidating one. He is a Dark wizard, after all. They tend to gradually lose whatever capacity for empathy they may have started out with. And he certainly does not hesitate to coldly depress the boy's pretensions. Consequently, Draco's burning ambition is to someday manage to impress his father.

We also do not know whether this apparent restraint extends to magical correction. Nothing damaging, or that could be regarded as extreme. But a well-placed stinging hex might well be the wizarding parent's equivalent of a sound smack on the bottom. Given that children who are accustomed to being hit tend to be rather too quick to hit others, Draco's tendency to lash out with hexes at people who oppose him, despite the fact that magic in the hallways at Hogwarts is forbidden, is a bit suggestive.

Unlikely as it is that Draco has ever been subjected to physical abuse, a cold word from his father can still crush him.

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Lucius also appears to come from the kind of social background which among Muggles of an earlier age traditionally kept mistresses, almost in the manner of a political statement. And if he is nothing else, Lucius Malfoy is, beyond question, primarily a political animal. But we do not know whether such arrangements have ever been the case in the wizarding world. Witches are, after all, persons of power in themselves.

Indeed, given the relatively high status of witches in traditional wizarding society it does not seem particularly likely. Or at least not among *married* wizards. For that matter, given the overall demographic rarity of witches of childbearing age as a percentage of the wizarding population, I would expect comparatively few of them to opt for the role of a kept mistress when they would have little difficulty finding husbands. Molly Weasley's disapproving references to "scarlet women" however suggests that the oldest profession is not altogether unknown in the wizarding world.

Since Lucius seems not to have married directly out of Hogwarts, he might have been accustomed to making such arrangements as a bachelor. But we are given no reason in canon to suppose so, nor that he might continue to do so.

On the contrary, we have been given every reason to believe that he and Narcissa are extremely well-suited to one another, and that both of them are very well aware of it. You definitely do not need to be a good person in order to have a good marriage in JK Rowling's Potterverse. One sharp look at the Dursleys should be evidence enough of that. Vernon Dursley takes

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a distinctly tender concern for Petunia's comfort and peace of mind, and Lucius Malfoy clearly defers to Narcissa's feelings in nearly every matter that concerns his heir, from the boy's name to his education, and quite probably his only child status as well.



An additional contextual lens through which to view the development of the series, particularly as it concerns the actions of Lucius Malfoy, can be noted in any close examination of the positions Albus Dumbledore held in British wizarding society.

Up to the opening of OotP, as Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot (the body which appoints the Minister for Magic and must approve any of the Ministry's new policies), Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederacy of Wizards AND Headmaster of Hogwarts, Albus Dumbledore virtually owned the British wizarding world, and was in a position to direct policy without having to be the one to implement it. From a political standpoint, he was the uncrowned king of wizarding Britain. And Dumbledore is an old man who cannot live forever.

With no officially designated successors.

This kind of situation is likely to be irresistible to the Young Turks of any given society. And Lucius was certainly highly enough positioned to be taking an interest.

Or was he?

It blew past us in OotP that Lucius Malfoy, despite his apparent social prominence and his much-vaunted "influence," does not have a seat on the Wizengamot. Not even as Head of the family after his father's death. In fact, most of the members of the "Full Wizengamot" that we ever managed to identify

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seemed to be upper-level Ministry officials (and Fudge's senior assistant). Lucius Malfoy had not, apparently, managed to get his foot in the requisite door to the real power in the wizarding world just yet. And after the events of OotP he is never likely to.

We are still lacking much of the necessary data to draw any sort of informed conclusion as to just who does qualify for a seat on the Wizengamot. Without that information it is impossible to speculate further on exactly what the recognized "Paths to Power" in the British wizarding world are.

But regardless of whatever those paths may be, it has rather belatedly become evident that there is a perfectly valid (if incorrect) reading of the conflict between Albus Dumbledore and Tom Marvolo Riddle which, rather than being the widely perceived interpretation of a straightforward opposition of good vs. evil, falls solidly within the context of its being a largely *political* conflict. Incorrect, given that Tom Riddle clearly considers himself well above mere considerations of politics..

But that reading goes double, in spades, for Lucius Malfoy.

And in *his* case a political reading would *not* be incorrect.

In a society where we have been given to believe the general life expectancy is something more than a century, Lucius Malfoy, at no more than the age of 40, seems inordinately young to be able to throw his weight around to the degree that he does from CoS to GoF.

And as far as that goes, one has to ask oneself, just what became of his father? And for that matter, his grandfather, whom one might reasonably expect to still be in full control of the Malfoy fortunes and policies, leaving Lucius kicking his heels as the secondary heir, with no defined purpose, in a gen-

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eral state of frustration. And Echo answers us nothing.

Well, at this point I have to admit that there may have been further information posted on Pottermore. But I do not follow Pottermore. Frankly, the fact that Rowling was unable to keep track of what her characters were doing between the Battle of Hogwarts and the «spits» epilogue, or stick to the same story for two days running in the wake of the release of DHs, makes me unwilling to take her word for anything that hasn't been delivered to me in print between the covers of an actual book. And even then I reserve the right to be skeptical. Although I do tend to take at least some notice of statements and information that was made publicly available before the release of DHs.

But, it should be pointed out that anything that follows is largely a matter of theory and speculation.



First off, one has to wonder just what the elder Malfoys' opinion had been of this upstart "Lord Voldemort" person?

We were given a little more background on the matter in HBP.

And even more of a suggestion on the Black family tapestry sketch a few months later.

There is certainly no Malfoy mentioned by name in the pair of Pensieve memories connected to the young Tom Riddle or the slightly older, but still young Lord Voldemort. There is a Lestrange and an Avery in attendance at our visit to an early meeting of the Slug Club. As well as Riddle, of course. We do not know the identity of the other three youngsters in the group of a half a dozen boys. But Harry noticed no resemblance

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in any of them to the Malfoys he's met.

Some 15–20 years later; soon after his return to the British wizarding world at the end of an absence of some ten years, we learn that Voldemort's "fellow travelers" are Doholov, Mulciber, Nott, and one of the Rosiers. But we hear nothing of a Malfoy.

Horace Slughorn knew Abraxus Malfoy. There is no certainty that Tom Riddle did. Or, at least not while he was at school.

Draco claims to remember statements made by his grandfather regarding his former acquaintance with Slughorn when he makes an attempt to curry favor. Slughorn mentions his regret at hearing of the elder Malfoy's passing in an outbreak of dragon pox, but states that "at his age" such a passing was not to be wondered at.

If we can assume that Draco Malfoy was old enough to be expected to have some authentic memories of his grandfather by the time of that gentleman's death, then Abraxus Malfoy must have at least lived into the 1980s before being carried off in an outbreak of dragon pox.

Well, on the sketch of the Black family tapestry, released to the public some months after the release of HBP, we may have some information that appears to shed additional light on this issue. We discover that there were no fewer than four deaths recorded in the Black family over the course of 1991–1992.

These deaths were variously: Arcturus; 1901–1991, Cassiopeia; 1915–1992, Lucretia; 1925–1992, and (originally) Cygnus, the Black sisters' father; 1938–1992.

Cygnus's dates were later changed in the film's version of the tapestry to 1929–1979, and the version posted on the HP

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Lexicon followed suit. But his death was originally noted as being in 1992.

1991 was the year that Harry first started Hogwarts. 1992 would have covered the spring and summer terms of Harry's first year at Hogwarts. (As well as the Autumn term of his 2nd.)

One has to ask whether it is possible that the sudden deaths of no fewer than four (now 3) members of the Black family over what could have been no more than a matter of a few months, or possibly weeks, have signified the outbreak of an epidemic?

Might this have been the same outbreak of dragon pox which carried off Abraxus Malfoy?

If Abraxus Malfoy lived until late 1991 or early 1992, keeping his son Lucius firmly under his thumb, might his death explain why — apart from Draco's parroting his father's sentiments — we never had to deal with Lucius Malfoy until the following summer? At the point that he launched the Year of the Basilisk.

Because he certainly was continually underfoot from that point on, until he was finally hauled off to Azkaban, four years later.

His father's being still alive could readily explain why Lucius did not deploy the Diary until he was off his leash at the beginning of his own son's 2nd year at Hogwarts.



Given that Dobby claims to have heard something related to the plan to deploy the Diary, in the face of Barty Crouch's failure to protect the family from raids by Aurors I could fairly easily picture Lucius campaigning to do *something*, trying to soft-pedal the LV associations of the Riddle Diary to his father, and

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to play up the purge the mudbloods angle. But even that doesn't completely satisfy the requirements. For, so far as we were ever told, from Lucius Malfoy's position, the point of deploying the Diary was to remove Albus Dumbledore as Headmaster.

I cannot see any obvious manner in which removing Dumbledore would necessarily serve Abraxus Malfoy's purposes. Or Lucius Malfoy's either. If there was some other element involved about which we have not been informed, there might have been a great deal of discussion for Dobby to have overheard but the chances of our ever knowing what it was are negligible.

Unless, of course, Lucius drafted out the whole plot in a snit after Albus gave him provocation by rigging the House points at the last minute and insulting a full quarter of the school by effectively stealing Draco's House's legitimate win. If that is the case, Abraxus probably would still have wanted no part of it. Even if it might have dislodged Dumbledore, raising havoc at Hogwarts would not have stopped the Ministry raids. So far as the Malfoys would have known, Dumbledore had nothing directly to do with the Ministry raids. That would have been Amelia Bones's doing.

But if the shameless theft of the House Cup was a deciding factor, Dobby would hardly have been claiming to have known about the plot "for months." The theft of the House Cup was at the very end of the year, after Abraxus's presumed death.

And while we are on the subject of Ministry raids, neither did Arthur Weasley have anything to do with them, although he had no doubt taken part in some of them.

Weasley's department is certainly a part of the DMLE,

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and the DMLE was in charge of the raids. However, Weasley's own department's responsibility was to discourage the enchantment of Muggle artifacts, and to prevent the releasing of enchanted artifacts into Muggle hands. The discovery of enchanted Muggle artifacts in wizarding hands — which *remain* in wizarding hands, is not really that much of an issue. Arthur Weasley was certainly not the one in charge of proposing raids of Dark wizard's households in order to search for enchanted Muggle artifacts. He was included in these exercises in order to identify and confiscate such artifacts that might have turned up in the course of them, but the raids themselves were looking for something of rather more significance than the odd charmed tea set.

The highest likelihood is that the discussions that Dobby claims to have heard were between Lucius and Narcissa after Abraxus's death had set Lucius free from his father's restraint. The news that Voldemort had attempted a return the previous year, and had failed at it — which may have been reported by Draco, and confirmed by Snape at the end of the year, must have seemed to offer a green-light to make his own bid for political power. But that still wouldn't have been known until after the end of the academic year. Not something that had been in discussion "for months."

Therefore; it is probably safe to conclude that either Abraxus Malfoy was already some time gone from Hogwarts before Riddle appeared there. Perhaps a long time gone. (And not all wizards start their families right out of Hogwarts. Lucius could have been the child of Abraxus's old age) Or he was just far enough behind Riddle to have missed recruitment by the

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younger siblings of Riddle's original followers, through having finished Hogwarts before Riddle's return from his first exile.

Lucius himself may have been roped into the DE movement either by his father-in-law, Cygnus Black, or by the 2nd-generation Death Eaters who were at Hogwarts at the same time that he was; Evan Rosier, Avery and the Lestrange brothers — all of whom we know about, or possibly younger representatives of other families whose names we have not been told; and had consequently become the first actual Death Eater in the Malfoy family.

However, we can probably still safely assume that any elder Malfoys were pretty nasty customers themselves, Death Eaters or not. Molly's comment that "that whole family" was trouble didn't come out of nowhere, suggesting some past friction between the Malfoys and possibly the Prewetts. Lucius's ingrained conviction of pureblood supremacy does not have any of the signs of new convert's fervor that Arthur Weasley's love affair with Muggle technology does. Abraxus Malfoy would probably have found Lord Voldemort's reported sentiments attractive.

But what did he think of Lord Voldemort, himself?

Rhetoric that appeals to an 18-year-old might not be so impressive to older and cooler heads who might regard the man's lack of traceable background, and his adoption of an obviously bogus Muggle-style title to be in poor taste (I seriously doubt that 'NATURE'S NOBILITY' contains any more references to a Lordship of Voldemort than it does to a family named Riddle), if nothing else — and such cooler heads might well consider it more suggestive of a charlatan than of a leader

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who rated his family's valuable support. Or did he, like the elder Blacks simply take his son's word for what this "Dark Lord" fellow stood for, agree that he had the "right ideas" and go on about his own business?

We understand that Lucius's Imperius defense was bogus. We know that Abraxus was not in Azkaban, or Draco would hardly be quoting him. Did Abraxus let Lucius go his own way and support him unofficially from the background. Or was he truly not aware that his son and heir had gotten involved with a terrorist organization?

Or, at any rate, not until Lucius got caught at it.



And we still do not know for certain whether Lucius's long-range, (nearly successful!) campaign to depose Albus Dumbledore was set up for his Master's benefit, or for his own. Although we can harbor some pretty sound suspicions. By all indications he and Rita set up the groundwork for their smear campaign all the way back at the Quidditch World Cup, before there was any indication that Voldemort was solidly on the comeback trail.

Indeed, while there is still a good deal of uncertainty as to just exactly what Lucius thought he was doing when he decided to deploy the Riddle diary without his Master's knowledge or permission, by every indication we have been given of his actions since that point, his intentions appear to have all been less calculated to assist Voldemort than to supplant him.

And, indeed, deploying the Riddle diary, and, in fact, deploying it at that particular time, seems to be the sticking point of any attempt to understand or interpret where Lucius Malfoy is

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coming from. And it isn't likely that we will ever be given any additional information to sort that issue with any certainty, either.

On the one hand, we do not know just how much of the adventure of the Philosophers' Stone Lucius Malfoy was ever made aware of. We assume that Severus Snape reported at least some of the business to him. He could hardly do less and maintain his "reliable source" credentials. Besides, the Adventure of the Philosophers' Stone had already managed to get away from the staff of Hogwarts. Dumbledore was not able to completely hush it up, and given that it enhanced the public view that Harry Potter was their appointed savior, he may not have attempted to. Some version of the business (probably *many* versions of the business) was circulating throughout the castle by the time Harry regained consciousness. So Snape would have had to fill Lucius in on enough of the rumors to maintain his cover.

Consequently, we can assume that once the school year ended Lucius would have soon been made aware that Voldemort had possessed Professor Quirrell and made an attempt to stage his return. And failed at it. Lucius may have concluded that even if Voldemort was not dead, he was no longer to be regarded as an obstacle.

On the other hand, we have Dobby's claim that he had known of the plot of Bad Things planned to happen at Hogwarts "for months" by the time he showed up in #4 Privet Drive to deliver his warning only a few weeks later. Which strongly suggests that the plot was already in the making before Lucius Malfoy learned of Voldemort's abortive attempt to return. Or the theft of the House Cup.



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Well, okay. There are a few things that need to be considered:

- 1 Harry Potter may be Dobby's hero, but he is not his Master. There is nothing to stop Dobby from lying to Harry Potter if he feels he needs to. He could have exaggerated the amount of time he had known about the plot.
- 2 At some point during Harry's first year at Hogwarts Lucius Malfoy seems to have been subjected to a raid by the DMLE. He would have had a great deal to say on the subject once it was over. Much of it on the subject of revenge. Dobby almost certainly *did* overhear that. But that had nothing to do with Harry Potter.
- 3 The Diary is exactly the sort of Dark artifact that it would have been a Very Bad Thing to have been caught with. Lucius dodged that bullet, the first time, but getting it out of his possession altogether might not be a bad idea. He also knows that the Diary is somehow a weapon (one specifically targeting Albus Dumbledore), but he doesn't know the details of how it works.
- 4 Even if the plot was in the works months before the summer, it was not set in motion before the summer break. It may well not have been finalized before the summer break.

Lucius Malfoy is not the kind of man to pour his soul out to a diary. But it is possible that he might have gotten into a dialog with the Diary Revenant. And he might have been careless enough to take the Revenant at its word. Tom is very persuasive.

We don't know what the Revenant might have told him.

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All we know for sure is that at some point, either when he was first given the Diary in 1981, or at some point afterwards, he had been informed that if someone got the Diary into the hands of an agent bound for Hogwarts, the Chamber of Secrets would be opened and all hell would break loose. Pharnabazus could possibly be right and Lucius always had intended to give the diary to Ginny Weasley. But *Harry's* stack of books were the first ones that were put into her cauldron where the Diary was later found, and I still suspect that Dobby would not have got his pillowslip in such a twist unless the primary threat was to Harry Potter.

For that matter, what was Dobby lurking around Privet Drive for, anyway, unless he had been *ordered* to keep an eye on Potter?

And it may only have been after Lucius learned that Potter had vanquished the Dark Lord again and that his own son had managed to alienate Potter, that he decided to offload the Diary to Harry Potter. Severus Snape is probably telling the truth when he states that many of the Dark Lord's followers wondered whether Harry Potter might turn out to be a powerful Dark wizard himself, and a standard around whom they might all rally once more. And if Draco had already managed to alienate Potter, from Lucius Malfoy's standpoint, that made the boy both; a. Competition, and; b. A potential threat. Malfoy does not like it when things threaten his family.



And, leaving aside the business of the Diary, there is also the not-at-all-minor point of material gain to be considered. This

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is not a matter which it is likely that a man of Lucius Malfoy's caliber is going to overlook, either.

What do I mean by that? Why, just the standard exhortation to "follow the money." Or, in this case, the property, up to and including all the nasty knick-knacks. In plain language, the Black *family* property.



With the death of Sirius Black, the Black family name has officially become extinct. But the writing on that particular wall had been on exhibition for quite some time. Ever since 1981, in fact. When the last scion of the Blacks was consigned to Azkaban for life and expected to die there, without issue.

But the name is not the whole sum of a family. Especially not a family which owns property. With the failure of the male line, the family's property would have defaulted to the female line. Which is to say, the *present* female line. The property was not going to default back some 2–3 generations looking for a senior female line to follow. It would default to one of the female lines available to it now. And there isn't really a shortage of claimants to the Black holdings among sons descended from Black females. There appear to be several separate claims on the inheritance to be made by various Black females and their descendants.

With the death of Sirius Black, his grandfather Arcturus's branch of the family, that of the former Heads of the family, the descendants of an earlier Sirius Black, will be extinct. There are no known living claimants remaining from that branch of the family.

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Extrapolating from the dates on the original version of the Black Family Tapestry sketch — once one sorts these dates into proper order — tracing lineage from Phineas Nigellus Black, reveals that the senior cadet branch would have been those descendants of an earlier Arcturus Black and his wife, the former Lysandra Yaxley. That branch produced only female issue, and the only surviving line which is not disqualified by having being disowned, is the one that now devolves upon Neville Longbottom.

The eldest of Arcturus's daughters, Callidora Longbottom, who, according to the tapestry was still alive, produced one son and one daughter. It is quite possible that she is Frank Longbottom's grandmother.

The other claimants from Arcturus's cadet branch are no longer in the running, since the Crouch family is also now extinct, but in 1982 both Barty Crouch and his son were still alive, even if not necessarily walking free. And Crouch Sr was certainly still alive at the time CoS took place.

Lestrangle, Longbottom, Crouch. One really does have to ask oneself just what was behind that attack on the Longbottoms. Why were the Longbottoms attacked *specifically*.

A junior cadet branch of the Black family which continued to produce male issue, was descended from Phineas Nigellus's youngest son, Cygnus. This was Sirius Black's grandfather Arcturus's cousin Pollux's branch of the family. This line has also devolved into only surviving female claimants, one of whom has been officially disowned. Leaving only Bellatrix Lestrangle, Narcissa Malfoy, and her descendants. Tracing back to Pollux's own generation, we have the descendants of his younger sister,

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Doria Potter. Who is the last in the succession.

Yes, that's right. By passing over Bellatrix and Narcissa's somewhat stronger claims, assuming that Charlus and Dorea Potter were James Potter's parents. In the 15 months after his birth, there was ample time for it to be generally known that Sirius Black had been confirmed as the Potter child's godfather. And Sirius, having been reinstated as heir after his younger brother's death, was still unmarried.

He would probably have left a will, however.

So, if Sirius Black settled his property upon Harry Potter, who (but for his technically halfblood status) was a collateral heir anyway. And even though Harry's mother was Muggle-born, and he is considered a halfblood, If James Potter was Charlus's son, he is still clearly shown on the family tapestry. The Potters have not been blasted off that tapestry, as have the Weasleys and the Tonkses.

By possibly pointing out Frank Longbottom as a possible source of information, concerning the fall of the Dark Lord was Malfoy removing Bellatrix from the equation before she and her husband produced a child who would have a stronger claim on the Black holdings than his own infant son?

And did he actually intend to remove Barty Crouch Jr as well, even though his claim was somewhat weaker? And what about the Longbottoms themselves? Incapacitating Frank did not remove Neville from the succession, although I rather doubt that Augusta would be likely to make much of a push for Neville's claim on the Black legacy.

But after Halloween 1981 no one could get at Harry Potter. No one seems to have been able to find Harry Potter until he

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had returned to the ww and enrolled at Hogwarts.

And by then Lucius was a school Governor.

I tend to doubt that Lucius would have decided to pass Harry the Diary *solely* to remove him as a claimant of the Black family holdings, but it does make for an additional reason to be doing so.



Lucius did seem to understand that nothing good would happen to whoever was given the Diary. And this may have been when he started talking about sending Draco to Durmstrang to get him out of the way of the situation (even though we only heard about Lucius's proposal to send Draco off to Durmstrang in GoF). I suspect that Lucius had no idea that deploying the diary might reincarnate a young Tom Riddle. That would probably have been a nasty surprise if it had come off, and we don't know what he would have done about it.

But, had he known, he might have thought he could control a young Riddle. Which would have been a mistake. Riddle is not amenable to control. He is not vulnerable to the demands and unspoken agreements which underlie social "contracts" and only goes through the motions as long as he is getting something he wants from them. And, to be honest, he doesn't give squat about politics.

Not to mention that the reincarnated Diary Revenant would have only *looked* like a young, teenaged Riddle. If, as I contend, the Diary was only converted into a Horcrux in 1981, just before it was entrusted to Malfoy, the soul fragment that actually drove it would have been that of the 54-year-old Riddle. One who would have been perfectly well aware of

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how to retain control of Lucius Malfoy.

On the other hand, it is easy to postulate that Lucius might have attempted to do a salvage job, and possibly solve his problem by sending young Riddle to Albania (if he knew about Albania. Snape may not have told him about that) and put him in the way of his future/former self, to be taken over and be ultimately destroyed by it as Quirrell was. Now that we know what the Diary Revenant was, it begins to look as though we had a closer call than we realized in CoS. I very much doubt that if Vapor-Mort had possessed the reincarnated Tom Riddle the result would have duplicated Professor Quirrell's experience of the process. (Assuming that he would have been able to possess his former self at all. This is far from certain. We do not even know whether the Diary Revenant would have ever become completely solid.)

But the situation did not arise and I still do not think that Lucius would have anticipated it if it had.

Since the failure of the Diary plot, however, it seems clear to me that Lucius Malfoy's actions over the following two years could really only further his own ambitions. And he came very close to succeeding. Only his Master's return thrust a spoke into his wheel, and co-opted his efforts.

But while this reading certainly holds for the events of CoS, it does not entirely account for Malfoy's actions over the course of GoF.



Snape is telling no less than the truth at Spinners' End. It had to have been apparent that the Dark Lord's return was eminent. His followers' Marks had been growing clearer over the course of the year. Lucius could not have failed to notice that.

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Particularly not after Barty Crouch Jr inadvertently(?) made a general stand-by announcement by sending up the Dark Mark at the Quidditch World Cup.

And yet it was almost certainly at the World Cup that Lucius made contact with Rita Skeeter, and set up the projected smear campaign against Dumbledore. At this point we do not know that the smear would have also been applied to Potter as well, since at that point, Potter would have been assumed to have no part in the TriWizard Tournament. That was limited to students who were of age. Yet Malfoy did not cancel this campaign once the Dark Mark was sent up. In fact, it is possible that he may even have only doubled down on it after Crouch did so. The campaign was already in play before the representatives of the visiting Schools even reached Britain. And it escalated over the course of the year. So just what was Malfoy playing at?

The Slytherins in Draco's year were obviously instructed to cooperate with Rita, and vice versa, and the purpose of the campaign appears to have been, on the surface, to discredit Dumbledore and Potter *before* they had anything to say on the subject of the Dark Lord or his return, and, in the background, to continue to drive the wedge between Fudge and Dumbledore.

One reflects that this wedge had probably been inserted during the year that Fudge was surrounding himself with Demen-tors, and it appears to be evident (after the fact) that Malfoy had already managed to suborn Dolores Umbridge during the course of Year 3 when he was running in and out of the Ministry agitating over Draco's injury by a hippogryff. Umbridge was obviously never a supporter of Dumbledore, or his inclusionary views, and would have readily allied herself with Malfoy.

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However, by launching that smear campaign and sticking to it we can see that Malfoy had devised a multi-purpose resource which could have been deployed profitably either by the Dark Lord or himself.

If Voldemort chose to make use of it, it would pass for a “welcome home” gift. And might partially off-set the loss of that Diary. Indeed, we are forced to conclude it did. At least temporarily.

Which brings us to the question of whether or not Lucius is particularly intelligent. He is certainly capable of laying very insidious, long-term plots which display a fair degree of cleverness. But we’ve also watched him make some very stupid mistakes (usually whenever he has been openly thwarted or challenged) and anyone who gets swept up in something like a pureblood supremacist movement simply cannot have the best of judgment in the first place. Certainly not if you stop to consider even the obvious consequences of carrying through any of such a movement’s goals to their logical conclusion in a world such as the Potterverse, as it has been set up.

He appears to have some degree of native intelligence, or at least a fair degree of cunning, and he is certainly more effective than his son ever seemed likely to be up to Book 6, but he has totally blinkered himself with prejudices, and he is so wrapped up in himself and the importance of being Lucius Malfoy that he is never going to get any farther in the world than he had already.

Which turned out to be Azkaban. Ironic, that.



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Lucius Malfoy is demonstrably ambitious, calculating and cunning. But his tactics are not particularly subtle, and he does not operate well under any sort of pressure. Particularly not in situations where his pride might come under attack. In very much the same manner as his son, he seems to expect everything to be handed over to him as soon as he decides that he wants it, and his hackles go up if it doesn’t happen immediately. As effective as he might be behind the scenes, (blackmail and extortion seem to be his specialties) it is a Bad Idea to put him on the front lines. And he completely loses it when he is angry. As soon as he flies off the handle he is more likely than not to say or do something truly stupid.

Still, unlike many of Voldemort’s other followers, he is not notably delusional. He MAY have been arrogant enough to have once harbored some intention of “using” Voldemort to further his own ends and he may well have engaged in mulling over possible ways to supplant the Dark Lord once the wizarding world had been “conquered.” He also may well have viewed their association as an “alliance” rather than an “allegiance.” Voldemort, conversely, probably returned the compliment by intending to dispense with Lucius once the wizarding world was securely under his own control.

But all bargains were off, as of the opening of OotP. Once Voldemort had discovered the loss of the Diary Horcrux, which might have been even more damaging to his future plans than we ever guessed, Lucius would have done best to prepare for a long stay “inside” if he expected to live past his next birthday. By the following year Voldemort was determined to cut off the Malfoys, root and branch, and take their property for his own.



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On the other hand, we have no clear idea of the Malfoys' current circumstances. Malfoy's actual resources may have been greatly exaggerated. Pharnabazus and A.J. Hall (and Vera Rozalsky) may well be right, and Lucius Malfoy was one step ahead of bankruptcy by the end of OotP. But we didn't get any clear indications of that in HBP. And the manor itself is still worth taking.

Nevertheless, however large the fortune may have been that Lucius Malfoy stood to inherit from his father, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that a sizable portion of that fortune had already been dissipated in the Dark Lord's service over that crucial 22 months or so before his first defeat; and the remainder may well have been squandered over the course of the series on Lucius's own attempt at a power grab, which was ultimately co-opted by his Master. To say nothing of the Dark Lord's out-of-pocket expenses over the course of OotP, while he was remaining in hiding.



There is also the little matter of Fenrir Greyback, whose "family friend" status does not sound like what that term would usually be expected to signify. (And which is not supported at all in DHs. Indeed Rowling appears to have summarily dropped that entire thread.)

True, I would imagine that Fenrir sometimes made himself "useful" to Lucius Malfoy over the past 14 years or so. And the threat of him was probably even more useful, since that way Lucius didn't actually have to deal directly with the creature. But it seems more likely to me that the whole relationship was

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solidly based on a foundation of extortion.

Whatever goes around in the ww definitely comes around.

Lucius was one of the only DEs to have been "outed," but not imprisoned by the end of the Death Eater trials. Consequently Fenrir knew who Lucius was. And where he could find him.

And Lucius had a small child to be used as a bargaining chip.

Given that we never heard of Fenrir Greyback before HBP, I am inclined to regard Draco's claim to Borgin that Greyback was a family friend with a healthy degree of skepticism. Greyback was not so much the "family friend" I think, as the wolf at the door.

And by HBP, Draco's father was no longer around to protect him. He now had to depend on Lord Voldemort for that.

And Voldemort has not forgiven his followers their 13-year abandonment of him. Nor is he likely to permit them to assume otherwise. He may have wrung Malfoy dry by the time of that raid in the DoM; and, finally, as an object lesson, threw him into the front line where he was least qualified to be able to function effectively. If Lucius had managed to pull it off, he could only have expected to be kept on as one of the grunts for as long as he lasted, and if he didn't, well, then he had already served his highest purpose, hadn't he?

Of course I had also originally believed that it was only once Lucius was off in Azkaban, that Voldemort got a nasty surprise.

I honestly thought he didn't learn about the loss of the Diary until after Lucius was arrested and Tom turned his attentions from eliminating Potter to removing Albus.

He hadn't entrusted the Diary to Narcissa, after all. And Draco was just a kid.

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I thought that as soon as the school year was over, he ordered Snape to fetch it back.

But no, Albus tells us that Tom had already pried the story of what had happened to his Diary out of Lucius, himself.

And if that took place at a time that Snape could have given Albus an eyewitness account of it — as seems to have been the case — then it had to have been all the way back during the summer before 5th year.

And Tom left Lucius *alive* after that?

He must have really *needed* Malfoy for the sake of his influence on Fudge. But Lucius must have known that he was walking on eggs over the course of the whole year.

Raising the possibility that he volunteered to lead that raid, to garner some credit.

And that when he saw it going pear-shaped, he let himself be captured and taken out of the range of Voldemort's anger.

I wonder if anyone sent him word of how Voldemort chose to retaliate?

Making us now wonder whether that retaliation was really the wisest course or not. Although Rowling never went anywhere with that possibility. In fact when she finally sat down to write DHs she seems to have decided to start with a clean slate and write a different story altogether.

But we already know that Lucius Malfoy isn't the only person who does stupid things when he is angry.

And Voldemort is always angry.

Considering Viktor Krum

I realized that I was taking a risk by listing Viktor Krum among the White Hats before the series was finished. This could have turned out to be both premature and incorrect. But, really, there wasn't any reason to suppose that he *wasn't* one, and indeed very little reason to suppose that we would even see him again other than just in passing.

I would not have even said there was much chance of that, except that Rowling did tell us that we would — although not for a while — in one of the interviews some time after HBP.

I thought that maybe Fleur would invite him to the wedding.



Well, I was right, Fleur did invite Viktor to the wedding. I was far from the only person to have expected that. Someone had to do it, and it isn't like Rowling would manage to shoehorn him in any other way.

Since Rowling had already admitted that the things she states in interviews don't always come to pass by the time she actually settles down to write that section of the story, I wasn't going to depend upon Krum's return, but I figured I could afford to stick my neck out at least that much.

And she *had* said that he would be back.

Of course once he did show up we discovered that he was yet another character who had acquired an unfortunate personality makeover. It was DHs, so what can one say?

In his case he got a comprehensive personality replacement. I preferred the first version, thank you. And, indeed, for the rest of this article I think I'll just ignore the spear carrier who was

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using his name in DHs and concentrate on that first version.

The first thing about Viktor Krum that we need to sort out is that unless Durmstrang takes an entirely different age range of students than Hogwarts does, which I doubt, it is likely that Ron was simply somewhat off in his statement that the Bulgarian Seeker was “really young too. Only just eighteen or something.” It was almost certainly “or something.” To still be in school, Viktor was probably no more than seventeen at the World Cup, and possibly throughout the year of the TriWizard Tournament as well.

Although it is always possible that he may have turned 18 between when we saw him in the summer and the arrival of the Durmstrang contingent at Halloween. For that matter, Krum could even have still been only 16 when we saw him at the World Cup in August and only just turned 17 by the time school started. Ron, not having realized that Krum was actually still in school, may have unconsciously scaled up what he expected Krum’s probable age to be. All we have ever been told since is that Krum was in his final year at Durmstrang, and might easily have still only been 17 throughout the Tournament.

Hermione, for that matter, we now know for certain was 15 by the time the Durmstrang contingent arrived for the Tournament.

I think I may be in the minority here but I’ve always suspected that Viktor was originally drawn to Hermione, not just because she was smart, not just because she wasn’t a mindless groupie who was all over him for no reason other than because he was famous, and not even because she was passably pretty, or known to be a friend of Harry Potter’s (who may not be a celebrity on the same order in Europe as he is in Britain, but he is still a celebrity), but specifically because she had been

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pointed out to him as being Muggle-born.

By someone who was doing her no favors.

As Ron Weasley so vehemently keeps reminding us; Krum was from *Durmstrang*. Durmstrang does not *admit* Muggle-born students. Viktor had quite possibly never in his life really been exposed to Muggle-born witches or wizards — not to *talk* to. Consequently, from where he was standing, Miss Hermione Granger was exotic. And there is no question that if the subject is not Quidditch, Hermione can talk intelligently on pretty much any topic common to school-aged boys. For that matter, Hermione tells us that the two of them *did* talk mostly about school — and Harry.

Even if she was 2-3 years younger than Viktor, she would have easily been able to hold her own on those subjects. And, for that matter, he might even have enjoyed being teased about his “wonky faint” for a change. Or even been downright grateful to find someone who *didn’t* want to talk about Quidditch *all* the time.



Quite a few fans are totally convinced that Krum only noticed Hermione since she was one of the girls, if not the only one, who *wasn’t* slavishly following him around due to his fame. It’s easy enough to jump to that conclusion, and that may very well have contributed, but on its own it doesn’t quite fit.

For one thing, in a school with about 300 students (yes, I know Rowling now says that it’s 600. She also says that there are only 3,000 witches and wizards in all of Great Britain. Rowling cannot count), it’s very likely that Hermione wasn’t the *only* one not to be falling all over him. Particularly given

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that he doesn't look like any kind of matinee idol. Nor was he exactly "Mr Congeniality."

And, given how seldom we've seen the usual cast of characters pay the slightest bit of attention to students from any year but their own, for a 7th year foreign "guest" student to have singled out a 4th-year girl of no particular degree of stunning beauty or family influence, and moreover, one who is rather emphatically not widely popular in her *own school*, it stands to reason that she probably had been pointed out to him, quite specifically, by *somebody*. For a *reason*.

Ron was convinced the reason was that she is known to be a friend of Harry Potter's.

Aka as Krum's competition in the tournament.

He may not have been *altogether* wrong. Ron does have a lot more intuition than Hermione does. But I suspect that was not the only reason. Particularly given who I suspect it was that did the pointing out.

Obviously, Krum's growing attachment to and his continuing interest in Hermione had little or nothing to do with her Muggle background, but his original attention may very well have had a bit of prompting from outside forces specifically on that account. And not because said "forces" thought highly of her, either.

I suspect that the ensuing association between them had a distinct element of being "one in the eye" to various 3rd parties on both sides of the equation. Rendering them, from a fairly early stage of the proceedings, into something in the manner of "partners in crime." Their continuing friendly correspondence a year later at least suggests that there was something more to the association than just hormones and spite. Not that it seems

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to have lasted. Like I say, by the time we caught up to Viktor Krum again he had been demoted to an infodump on legs.

We can easily guess the identities of the cast of several about whom Hermione may have felt a trace of smugness in "scoring off of" when she showed up at the Yule brawl on the arm of Viktor Krum. For that matter, she may well have been attempting to give a very particular someone "one in the eye" by that association. Someone who she had already decided is prone to bouts of jealousy.



And this might also be an appropriate point to recall just who Krum was being forced to associate with on a daily basis that year as well.

I suspect that a rather amusing "biter bit" situation may have been responsible for the launching of that Krum/Granger partnership. Or, at any rate, it is simple enough to draft out a reasonably plausible one. Whether it is actually on-target or not. Which we will probably never be told.

Igor Karkaroff, Headmaster of Durmstrang, is an ex-Death Eater. By this time, post-Voldemort and the DE trials, he certainly knows who — and how dangerous — Lucius Malfoy can be. And the last thing he would want to do is antagonize him. Or get in his way.

And Malfoy has a son at Hogwarts.

And the kid is Quidditch-mad — plays Seeker on the House team and is the sort of kid who is bound and determined to call attention to himself.

So, although Karkaroff is very good about fending off the rest of the groupies, he doesn't quite dare to pull excessive rank

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on the Malfoy sprout. The Durmstrang contingent also shares table with the House that the Malfoy spout is in, so there is no keeping him away from the pet celebrity.

And at 14, the Malfoy sprout — as we were all too well aware — never knew when to keep his mouth shut. (Malfoy seems to have finally learned *that* lesson over the summer between Year 5 & 6) So, there he is boasting to Viktor Krum about what a hot Quidditch player he is, what losers everyone else is, how he can't see why everyone thinks Potter is such hot stuff, yadda, yadda... You just know that "that mudblood Granger" is going to figure in his tirade somewhere. She always does, eventually.

Well, Viktor Krum may be a 'Strang boy, and surly with it, besides, and by the time he is 20 we are supposed to believe that he will have had his head pretty thoroughly turned by his fame. But at 17–18 he isn't a pretentious twerp. And while he *is* a jock, we have no real reason to suppose that he is a *stupid* jock, however inarticulate he might be in a second, or more likely third language. He is Durmstrang's chosen *Champion*, for goodness sake! There has to be more substance to the kid than just being able to stay on a broom.

And as a world-class celebrity who has *earned* every bit of his fame honestly, I don't really think he has a lot of time for pretentious twerps. And, anyone that this *particular* little pretentious twerp has such a down on may be worth some further investigation.

And Viktor has never actually met a mudblood. Not to talk to. And, dammit, Karkaroff doesn't *own* him.



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And, I think that over the following months, Hermione quickly became one of the brighter spots in this year-long ordeal

I mean, think about it; he really wasn't having a particularly good time, was he? There was clearly tampering with this contest going on right from the get-go. He got stunned from behind once, put under Imperius and forced to attack one of his competitors, not to mention having to deal with dragons, merpeople, and thread his way through a maze of monsters. For all that it was a great honor to do so, it was hardly *fun*.

Another factor regarding Viktor Krum which regularly gets pointed out on the Snape/Hermione lists is the physical resemblance between young Viktor and Severus Snape. While much of this particular ado is probably about nothing, and can most safely be filed under "H" for "hope springs eternal," the resemblances of neither facial feature, nor general surliness between the two is altogether illusionary.

Unlike the "similarities" fans were determined to find between Peter Pettigrew and Neville Longbottom, which were all in Harry's head — and only lasted until Harry actually *met* Pettigrew, the Krum<-->Snape similarities appear to be real enough, however shallow, and are out there for all of us to see. They're just not as pronounced as the SS/HG crowd likes to make them out to be.

That from the end of GoF up until the end of HBP, Snape was generally regarded as a probable White Hat, and that Viktor Krum had the distinction of having been Hermione's only official "boy-friend" up to that point in the series was enough to keep the Snape/Hermione 'shippers waiting further phantom developments.

The physical similarities between the two are the more

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striking, although Krum's hooked nose could be partially due to an encounter with a bludger at or before the previous summer's World Cup. And, in this regard, of the two, Snape may have a slight advantage, in that he is apparently no longer round-shouldered, does not walk like a duck, and is articulate in Miss Granger's native language.

He has also pretty completely "reinvented" himself from the scruffy little working-class tyke that boarded the Hogwarts Express in 1971. But we were also shown a few similarities in manner, given Krum's public surliness and private apparent interest in scholarship. Which is a classic hallmark of fanon Snape, and has since been shown to be more-or-less supported in canon, even if canon Snape unaccountably does seem to think that you are more likely to find a (specifically Japanese) Kappa in Mongolia.

And until the conclusion of HBP, there was also a quite blatant similarity in the placement of these two characters wherein both appeared to be heavily tarred with the brush of their associations, being both from backgrounds known to be hotbeds of prejudice and association with the Dark Arts. Prejudices which for the duration of the period between OotP and the release of DHs it was heavily suggested may be shared in Snape's case, but shows no particular indication of being so in Krum's. In fact, if anything, the opposite.

And, for a couple of books there, until we finally got a "real" one. Viktor seemed to be the closest glimpse we had of the series's desperately hoped for, hypothetical "one good Slytherin."

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This is one of the oldest of the character studies in the collection, and it was first drafted out when there was a good deal less known for certain regarding any of the cast of dozens which we had been handed to deal with.

Consequently, the analysis may read a bit differently from those regarding other characters who are less frequently "on stage" throughout the proceedings.

Still, I see little reason to retract any of it.



Miss Hermione Jean Granger is not presented anywhere in the series as a young witch with any particular degree of mystery about her. Which, ironically, seems to make it all the more difficult for fanwriters to get a decent handle on her. But then, one tends to suspect that most of them are looking at her in some form of distorting mirror.

Most of the fans don't seem to have noticed this. Or, if they have, they evidently have few objections to the preponderance of off-kilter "Hermiones" which proliferate throughout the fandom. I suspect that a part of this is because most of us recognize that Rowling's version is not a completely realized character to begin with, and that any 3rd-party interpretation is largely the creation of said 3rd-party.

Which right there is a good explanation for why Hermione Jean is so often so recognizably Hermione Sue.

After all, it's hard work being just about the only semi-consistently-realized major female character in canon.

But I'll have to admit that there are times that I wonder

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whether the fans have even all read the same books. Fewer than half of them seem to have read the same books I did.



The first thing which strikes me is that Fanon's typical interpretation of Miss Granger usually has blessedly little to do with Rowling's original. For one thing she is often American. For another, she is usually far too well-socialized.

Typically she is also quite unmistakably a "heroine." Canon Hermione is (or at least originally was) much more typically played for laughs. At least as much as early canon Ron was.

I'll admit Film!Hermione isn't. But then I have never regarded films as being truly canon in any fandom which wasn't originally based on a film.



Canon Hermione may have burst onto the scene being all too willing to make a grand show of following the rules to the very letter, but she is not your quintessential "good girl." And for that matter, she clearly started out with the conviction that she was entitled to set herself up as the enforcer who was going to see to it that everyone *else* followed the rules to the letter, too. Clearly she was one of Hogwarts's occasional self-appointed "First-year Prefects." I'm sure she wasn't the only one. Percy Weasley also seems a likely candidate.

This is just not a well-socialized child. Although she obviously had figured out how to best present herself to adults. This is not a naturally, or effortlessly "good" child, either. In fact, this kid is a potential bully. And just about every other child on

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that train recognized it. Ron and Harry certainly did. Ron and Harry both already had ample experience of bullies.

Rowling has stated more than once in interviews that she is surprised that the fans see Hermione as "emotionally strong." We finally got a loud and clear message in HBP that she is anything but.

Which also suggested to me that the decidedly neurotic undertone that I was reading in the canon accounts of Miss Granger's statements and behavior were neither my imagination nor were they there by accident.

This was once an extremely insecure child who learned to over-compensate by acting pushy. And up to fairly recently this particular form of coping had generally worked for her — within reason. Upon the whole, she had succeeded in her short-term objectives more often than not.

But it had NOT been the most effective of strategies, overall. For all that she probably accounts for far more than her share of Gryffindor house points awarded, she is still not particularly liked or admired by her housemates, she does not have the social influence that she craves, and there is a tremendous amount of wasted energy involved in her methods.

One part of the fallout from these methods is that Miss Granger does not usually react well in situations of sustained external pressure. She already generates more than enough internal pressure of her own. When forced into such situations, her performance in whatever the immediate subject at hand is remains up to her usual high standards, but her personal behavior tends to become hair-trigger, over-emphatic, quarrelsome and decidedly shrill.

And even at the best of times, she tends to be prickly, high-

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strung, and impatient. There is a lot of fine human potential here, but this is not a *quiet* child. Nor a particularly sweet one. This kid is emphatically *not* among the tribe of Log. She is unmistakably Stork.

She also is clearly so determined to anticipate every possible outcome and write a mental script of what is *supposed* to happen at every point of that action that when she runs up against something she has not anticipated she tends to freeze. This can have dangerous repercussions.



Miss Granger's appearance; which, at the time Rowling closed the canon, was not generally subjected to a lot of controversy, we can get out of the way quickly enough: we are all reasonably familiar with what canon had to say of it. We know that she has brown eyes and brown hair which is "bushy" — which could just mean thick and unruly, but Rita Skeeter's little barb about knowing things about Bagman that would "curl your hair — not that it needs it" suggests that her hair is, in fact, either frizzy-wavy or curly. Since the Yule ball in GoF we also know that she "cleans up well" if she is prepared to put a considerable amount of effort into it. She has not yet developed such a level of social commitment that putting in that degree of effort has become a day-to-day priority. She may not ever reach that level. Not all girls do.

Since the closing of canon, and the production of the stage play; 'THE CURSED CHILD' the casting of an actress of African ancestry as the adult Hermione Weasley has thrown the fandom a bit of a curve. The casting was presumably with J.

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K Rowling's approval, and has resulted in the adoption of the concept of a mixed-race Hermione being taken up by quite a lot the fandom with a good deal of enthusiasm.

Representation is a thing.

There is, moreover, nothing in printed canon, as it stands which would absolutely contradict this interpretation. However, I suspect that had a mixed-race Hermione been Rowling's original concept of the character, she would have made a point of telling us so. She has never been even slightly behindhand in pointing out any Hogwarts student who was not presumed to be white. She also, one should note, approved the casting of Emma Watson as Hermione Granger in the original film series.

Ultimately, whether Hermione is a brown-eyed, brown-haired English rose, or a young lady of mixed race is entirely up to whatever the fan writer or artist who chooses to use her decides upon. Canon is closed. Your fic, your rules.

And that goes double for fan art.

We do know that she wasn't at all averse to magically correcting the oversized front teeth that she had probably been teased about all through primary school.

Which brings us to: we also know that Miss Granger used to have "big teeth." Whether this was actually prominent teeth that stick out, or that "rodent tooth" condition where the two front incisors are oversized in comparison with the rest of the teeth is unclear. Her parents' insistence that she put her faith in braces would suggest the former, but the fact that a mere shrinking of the teeth fixed the problem would support the later. In any case, this is a feature which no longer applies. Her teeth are probably now quite straight, well-proportioned and would constitute a

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suitable advertisement for her parents' dental practice.

We also know that at the end of Book 3 she was not exceptionally tall. Pettigrew was described as being about the same height as Harry and Hermione. Harry was still regarded as undersized at that point (although he was a full head taller than Cho Chang, who is a year older than he), and Pettigrew is described as a small man.

Pettigrew is not dwarfish, like Flitwick, however; he is probably in the 5'1"–5'6" range. By the end of Book 3 Miss Granger was 14 and one would expect her to be finishing up her major growth spurt with, at most, only a couple of inches more to top out. Given that she has never been described as either tall or short, she has probably since topped out at what counts as a dead-on average height for women in Britain.

We also have no information in canon whether she tends more toward the slim, or the plump, or the curvy bodily conformation and the readers of the American editions of these adventures were not assisted by the illustrator's determination to continue drawing a 16-year-old Hermione Granger shaped as if she were a child of 10. (OotP chapter head illustration; Chapter 33.)

My own suspicion regarding Miss Granger's appearance is that; over the first 4–5 books, we were dealing with a child through the period of life where the adult bone structure is only beginning to emerge. That at the age of 11 Miss Granger's most distinguishing features were the hair and the teeth would tend to imply that at that age there was nothing else to really catch the eye about her appearance for either good or ill. The fact that by the age of 15 she looked "very pretty" with her hair slicked back into an "elegant knot" would tend to indicate

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that she probably has small, fairly regular, quite attractive features and the beginnings of a good bone structure, which the usual mop of hair tends to overwhelm, but that she is not yet an accredited "beauty".

Neither is she in any manner of speaking "plain." But she probably does not immediately catch the eye. Nor does she usually attempt to. At this particular stage of her social development she is still content to draw attention to herself on the grounds of "knowledge" or "character" and otherwise hide her light under a bushel of hair.

That a boy as self-absorbed as Harry did not notice that Hermione was turning out to be a passably pretty girl prior to the Yule Ball is hardly worth mentioning. Viktor Krum certainly noticed it, and I rather suspect that Neville Longbottom may have also. That few others appear to have done so, even since that point would suggest that she is still not some kind of stunning diamond-in-the-rough, but simply a rather attractive teenaged girl who probably does not look her best in regulation Hogwarts black and a fretful scowl. (She was out of uniform at the Yule Ball, too. Those "floaty" periwinkle blue robes alone probably accounted for something.) On the other hand, even if she were a good deal more strikingly pretty than she is generally presumed to be, her prickly disposition might still make most of the boys her own age hesitate to approach her.

By Rowling's insistence, and after several official flip-flops, we are also now secure in the information that Hermione is the oldest of the trio. Seven months before finally settling the matter Rowling had just as clearly informed us that she was the youngest of the three, and it is clear from other statements

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made earlier that she really wanted Hermione to be the youngest of the three — but could no longer manage to do so according to the rules she had already set up. To retool our earlier readings of her character to comply with all this takes a wrench. The shifts are minor, but significant. Fortunately this should be the last time we will be forced to do so.



Which brings us to a necessary related sidebar regarding the Time-Turner.

Various 'shipping communities have long taken the view that none of the boys her own age are an appropriate match for Miss Granger, and have at various times proposed that therefore her OTP (One True Pairing) must be Remus Lupin, Severus Snape, Sirius Black (before OotP was released) or one of the other adult characters.

The majority of the fic writers from these communities merely go ahead and set their fics at some point in the future when Miss Granger would be an adult herself — or at least no longer a student — and continue from there. A significant minority of them, however, enjoy attempting to explore the dynamics of student-teacher relationships, or of other explorations of romance within a scholastic setting.

They do not, however, wish to imply that the adult partner in this enterprise is a pedophile.

Consequently, for several years, during the period that canon was still open, particularly over the course of the 3-Year summer, among these authors a convention sprung up which attempted to claim that Miss Granger's use of the Time-Turner

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in her 3rd year added enough additional time to her physical age to make her "true" age that of "legal adult" status, even though she was still attending school.

In the early days of this convention it was widely accepted among the readers of these fics that this was a blatantly transparent dodge specifically intended to keep the hosts of fic archives out of hot water in case anyone started screaming "Kiddie-porn! Shut them down!" and, as such, it operated much in the same manner as the standard disclaimer that the characters and world are the creation of JK Rowling, even though it was necessarily incorporated into the text, rather than, in fact, posted as a disclaimer.

The amount of time added to Miss Granger's age was often highly implausible; anything up to 2-3 years has been floated in some fics, depending upon the legal statutes of the author's country of origin, or what they were able to find on the internet (or what academic year in which the author had chosen to set the action).

Over the past few years, and since canon has closed, various readers, not being aware of what the underlying reason for Miss Granger's precipitous premature aging really is, have accepted it as established fanon, and have some difficulty believing that it is not established in canon as well. In point of fact, this dodge typically serves no real purpose to the stories' actual plots.

Now that Ms Rowling has finally settled upon the statement that Miss Granger was nearly 12 years old when she began at Hogwarts, we can conclude that she will be turning 18 within the first month of her 7th year, without additional magical assistance. And, indeed, insofar as the wizarding world is concerned, she

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came “of age” within the first month of HBP, since the wizarding world regards “adult” status as being reached at the age of 17.

Perhaps one should also note that legal age of consent in Great Britain (at the time of this writing) is 16.

Despite which; I suspect that having an affair with one of her teachers would nevertheless be frowned upon. Severely. (Besides, canon Hermione is hardly portrayed as being the type to be carrying on an affair with anyone.)

Recently, a more level-headed and analytical faction have looked at the actual use that Hermione’s Time-Turner was put to over the course of Year 3 and concluded that Miss Granger probably used it enough to add no more than 4-5 weeks to her age, at the outside.

Which just about exactly corresponds with the weeks (Mid/late April to mid-June) that she spent in stasis while petrified during Year 2. (Forgot about the time in stasis during Year 2, didn’t you?)

Or, in other words: she broke even.

And that’s just all there is to the matter.

Deal with it.



Now, moving on to the apparent facts in canon pertaining to Miss Granger’s background:

An odd thing about canon Hermione Granger is that over the course of the series, she really seems to have almost nothing to say about herself or her family.

We know that Hermione’s parents are both dentists.

We have been given no clue as to where in Britain the family is settled. Or what sort of area in which they reside. It is rea-

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sonably safe to assume that they are either suburban, live in a small town, or are city dwellers. They are unlikely to live out in the country.

We have been told nothing specific of Hermione’s actual home background. Harry has not ever visited Hermione’s family. In fact, we have caught only brief glimpses of the Grangers at King’s Cross Station and their incursion into Diagon Alley in the summer before Hermione’s 2nd year appears to have been their last. Whether they were more intimidated by Lucius Malfoy’s clear contempt for their Muggle status, or annoyed by Arthur Weasley’s patronizing and, rather impertinent, interest is unknown. Rowling informed us on her original website that she deliberately kept Hermione’s family in the background, because she had chosen to give so much prominence to the Weasleys. (*sigh*)

We know that the Grangers are affluent enough to have taken their daughter on a holiday to France in the summer between her 2nd and 3rd year (probably not as much of a financial stretch for Brits as it would be for Americans, but it still would cost something) and to be proposing a family skiing trip (most probably either somewhere in the Alps, or in Scandinavia) during the winter of her 5th year, two and a half years later.

We had, up to midway through the series, assumed that she is an only child given that no Granger siblings had ever been mentioned in canon. In Rowling’s World Book Day interview of March 2004 she confided that she had always intended to give Hermione a younger (Muggle) sister, but that by that time (2004), since a sibling had never appeared, it was probably too late to introduce one. That much is true. Given that Miss Granger’s behavior, particularly her orientation toward adults,

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rather than other children, has all of the earmarks of an only child, indeed, that of an only child of somewhat older parents, the lack of any mention of the intended younger sister is probably just as well, in the long run.

By that point in the story arc, to introduce a younger Granger, even if this sister is not another witch, in the face of Hermione having never mentioned a sibling over the course of 6 years would be almost as jarring as for the Dursleys to be suddenly having another baby. Evidently, the Granger sister is destined to join the Weasley cousin as a character who didn't make it into the final version. Which, like I say, is probably just as well.

Particularly since the Grangers don't seem to be particularly pro-active parents, either. Hermione appears to have been largely left to raise herself. If there had been a sibling in the mix, Hermione would certainly have been drafted into service, and we would hardly have gone through four years without ever hearing a mention.

A sibling would also have made the memory modification and packing the Grangers off to Australia a lot more complex. And correspondingly even more implausible.

I am now inclined to suspect that this element was a retrofit, and not a part of the original story arc.

An older, perhaps several years older, sibling who has finished at uni and is out of the house, might have passed without notice. But even that possibility gets dicy considering the escape to the Antipodes.

Hermione spent nearly all of her term breaks at Hogwarts after her 1st year. She had joined the Weasleys prior to the World Quidditch Cup in early August in the summer before her

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4th year and by the 6th of August before her 5th year she was already settled in at 12 Grimmauld Place for the duration, and never spent any time at home until the year was over.

And, at that, she was back in the Burrow 2 weeks after term broke up, for she was already there when Albus dropped Harry off after their side trip to Slughorn.

Which brings her up to a total of perhaps 10 weeks at home between September 1993 and December 1996. That's even less time than Harry has spent at the Dursleys'. Indeed, she seems to have spent as little time in her parents home as she could get away with, until she fell out with both of the boys for a 2nd time, and went home for Christmas in HBP.

And she doesn't make it sound as if she had all that good a time there.

Her family may have a supportive attitude to her determination to excel as a witch, (which she does confirm, more or less) but they don't seem to insist on having her around very much, and Rowling states that they are proud of her, but do not really understand her.

Which by this time has the distinct 'clank' of an excuse.



We do not get the feeling of any authentic emotional closeness with her family, either. A suspicion which is borne out at every turn by her behavior. This is clearly the child of busy parents. Both hold down demanding professional-level jobs, and on their own time they do not just sit back and enjoy quality time with their daughter. They travel. They go skiing. And a younger Hermione was dragged along with them regardless of

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whether this is what she had any interest in or not (although she may have enjoyed at least some of the traveling).

And you will notice that — by the age of 16 — even though she had spent next to no time with her parents since the summer before she turned 14, she chose to bow out from the opportunity to spend the Christmas holidays with them merely because skiing “wasn’t really her thing” (although I had my own suspicions about that).

Even before the close of canon, like Harry, I thought that if she survives, she will probably make her future in the wizarding world with hardly a backwards glance. She already seemed to be actively withdrawing from the world of her parents.

I also get a powerful impression that very early in childhood, Hermione learned to reflect back to her parents the sort of intelligent, “responsible” projection which has encouraged them to effectively cut her loose to raise herself. And they have largely treated her as an honorary adult ever since, displaying a level of trust in her that I think was not altogether deserved.



In fact, reflecting back a projected image of what the people in positions of authority usually want to see is probably her only really well-developed “people skill.” She certainly does not seem to have ever developed the gift of making herself popular with her immediate peers.

Although by fifth or sixth year those peers have learned to respect her, and they no longer seem to actively dislike her. The Gryffindors seem, in general, to have become “sincerely *used* to her.” Everyone else is simply wary, and tries not to draw her

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attention.

Anticipating the demands of the plot *du jour*, by the opening of OotP her most recent advance in social development seemed to have been to, somewhat belatedly, swallow a copy of ‘POP-PSYCH FOR DUMMIES’ whole, and set herself up as an expert, spouting it back to all and sundry. Most fans have taken this “expertise” at face value. I think they are making a mistake.

The advice itself is certainly not bad, but she is no kind of expert. Her explanations for other people’s behavior come across as “plausible” textbook examples, but somehow they are less than altogether convincing, and they are certainly not backed up by any authentic experience of her own. She has obviously read *about* how people might be expected to react in given situations, together with some alternate examples of ways in which they *could* conceivably react, and she does seem to finally be trying to put all the pieces together into a pattern. But the fact that people do *not* always react as anticipated by the writers of pop-psych manuals had not sunk in yet at all. Nor had the fact that some people manage to conceal their reactions extremely well.

Considering the botch she made of the encounter with the Centaurs and her determined mismanagement of the issue regarding the house Elves, it seems evident to me that she does not really have all that much actual connection with real people’s (human or otherwise’s) real feelings. She can spin you a quite plausible schematic on the emotional world of Cho Chang, and, on that issue she is probably at least in the right ballpark. But Cho is emoting fairly openly, and Miss Granger can still be fairly easily misled. Particularly by her own assumptions.

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More tellingly, like many armchair experts, she can give other people, like Ginny Weasley, perfectly sound conventional advice, but she consistently misreads and mismanages her own emotional connections. In the interval between Book 5 and Book 6, It seemed extremely possible that this would be the vehicle of the great “comeuppance” that she seemed to be determinedly hurtling toward. Rowling definitely seemed to be giving us a long slow build-up to *something* to do with Miss Granger.

In the event, while Miss Granger still got no major comeuppance in HBP, it was indeed in the realm of accurately reading and dealing with others’ emotions that she finally succeeded in making a total fool of herself in public.



Which brings me to my next point; from what we’ve seen, Miss Granger is all too ready to tell you what the experts think on every subject, but it is seldom, and only quite recently, that she has ventured to stick her neck out and tell us what *she* thinks. Only on the issue of the plight of the House Elves did she unequivocally take a personal stand and, rather stridently, stick to it.

Speaking of which: what *about* those House Elves? It seems fairly clear to the readers of the series that JKR has based her interpretation of House Elves upon the traditional tales of those household spirits which permeate European folklore. These creatures have been referred to by various different names, but are most familiar to modern children as the Brownies, from Mrs Ewing’s mid-19th century tale, ‘THE STORY OF THE

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BROWNIES’. This particular tale has been adopted, simplified and broadly popularized by the International Girl Scout/Girl Guide organization the world over, and is familiar to just about every little girl who has ever been even peripherally involved in it for the past century. Rowling herself was reportedly a Girl Guide for at least some time as a child.

So why doesn’t Hermione seem to recognize this? Does the Potterverse even have a Girl Scouts/Girl Guides organization? Actually, it might not. Or at least not one which ever incorporated a story about Brownies. The post-Seclusion Ministry for Magic would have wanted to discourage the preservation of such tales. Are the Grangers, perhaps, the sort of overly “rationalist” thinkers to whom the reading of fairy tales and other such “escapist” literature is a practice to be gently, but firmly discouraged in their young? I wouldn’t be at all surprised to learn they were.

For that matter, while we hear her quoting textbooks, and pop-psych, and history at length upon every opportunity, can anyone point to any example anywhere in canon of her referring to anything with an origin in literature of *any* variety? Or, indeed in any recognized branch of narrative “culture”? (Film? Theater? Opera? Ballet? Poetry? Folktales? Anything at all?) Hermione may read fiction, or she may not, but clearly she does not consider such sources a worthy portion of her arsenal. Or, if she has, it has all flown straight past Harry.

Which is a whole other problem for any attempt at analysis.

We still have no clear indications regarding Miss Granger’s recreational reading tastes, but her adoption of the WW’s Who’s Who as “light reading” in year 1 is suggestive (assuming she wasn’t

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simply showing off, which still seems to me to be most likely).

Given that “culture,” at it’s deepest level, is defined by a collection of “shared stories,” she is beginning to come across as, culturally, a bit of a dullard. Which does not square at all with the “daughter of the middle classes” origins which as the daughter of medical professionals one initially grants her. The middle class is traditionally exceedingly proud of its familiarity with, and appreciation of Culture, thank you very much.

Something here doesn’t match up at all.

Admittedly, in this instance, we are almost certainly being misled by the Harry filter again. Harry Potter clearly does not care about either the family or the cultural background of Miss Hermione Granger. Ergo, we are told nothing of it. In Harry’s perception, Hermione Granger is a young woman with a mind that never rises above the facts. This is not the case with all of Harry’s associates. But that particular filter seems to be rather selective in its attentions.

For example, Ron Weasley, a member of a very large family, speaks of his family constantly. By contrast, Harry is understandably reluctant to speak of the Dursleys. But Hermione appears to speak of her own family as rarely as Harry does. So, could this also be an effect of the “Harry filter”?

Well, perhaps. But somehow, I rather think not. She really *doesn’t* mention them.

So why does she *not* speak of them?

Because she doesn’t think her parents’ beliefs, or the culture of the mundane world make decent arguments in a wizarding context?

Or is she reluctant to rub people’s noses in the fact that she is Muggle-born?

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It is obvious that she rapidly picked up the message that to be the child of Muggles is not a particularly desirable position to be arguing from in the current wizarding world, and it is a circumstance that she can do nothing about.

Upon the whole, taken in concert with the lack of evident closeness with her own family, the overall picture that I am getting suggests a level of voluntary alienation from the mundane which goes rather beyond mere adolescent angst. But then, I am beginning to suspect that alienation from the company of others, including her own family, may be a semi-natural state for Miss Granger. One that she may not have originally sought, but one that is at least familiar and “safe” enough to her to be worth maintaining.

Which is to say; it is familiar, therefore it can be controlled. And canon Hermione is very, very much about control. That has been obvious from the beginning of the series.

Canon Hermione, from the beginning of the series, has also been presented as a walking compendium of facts. But by this time the lack of any corresponding sense of “culture” from her is distinctly odd, once you notice it. Even in modern, supposedly egalitarian times, the main hallmark of the “cultured” individual is a sufficient familiarity with these least “functional” trappings of one’s society to be able to take cheap shots at them. And she does none of this. She does not even take cheap shots at *popular* culture — a trick that even Snape is capable of pulling off! (Which, in retrospect, in Snape’s case, we ought probably to have taken as a clue.

If this perception is solely an effect of the Harry filter, it is one that does her — and us — a grave disservice. If it is not such

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an effect, then we are dealing with a very strange personality here. It looks very much as though Hermione Granger is following a far more complex agenda than merely to get as full a wizarding education as she possibly can.

Whatever it is that she is doing, she is going about it with the same ruthless degree of thoroughness that she puts to everything else. If she is trying to divorce herself from the mundane world, I don't think we've been shown such a single-mindedly comprehensive attempt this side of Tom Riddle. (Or, in the wake of Book 6, Severus Snape.)



And, now that we finally come right down to the nub of it, I think that if you had to describe Hermione Jean Granger (The "Jane" middle name was only website and interview info. It was nowhere in the books. I think, when push came to shove, Rowling tried decided to eliminate that bit of common ground between Hermione and Umbridge, they have far too much else in common as it is) in 25 words or less, one of those words would assuredly be "ruthless."

This is definitely not the sweet, intellectual, overly well-socialized, "good-girl" who is impersonating her in a fanfic near you. Canon Hermione, for all her fine potential, once examined closely comes across as an extremely "edgy" and rather brittle young woman, with a number of highly distressing traits.

"No she's not!" clamor the fanfic authors. "I see her as shy and rather plain..." "She's very mature for her age." "She wants to learn everything she can, she wants to acquire knowledge for its own sake!" "She cares about justice."

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Etc. Etc. Etc.

Well, yes, she *does* care about justice. (Thank goodness. I'd hate to see what she was capable of if she didn't!) Whether the objects of her chosen crusade want justice or not. Which, at this point in the House Elves' history, they do not. In their own words; "We is not wanting paying and we is not wanting to be free." Ron has consistently been more in tune with what the House Elves want and deserve than Hermione ever has.

If you ask me, at this point, the House Elves want *appreciation* more than justice. And she isn't offering them *that*.

As to the rest: what books are these people reading? Shy? Mature? A thirst for knowledge for its "own sake"? Hermione Granger? It is to laugh.

Let us start at the beginning, shall we? Our first sight of Hermione Granger was of a nearly 12-year-old Little Miss Bossy-Boots, already decked out in her Hogwarts uniform, working her way down the corridors of the Hogwarts Express trailing an embarrassed Neville Longbottom (who probably didn't know what hit him) in her wake, marching up to total strangers and demanding to know whether they had seen his missing toad. At that point in time, she must have known that was one of the youngest people on that train. Didn't slow her down much, did it? (To say nothing of leaping to the center of attention every time any teacher has ever asked a class a question.)

Shy? Oh puh-lease.

From the standpoint of the imperfectly-socialized; this kind of demanding (in fact very close to bullying) behavior is entirely acceptable if is in the service of someone other than oneself. She has clearly found herself someone to "help" and is set-

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ting herself up as Neville's (or at least Trevor's) white knight. Hermione Granger, Future Head Girl, that's me!

(Now who else do we know about that has been described as a "pushing, thrusting" young person?)

Ron's botched and almost certainly bogus spell to turn Scabbers yellow gives her an opening to get his attention by spouting a tall tale about how all of the spells she tried at home worked!

Knowing what we now know about the restrictions of underaged magic, as well as Miss Granger's tendency to lie her way out of a tight spot, or potentially any spot she doesn't care to be in, leads me to suspect that this was a complete fabrication. She then goes on to boast off-handedly about having "learned all our course books by heart".

This last claim actually may not be a *complete* fabrication. If she was indeed presented with her Hogwarts letter by a Hogwarts representative, or Ministry employee shortly before her 11th birthday, she may have made her first excursion into Diagon Alley as early as the preceding September, after the previous academic year had already started. This would have given her nearly a year to have gone through the standard first year course books. Not to mention 'HOGWARTS, A HISTORY', 'THE RISE AND FALL OF THE DARK ARTS' and 'GREAT WIZARDING EVENTS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY', all of which she claims to have read.

But we still have no confirmation that this is how the notification of Muggle-raised prospective students is typically handled in the present day. It was certainly not the case in Tom Riddle's day, when such matters were handled by the Hogwarts staff. Who would probably not have been making such visits in

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the middle of the academic year, while school was in session.

Upon coming face-to-face with a bonafide celebrity on the order of the famous Harry Potter, she clearly assumes that the appropriate thing to do is to impress him with what an informed young witch she is. She tells him straightaway that she has read *all* about *him*.

In her own way she is being every bit as condescending as Draco Malfoy.

And it is all going over just about as well as his version did, too.

This is a child who is clearly determined to be Admired. The Sorting Hat wasted very little time before throwing her to the Lions, even though she might have found the Eagles more welcoming. They would certainly have had a higher tolerance of her manner, which is nothing new in Ravenclaw.

And if she went on in that vein (and we already know she did!) it is small wonder that "nobody can stand her" by Halloween. Ron Weasley spoke nothing less than the truth, there.

The fact that she *did* eventually become a valued friend to Harry and Ron has blurred everybody's recollection of just what kind of a person she still comes across as if you aren't already predisposed to like her.

She didn't get a personality transplant after the Troll in the bathroom incident, you know. Or even after the trip into the Labyrinth. If this is the face she has consistently shown everybody in Slytherin House for the past 6 years, then it's small wonder they followed Draco's lead where she was concerned. If the Gryff's vision of Draco Malfoy is of a braggart flanked by two goons, the Slyth's vision of "Saint Potter" is likely to be one of a twerp flanked by a female bully and a hot-head.

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It's all a matter of perception.

However, if nothing else, her association with Ron and Harry did at least eventually teach her to curb her tendency to boast. Either that, or this was something she learned from Draco Malfoy by way of a counter-example. For we get a great deal of open boasting from her during 1st year, but progressively less and less after that. It is also possible her somewhat slowly-developing social skills simply matured to the point of mastering the overtly self-effacing statement which nevertheless accords oneself full credit in some other area (Albus was a master of that technique). She was only 12 after all, and she was still scrambling to cope with living with other people her own age 24/7. She'd never had to do that before.



And she *did* seem to be learning. Gradually. As much as they both burst upon the scene determined to boast, show off, and draw attention to themselves, we can see that, until the middle of HBP, whereas Draco Malfoy had apparently learned little and had devolved into something on the order of the "class clown," (although his father's position still gave him an edge among the Slytherins) Hermione had made considerable strides in breaking herself of at least some of her least likable behaviors.

By the end of Year 1 she had learned that boasting gained her no brownie points with her peers.

By the end of Year 2 she had evidently decided that drawing attention to herself on general principles was not all that great an idea either.

It took all year of Year 3 to get her to stop showing off in

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class, but she appears to have finally managed that lesson as well — for the most part, although she still goes into that mode whenever she is confronted by a new teacher.

In HBP Snape finally went so far as to openly slap her down for simply parroting the information from the textbook. He'd probably wanted to do that for years. But Potions is a study which does tend to support rote learning and "one true answer." At least the way he taught it.

Now if she could just wrap her mind around the concept that not all the answers can be found in books, or that she could be wrong about anything she would be making real progress.



As for the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake: fish fuzz.

She came onto the field determined to excel in order to be SEEN to excel. And by this time she knows damn well that in the wizarding world knowledge is quite literally power. And there is a war in progress! Not to mention that she belongs to one of the most targeted groups. She intends to have the very best stocked arsenal in Britain.

Knowledge for its own sake, my arse.

For that matter, for her first few years at Hogwarts she was quite transparently "showing off" what an extraordinary student she was at every possible opportunity. It took a year-long exercise in overreaching herself over the course of PoA to finally run her up against her limits and get her to knock off the act. I wouldn't put it past Professor McGonagall to have facilitated her use of that Time-Turner expressly for the purpose of giving Miss Granger enough rope to hang herself.

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There are very few flies on Minerva McGonagall.

Since then Miss Granger has managed to siphon off most of that excess nervous energy into “projects” such as coaching Harry for the Tri-Wizard Tournament, thwarting Umbridge on general principles, the plight of those poor, defenseless (Ha!) House Elves, and getting Ron Weasley to finally notice her. But the instances of her showing off in the classroom have scaled back from their high point around Year 2.

The impression that she managed to create over those first couple of years stuck, however. Snape was still sneering at her well after she had outgrown the worst of her show-off stage.

Snape didn't change his mind about people readily, and he had bad, *bad*, associations regarding show-offs.



And I begin to think that we may be giving her too much credit in the academic arena, too. The fact that *Hermione Granger* was unable to complete even one year under the kind of an academic load she took on in Year 3 without coming apart at the seams makes us wonder first; how anyone can ever possibly manage to achieve 12 OWLs, (Percy seems to have done so, however, as well as Bill, and so did Barty Crouch Jr) and, second; whether she is really as clever as she makes herself out to be, or if she is simply a tightly-wound overachiever with a photographic memory.

[Query: what was her 11th OWL in. She was only taking 10 classes. Did they let her sit the OWL for Muggle Studies on the strength of having taken it for only one year? Or is this just another case of; Oh. Maths.]

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And by sixteen, it appears that she was beginning to reach her limits.

Item: In the raid on the DoM she silenced rather than disabling an enemy. We already know that DADA is her worst subject, and, moreover, in the subject of DADA she and her year-mates have been egregiously badly taught — except by Remus Lupin, who did not teach them Defense Against the Dark Arts so much as Defense Against Dark Creatures (we can't count on anyone but Harry having learned anything significant from “Moody”). But hadn't she ever come across any reference to *non-verbal* magic?

That is a *fundamental* method of spellcasting. At NEWT-level it is required for just about every class that does any appreciable amount of spellcasting. And she never came across it before? From Harry's trip into Snape's Pensieve a year earlier it was evident that the skill had been introduced at least a year earlier in the Marauders' day for both James Potter and Severus Snape were making use of it. (Was Snape deliberately rubbing her nose in her gaffe by making non-verbal magic the very first skill he taught them when he finally got the DADA position? He had been the one to have to deal with the results of that mistake, after all. It took ten different Potions to repair the damage.)

And what about all of those DADA reference books in the DA's meeting room as provided by the Room of Requirement? She and Harry had spent all year browsing through those to learn new spells to teach the others. She never came across a reference to nonverbal magic in any of them? Or realized that it could be *important*?

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Item: Over the entire course of Book 6, Harry, who has absolutely no real understanding of the study of Potions, consistently outperformed her by following the notations made in his copy of the book by a former student, and all she did was to complain about him using the annotated book!

Now, mind you, she was *right* to complain that Harry was *cheating*. She was right to complain that he was pulling a Lockhart and taking credit for somebody else's work. And she was right to point out that he was taking an awful risk to do so. But it was absolutely clear that he was getting better results because he was following better instructions, that this mysterious "Half-Blood Prince" was making *improvements* to the process. Yet she did not reflect that doggedly reproducing perfect textbook examples is *not* the best that someone can do? Not even in a relatively exact science like Potions.

And yet she, who we all assume *does* have a real understanding of the underlying principles of the subject, never even considers sticking her own neck out and risking her perfect score by trying to see where she might make some innovations herself? Slughorn was sending out the message — loud and clear — all year long that innovation is a Good Thing. But no, she'd rather sulk. She may be bright, but she is evidently not creative. Or at least not in Potions.

However, we do know that it wasn't simply the fact that she was being shown up by Harry that had her nose out of joint. Harry has been quite legitimately showing her up in DADA class since sometime in 3rd year, and her response to that was to propose that he coach her, and anyone else that they could round up, when it was clear that Umbridge didn't

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intend to teach them anything. But the fact is that, in Potions, Harry was cheating.

Still, it is beginning to look as though, while she is still very bright, and very competent, to this point, she may have been coasting along to a large extent on the fact that she was also very precocious. And other people are finally beginning to catch up to her.

Especially Draco Malfoy.

And none of this boded well for her performance once she is away from the controlled structure of a classroom. When examined even somewhat closely, she is depicted as a plodder. A very clever and effective plodder, but a plodder none the less. There is a very real lack of spontaneity and originality there.

Fortunately, she didn't overreach herself again before the problem of Tom Riddle had been finally settled. (And her sudden intermittent replacement by a hitherto un-introduced "action heroine" answering to her name at various points in DHs was as disconcerting as it was unconvincing.)

And she knows this. She admits as much in the very first book. "Books and cleverness." That was NOT a piece of false modesty, or even *real* modesty. It was a statement of fact. It took us until the end of Book 6 to finally get the message.

In fact, thanks to the Harry filter we don't even get an impression that she has any particular enthusiasm for her studies — apart from Arithmancy, which she had to come right and *tell* him is her favorite class in order to make any sort of impression. In this regard we are clearly being jockeyed into a position of missing relevant information. People who have something that they are interested in, they *talk* about. Obviously Harry

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lets the better part of Hermione's conversation wash right over him, paying no attention.

From the above, however, we can at least assume that she honestly relishes a challenge. Arithmancy she has told us right out to be her favorite subject. It is also, she claims, probably the "toughest subject there is" when it comes time to sit the OWL for it. Which all made one sincerely hope that Rowling would at some point at least show us all what it is. (Yet another hope which Rowling dashed in DHs.)

Thanks to the Harry filter, however, we have no indication, whatsoever, of whether she takes the slightest interest in ideas, or philosophy or theory. We didn't even see Hermione regularly burrowing into the books she had packed during the endless camping trip. We haven't a hint of *anything* to actually support that supposed thirst for "knowledge for it's own sake" claim. Just the facts, m'am, nothing but the facts. We have been given no portrait of a young "intellectual." What we have been shown is merely a sketch of an overbearing little swot.

Is it humanly possible to be that dull?

But in this case I think we can solidly blame the Harry filter.



Oh.

Yes.

I did mention up there above that she lies, didn't I?

Well, yes, I'm afraid she does. We all already knew that. In fact, she flat-out lied her way into Ron and Harry's good graces with that bouncer about "I went looking for the Troll!" I guess we are expected to believe that she is usually rather better at it



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than that particular example came across in print.

We watched her lie again "for the cause" when she led Umbridge into the Forest and into harm's way with a banbury tale of "secret weapons." I can't say that I found that one much more convincing. But, then, she was dealing with Umbridge, and telling Umbridge what Umbridge wants to hear is never likely to be a mistake. However, when she tried to pull that stunt on Borgin she found herself summarily shown the door. Borgin is a tough nut to crack, and she isn't *that* good.

When she isn't improvising and spinning tales off the top of her head she is much better at it. In CoS, she slips that permission slip to use the Restricted Section under Lockhart's nose very smoothly indeed.

I wish I could assure you that she only lies in a "good cause." But I can't. In Phoenix she admits to Harry that she lied to her parents at Christmas, giving them the impression that "everyone who was serious" was staying at Hogwarts to study for the OWLs in order to get out of the proposed ski trip. Then she (probably) took the Hogwarts Express into London with the rest of the homeward-bound students and turned up in Grimmauld Place that evening by way of the Knight Bus. This is not exactly lying for the cause of the Light. But it was certainly very slick. Makes one wonder just how many other times she may have been been lying to us as well.



And as for the notion that she is mature for her age... words fail me.

People got that impression solely because she is so clearly not



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“one of those boy-crazy girls” like (presumably) Lavender and Parvati. Which is a fair enough assessment. She isn’t. Although she has certainly had her share of “girly moments” over the course of the series. Particularly in the first three books.

Those tapered off rather quickly after she discovered that the kind of behavior which most impressed Ron Weasley was more on the order of slapping Malfoy across the chops or marching out of Trelawney’s classroom. One might reasonably speculate whether that discovery had anything to do with the escalating arrogance and recklessness she was displaying over the course of books 4 and 5.

But, accepting this starting point automatically introduces the distortion of assuming that Lavender and Parvati represent the “normal” model of female teenagers, rather than being every bit as much of an exaggeration from what is typical for their “age group” as Hermione is, along with the corresponding assumption that Hermione is somehow “beyond all that.”

Because once you consider the matter without such pre-established assumptions and manage to dismiss the distraction represented by Lavender and Parvati from the equation, the picture you get is just as likely to be down to Hermione lagging somewhat *behind* in her social development as it is any indication that she is any appreciable distance ahead of her “peer group.”

As of March 2004, we were expected to believe that if her parents hadn’t pulled strings to get her admitted into primary school a year early. She would have been in the same class as Ginny and Colin Creevy, where, perhaps, once one gives the matter some serious consideration, she really belonged, developmentally. She certainly behaves in a manner which would sup-

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port such a conclusion.

But no. We don’t have any such easy outs in that regard. If she “started early” at Primary school (which Rowling *did* tell us on the original official website in March of 2004), it only means she had an extra year of Muggle schooling before she got to Hogwarts.

And Rowling up-ended the statement she’d made in March, in December when she finally pinned herself down to admitting that Hermione really is the oldest of the trio after all.

Socially Hermione is quite clearly a late-bloomer. Her being older than Ron and Harry may go some small way towards explaining her bossiness, but that is about all that it accounts for.

For that matter, so far as we can tell, her closest female friend anywhere in canon is Ginny Weasley, who is nearly a full two years younger, and is not exactly the “less dominant” partner in the friendship. Even taking Hermione’s bossiness into account.

Item: she has never once failed to rise to the bait whenever Ron makes one of his egregious misogynistic statements. A fact that I am convinced that Ron is quite clever enough to be perfectly well aware of, and who has almost certainly passed into the stage of — at least sometimes — doing it deliberately to yank her chain.

A “mature” individual would have figured that out.

A “mature” individual would have also figured out that your friends don’t **have** to agree with you on every single particular. Moreover, that *she* isn’t responsible for *Ron’s* behavior. That it isn’t her place to try to **control** his behavior. And that his behavior is no reflection on *her* anyway.

In short, that she isn’t his *mother*.

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A mature individual would probably sit back and *let* him periodically make a capering jackass of himself if he's so insistent on it.

But no. She has to bicker over every phrase, every incident, and when she realizes that he has her where she can't win she stomps or flounces off to bed with a great deal of humphing and eye-rolling.

That's not exactly *my* definition of maturity. If you ask me, the kid is not mature. She is merely *articulate*.

And as for not being boy-crazy; Well, no. She isn't.

Or at any rate she certainly isn't crazy about boys *in general*. But by the middle of GoF I was beginning to wonder whether Rita may not have inadvertently managed to incorporate just enough of a grain of truth in some of her smear articles to sting. Rita Skeeter is not unperceptive. She makes a living from her observations of people's behavior.

We saw how Hermione behaved when she came face-to-face with a celebrity on the order of Harry Potter. We also saw how she behaved the following year when exposed to a celebrity on the order of Gilderoy Lockhart.

And, two years later, a celebrity on the order of Viktor Krum singles her out. Personally.

Well, we can be pretty sure that she didn't go running after him. He isn't a celebrity in any field that she particularly values. In fact she regarded his extensive string of Quidditch groupies with unconcealed contempt. But there is no blinking the fact that he *is* an international celebrity, *quite* legitimately, and attaching him was in the nature of a coup. And she clearly grew to *like* him well enough on his own account to still be carrying on a correspondence with him a year later (a thread which was

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comprehensively snipped by DHs). But he seems to have been a good deal more bowled over by her, than she was by him.

And I am inclined to think that particular association may have at least started out with an element of being deliberately one in the eye to outside detractors on *both* of their parts. Remember just who Krum was being forced to associate with on a daily basis that year.

He may be a jock, but we didn't get any real indication in GoF that he is a *stupid* jock. (However inarticulate he may be in a second, or more probably third, language.) His turning up at the ball with a Muggle-born Gryffindor on his arm isn't exactly something that happened by accident. And I'd really like to know just whose idea that originally was.

On Hermione's side; one hardly needs to strain to write up a list of the top half dozen people that showing up at the Yule brawl on Viktor Krum's arm had her scoring off of. And make sure that list includes at least one person that she had already concluded is subject to bouts of jealousy.

The allegation that she "uses" famous young men to her own advantage may have smarted. Just a little.



I'll also take the time here and now to hazard my own opinion that the biggest reason to date for why Hermione Granger doesn't seem to have much time for running after boys in general is because from the time we first met her, she's had her eye on one in particular. And I am not talking about Harry Potter.

Or Neville Longbottom.

Think about it.

Who, of all the people that we've met in over some 4000 pages

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of this series most had the power to *hurt* her, with one careless word. And, knowingly or not, has used it. More than once.

One or two other people have managed to wound her, usually quite deliberately, but who else do we know that routinely does it without even *trying*.

I rather doubt that she'd have been sniveling in the bathroom all afternoon and evening if she had overheard the statement that she was a nightmare that nobody could stand coming from Draco Malfoy. Or even coming from Harry. But *Ron*? Pass the hankies.

And yet she constantly misreads him. And we've never heard her say anything particularly *nice* to him. Which even he has noticed. ("Always the air of surprise.") She has rarely been even remotely supportive.

It's all very well to call him out on the disrespectful comments he makes about females, his comments invite that, but she fixates on some supposedly underlying significance of the careless things he says, and doesn't take the trouble to look beneath the surface of his actions.

Or his reactions. Blowing off his falling out with Harry over the Goblet of Fire with "he's just jealous" may have made Harry feel better, but it wasn't a particularly accurate interpretation of the situation. Mere jealousy would have been if Ron were indeed fuming just because Harry had got some more public attention and he didn't (Q: When *hasn't* he?). That wasn't what was going on at all. Attracting public attention wasn't the issue — although that made an easy stick to beat Harry over the head with.)

I'd say that Ron was upset that Harry had somehow man-

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aged to get his name into the Goblet *without* him. He was convinced that Harry had gone and done it by himself, and then was shutting him out even more by not even having the decency to *tell* him about it. There was *some* jealousy present, sure. But he wasn't *just* jealous. Ron is used to being outshone, he doesn't mind it *too* much so long as you still *include* him. But now he's been shut out, and rejected as well, and it *hurts*.

So he whips himself up into a temper because a 14-year-old boy just can't publicly burst into tears because his best friend has gone off and left him behind like he doesn't even matter!

If Harry had fiddled the Goblet with the help of *someone else*, now, *that* might have been cause for pure-and-simple jealousy. But that he had gone off and done it alone was a cause for pure-and-simple *hurt*.

And anger. Ron was still going through his very worst stage of adolescence at that point and he handled the whole situation about as badly as he possibly could. But to convince Harry that it was all just simple jealousy was a disservice to both of them and it probably helped to keep the rift open longer than it might have lasted without that particular bit of "helpfulness" on Hermione's part. Hermione's Helping Hand strikes again.

I really think that incident wasn't there to demonstrate how wonderfully perceptive Miss Granger is about other peoples' feelings. It was there to demonstrate the opposite.

Emotional range of a teaspoon, my foot.

If so, he's certainly not the *only* one.

In the aftermath of the Yule brawl she must have taken some degree of satisfaction that she was finally making an impression. But then Ron farted about for the rest of the year, and then

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went on to leave her twisting in the wind throughout the whole of Year 5. With, still, Not A Word spoken on the subject.

And, while we're on the subject; Earth to Hermione: have you considered that rubbing his nose in that continuing correspondence with Viktor Krum was sending a very mixed signal, and that maybe *that* has something to do with why somebody-we-won't-name left you dangling all through year 5? Hm? Boys aren't generally any more confident about this sort of thing than you are, you know.

(Or were you just trying to make him jealous again?)

Five years waiting around for somebody else to make the first move is a major chunk of your life when you aren't yet turned 17.

Even Ginny Weasley, two years younger and a year earlier, was able to change a pattern of behavior that wasn't working.

And even if I'm misreading just when it actually started, even two years is a fairly major investment in a teenager's time. But I really don't think I am misreading it.



And then in Year 5 suddenly someone *else* was showing a marked interest in him as well. Effectively at first sight. And, when one stops to think about it; very pretty little Padma Patil had quite happily agreed to go with him to the Ball.

Clearly there must be something rather significant about our friend Ron Weasley which is just not working its way through the Harry filter.

And, heaven help us, but Luna Lovegood just isn't the sort of character that Hermione could muster up a lot of respect for.

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Nor is she the kind of person that Hermione can readily *compete* with in any meaningful manner. Luna spent the whole of Book 5 sitting on the sidelines watching the show, but if she had decided that she really wanted him, there is a very good chance that she would have got him.

Luna has a lot more confidence in herself than Hermione does. And she has no compunction about asking for what she wants for fear of looking ridiculous.

And, by that time, I wouldn't have been particularly astonished if Hermione's years of torch-bearing (at least 2, possibly as many as 5) hadn't suddenly gone very sour on her and she just let Luna *have* him!

Well, evidently I sold Luna short. (Sorry Luna. My bad.) When push comes to shove, and leaving aside the Crumple-Horned Snorkack and other fabulous wonders, Luna has the essential, clear-eyed honesty and emotional courage to look past what she *wants* to see in a person she fancies, and determine what is actually *there*. She took Ron's measure over the course of Year 5 and found him lacking. He is funny. But he is often unkind. And Luna has had ample experience of unkindness, thank you very much. Someone else is welcome to him.



But, after looking over the series to that point, I couldn't help but wonder whether Book 6 was going to be the one in which it would finally be Hermione's turn to get a thoroughgoing "mad-on" at one of her friends. Harry wasn't the only one of the Trio to have reached a particularly nasty stage of adolescence.

In Book 1 it took until half-way through their first term for

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her to connect with Harry and Ron at all.

This tripod continued pretty much without anything to disrupt the balance of the relationships through Book 2. And all three of them were still essentially children throughout Book 2, even taking into account Hermione's little crush on Lockhart.

In Book 3, however, first Ron, and then Harry spent most of the year mad at her. And she was too overstressed and unhappy to get mad right back at them. Ron also moved into the earliest stages of his really "bad patch" of adolescence during that period.

In Book 4 Ron spent half of the first term mad at Harry, and in Book 5 Harry spent most of the year mad at the world and taking it out on both Hermione *and* Ron. Neither of whom appreciated it. Harry clearly had finally entered his "bad patch." Ron, by contrast, seemed to finally be beginning to emerge from the other end of his.

Wasn't she about due?

It didn't really seem likely that Harry was going to have improved significantly over the summer. (Although apparently, getting Voldemort out of his head solved the worst of the problem.) Plus, Ron had kept her hanging for the past couple of years by first enacting the jealous twit, but then never pulling his head out and making a statement of his intentions.

And both boys took her totally for granted.

How long was she expected to put up with this?

She is not exactly a *peaceful* individual, after all.

Or was she still insecure enough to just keep on taking whatever they dish out in order to have any "close" friends at all?



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And, apparently, I was right. Hermione seems to have spent the majority of Year 6 getting thoroughly pissed off at both of the boys. She was mad at Harry because he was cheating in Potions class and (just to add insult to injury) showing her up because of it, too! And she was quite thoroughly put-out at Ron's apparently bullet-proof obtuseness, and was determined to "show him".

And she made a miserable job of it, too. It is positively laughable that she could give such legitimately sound, if conventional, advice to Ginny, a full year earlier — advice that Ginny would have benefited from in the long run even if it hadn't worked — and on her own account could manage nothing more effective than to, yet again, launch the very shallowest and most transparent of attempts to — what was this, the 2nd, or the third time? — make Ron *jealous*.

And to botch it. Completely. What she did had nothing to do with the final result. Ron had *already* noticed her — because he was finally *ready* to notice her. It had been his own little sister — Hermione's *friend* — who managed to derail the whole natural progression with one particularly vicious quarrel.

Well, hey, it was *Ginny*. By 6th year viciousness seemed to be an inherent part of the package, there.

All Hermione managed to succeed in doing was to demonstrate publicly that she is capable of making an unmitigated fool of herself



And I will have to say, for the record, that while ending up with Ron Weasley is a long way from being the worst thing that

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could ever happen to a girl, I still think this is a bad idea. She wanted him, and she finally got him, evidently. But she still didn't understand him, she doesn't seem to *respect* him, and she still consistently sells him short.

And if she has wanted him all this time because she made up her mind to want him when she was not quite 12 — when she didn't even *know* him — and has never stopped to question whether she wants what he actually *is*, then the whole situation is even worse. Because she is quite stubborn enough to hang onto him simply because she has invested so much of her time and energy into getting him. Whether she enjoys *having* him or not. And if she doesn't, then she is liable to try to *change* him. Which is an even *worse* idea.

Forcibly reminding me of Dumbledore's statement all the way back in Book 1 about humans having a knack for wanting exactly what would be worst for them.

Sometimes, as the wise man said: the price of getting what you want is that of having something that you once wanted.

Not to mention the prospect of Molly, the mother-in-law from Hell.

Oh, hey. Why borrow trouble? They're teenagers. Their lives are not set in stone.

But... oh Gawd. Ron + Hermione; *theirloveisocanon!*

And SO dysfunctional.

And even by the end of HBP, so not even off the ground yet.



Which brings us to the «spits» epilogue.

I think we can all feel confident about what Rowling intended

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by that utterly wasted opportunity for giving us some information that mattered.

One Big Happy Weasley Family with Harry and Hermione safely rolled into the tribe. Hermione and Ron and their two children, and Harry and his Stepford!Ginny with their three.

Stepford!Ginny doesn't even seem to have any say in the naming of her own kids. Although in all fairness young James could very well have turned out to be James Fredrick (or Alfred). And Little Lily is probably Lily Ginevra. The serious shortage of female Weasley names makes one sincerely hope that the poor child is not Lily Nymphadora. But I suppose she could be Lily Hermione. (ETA: She is Lily Luna. Poor thing. And James is James Sirius.) Even Albus Severus could have been a compromise. Although it would be difficult to sort out just which parent was holding out for which name.

But the fact that Epilogue!Ron seems still to be seriously immature for his purported age has a great many fans limbering up to do a few therapeutic backbends to avoid the issue.

I cannot say I blame them. Rowling's initial claim that Ron and Harry had "revolutionized" the Auror department of the Ministry does not play well with a Ron who does not hesitate to confound the Muggle who is evaluating his performance in order to get a driver's license.

And while Rowling's second proposal of a Ron who goes to work at the Wheezes shop with his brother George and evidently spends his life trying to fill Fred's shoes is a lot easier to believe (despite the fact that Rowling never set Ron up as being either a bully or a prankster, he did idolize his brother Fred), it is all but inconceivable to imagine a Hermione Granger who

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would, even for a moment, seriously consider settling down with a surrogate Fred.

Drafting out alternate solutions is rather fun, and really not nearly as difficult as you would think it ought to be. Or as it would have been if Rowling had ever done anything but simply take the conclusion for granted. I'm not the only one to point out that nothing said by anyone in the «spits» epilogue challenges the reading that Ron isn't just all of Harry's and Hermione's kids' favorite uncle.

Bachelor uncle if there is any common sense left in the world. Of course his own kids may just not be Hogwarts age yet. Ron could be a bit of a late starter where it comes to taking on adult responsibilities. We would hardly be astonished at that.

And for that matter, since Hermione's eldest wasn't born until a good eight years after the end of the war, there is ample opportunity for there to have been some kind of slip betwixt the cup and the lip. The two of them certainly didn't marry the week after Voldemort fell, and immediately start turning into Molly and Arthur. In fact, they may not have married each other at all.

But Ron would certainly turn up to see his niece and nephew off on the train for their first trip. And Hermione may well have left her husband discoursing to somebody else about broom regulations in order to join Harry and Ron to all see the Hogwarts-bound off together, and then take the two younger children off to whatever eatery has now taken the place of Fortescue's in consolation, and to catch up with Ron, and Harry & Ginny.

And we *did* overhear Percy discoursing about broom regula-

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tions to somebody in the mist there on the platform. Harry was glad to be able to take the excuse of the mist not to greet him. He probably gets quite enough of Percy at the office. Or during family get-togethers.

Percy?

Well if we are still locked into One Big Happy Weasley Family, that almost goes without saying, doesn't it? I can't really see Hermione settling down with Charlie or George, any more than I can see her with surrogate-Fred!Ron. Or, actually, even original Ron. Less so, in fact.

And she and Percy are co-workers, after all. A great many matches these days are made in the workplace. And I should think the two of them might deal extremely well together.

Indeed, Percy was observed being notably kind to 1st-year Hermione back in the day. About the only Weasley who was.

One seriously hopes that their children are both bidable and intelligent. For a stupid child, or a rebellious one would not be an asset to such a household. Both Percy and Hermione can respond well to a challenge, but that is not exactly the *kind* of challenge that would bode well.

Because they really, really are just a bit too much alike. You rather shudder to think of the kind of flap they would periodically work themselves into, fussing themselves into conceptions over something between the two of them. And neither of them willing to admit that they could ever be wrong..

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We are told that Frank and Alice Longbottom do not recognize their son.

In that case, what was Neville's grandmother thinking of, dragging a small child off to St Mungo's to visit these scary strangers who are fated ever to remain strangers?

Clearly the experience seems to have traumatized the boy. Or ensured that the original trauma which resulted in their condition would remain "evergreen."

No matter how many assurances he may have been given that his parents did not do this to themselves; long before there was any certainty about his admission to Hogwarts, he had come away from the experience with the conviction that this is what comes of dealing with Magic.

My own suspicion is that Neville is one of those children who found his early magical breakthroughs alarming and had learned to unconsciously suppress or to dissipate them by the time he was no longer a toddler.

When he was a very young child, and still in his own parents' care, he undoubtedly did display the sort of magical breakthroughs common to magical children. But between the ages of two or three, these displays had tapered off and eventually ceased. If his parents were still functioning normally by that time (which seems unlikely. I now suspect that the attack on the Longbottoms took place before the start of 1982), they took this in stride and saw no reason to inform the rest of the family of the fact.

His grandmother, however, seems to be from a family which has a long history of such childhood breakthroughs on a grand

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scale. Great-uncle Algie, in particular doesn't sound like a good candidate for having ever learned to control any of his impulses, magical or otherwise. When Neville appeared to have no such breakthroughs, his grandmother was shocked and dismayed. Her handling of the matter (and that of her siblings) only made an issue of something that wasn't one.



However, rather than exercising the common sense of a jack-rabbit and writing directly to Hogwarts to ask whether Neville was on the enrollment list, they proceeded to try to "frighten the magic out of him." And they very nearly succeeded.

It is obviously his grandmother and her extended family who put the idea of being a Squib into his head.

Not that his relatives would have actually used the word "Squib" in his hearing. No, they never used such a shameful, mortifying term about one of their own. They worried about him possibly being a *Muggle*. Which is ridiculous on the face of it.

That particular exercise in being mealy-mouthed temporarily made me and other theorists wonder whether we had been given another clue about Neville's family background.

At a point early in Harry's first year there was a little conversation where everyone was first getting acquainted with their new housemates in which when asked, Neville comments;

"Well, my gran brought me up and she's a witch," said Neville, "but the family thought I was all-Muggle for ages."

Now, how does a child from a wizarding family get to be suspected of being "all-Muggle" unless he is already known to be *part* Muggle? And yet Neville does not claim, as Seamus Fin-

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negan does, to be half-and-half. From which I suspected that Neville and Harry had something more in common than we had been told. I thought that in both cases one of their parents must have been Muggle-born.

Since OotP was released we now know that this, at least, is not the case. Neville is definitely a pureblood. But, given the comment, one did have to wonder. And, it turns out that he and Harry DID have more in common than had previously been stated. They almost share a birthday, and until Voldemort made his choice in the matter, either one of them might have been thought to have been the child of the Trelawney prophesy.



Of course, once Neville went off to school and found out about Squibs, he started calling himself a Squib. But I'll bet he didn't pop out with the "s-word" in his gran's hearing. And by now he has no reason to.

But my reading of Neville is that for the first three and a half years of the series he desperately *wanted* to be a Squib.

To be honest, I suspect that any of those children who have unconsciously learned to suppress or dissipate their magic would probably benefit from some special coaching to overcome the habit of doing so, and to be better able to access their own magic. And it is obvious that they simply do not ever get it.

But just about everything Neville has ever said on the subject was a deliberate reminder to his audience that he was "practically a Squib," that he was magically incompetent, a complete waste of Hogwarts space. Everything he had ever been shown to have done magically had been something that might as well

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have been calculated to give observers the message that he was of no use when it came to magic, and should be removed from Hogwarts, sent home and permitted to just forget about it.

That, in short, people should stop trying to force him to be a wizard when he didn't WANT to be one.

Of course the very methods of avoidance Neville adopted only served to point out that his problem was not lack of power, but lack of control. And an unwillingness to *learn* control.

And, of course being sent off to school with a wand that didn't fit him didn't help, either.

Snape, for one, quickly saw straight through Neville's duffer act and it got right up his nose — with absolutely predictable results. The big disconnect here is that Snape was utterly convinced that Neville was being passive-aggressive, and screwing about in his class deliberately, while I'm not convinced that the boy was even conscious of it.

Professor McGonagall also displays a great deal of exasperation when it comes to Neville. As I have said elsewhere, there are very few flies on Minerva McGonagall. The only real difference is that whereas Snape's reaction is basically; "How *dare* you!" hers is more on the order of; Oh, get a grip!"



Neville's absentmindedness was a whole different issue. *That* problem was genuine enough. Being forced to stay in a place where he really, really didn't want to be, and wanting to be virtually *anywhere* else accounts for much of it. And, although we did periodically see him in conversation with Seamus and Dean, the boy was socially isolated, and he seems to have spent

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an inordinate amount of time off in his own private little world, inside his head. Things either didn't get through in the first place or he checked right back out and forgot them. He didn't *want* to think about any of that.

I found Neville considerably puzzling once I stepped back and tried to sort him out.

He's clearly overawed by adults, particularly older or aggressive adults — which, given his upbringing, is certainly one direction that such things might reasonably have been expected to go — but he seems to not be at all fazed by other kids his own age. Even though I doubt that he had ever had much exposure to other children before boarding the Hogwarts Express. I'm almost beginning to think that the only reason we hadn't seen him firing back at Malfoy & Co. more than we have is due to his aversion to being put in a position where he would be expected to use Magic.

Plus the fact that he doesn't like being hit any more than the next kid, and you rarely see Malfoy without his goons in attendance.

But, at that, we've still seen Neville throw a punch at that lot more than once. (A punch, mind you. Not a hex.)

On the flip side of the whole "boldness" issue; Neville didn't hesitate to stand up to the trio in their first year, and by their fourth year not only was he the first of Harry's dorm mates (that we heard of) to actually screw up his courage and ask a girl to the Yule Ball, he also had the very good sense to ask someone he considers a friend, rather than getting distracted by the (frankly barbaric) Weasley equation of trying to calculate who might be the best looking girl who might actually accept him,

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and to parade her about as a trophy.

What is more, when the girl he asked turned him down he demonstrated the social adeptness to immediately fall back on the fine old traditional, well-bred-young-gentleman-at-dancing-school manner and transferred his invitation to the female friend that his first choice happened to be standing with. We may not have known a great deal about the Longbottoms' socioeconomic background, but Neville's Gran clearly values traditional standards of behavior. And Neville shows no sign of finding those standards a burden. (Can you even imagine the decibel level of the Weasley whinge should anyone demand that Ron or the twins conform to that level of formal etiquette? Or for that matter, Ginny?)

On the good breeding and social maturity scale Neville scored discernibly higher than any of the rest of the 4th year Gryffindor boys, and by Book 5 it didn't look as if the rest had caught up to him yet. (Even if his new pet plant did seem determined to embarrass him in public.)

It was beginning to look to me as if it may actually be Neville's gran who is the flip side to the Malfoy's "prominent pureblood" coin, rather than Arthur Weasley and his family. Certainly in the "two Houses alike in dignity" sweeps. It is obvious that Neville clearly wants to be a "good" wizard, but up to the middle of Goblet, I was vanishingly less and less convinced that he possessed any intention of ever becoming a good "wizard".



I still really do suspect that Neville spent his first few years at Hogwarts barely pretending to go through all the motions of

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“trying” to perform acceptably. With what appeared to be quite unaccountably miserable results. But; whenever he opened his mouth, he was endlessly reminding people of what a bundle of incompetence he was as a wizard. He might as well have come right out and said; “Look at what a duffer I am. Can I please go home now?”

It might even be significant that the only class he had ever consistently relaxed and done his best in, without continually sabotaging his own efforts was Herbology, which probably requires the least active use of magical skills this side of Astronomy and History of Magic. There’s not that much absentmindedness on display in the greenhouses, either, I suspect!

I do suspect that he probably wasn’t *intentionally*, repeatedly, shooting himself in the foot. But he pretty clearly had convinced himself that he *couldn’t*, so he *didn’t*, and was hoping that Hogwarts and his teachers would finally get fed up and let him off the hook altogether.

I had begun to wonder if, after trying for most of four years straight to get himself sent home for reasons that he “couldn’t help,” he was going to finally have his own little epiphany and face the fact that he *IS* a wizard, that his magic was *not* going to go away, that he *can’t* siphon it off it the way he did as a toddler. And that if he and the people he cares about are going to survive, he had damned well better get control of it. I was looking forward to watching it, too.

Unfortunately, Rowling didn’t chose to show it to us. Although it clearly seems to have happened.



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So far as I can figure out, it seems to have been that up front and personal demonstration of the curse that destroyed his parents which served as the turning point, and set off the beginnings of just such a process as I had been waiting for. Either that, or something to the purpose was said in that private chat he had with “Mad-Eye Moody” directly afterward. A possibility which, all things considered, raises more questions than it answers.

I am only disappointed that we never got a chance to fully witness Neville’s epiphany. It would have made such a very nice dramatic scene for him somewhere in the fifth or sixth book. Unfortunately, although it certainly does seem to have taken place, thanks to the Harry filter, Rowling did not give us the chance to watch it happen onstage.

We were given a hint that it began during the course of Book 4, however. There was a night, after Harry’s first trip into a Pensieve, when *he* finally knew about what happened to Neville’s parents, that he was lying awake in the night thinking of all the damage that had been done to people by Lord Voldemort.

In one of only about three or four incidents in the series to that point, the narrator stepped back briefly from the Harry filter and pointed out to the reader that Harry hadn’t realized that Neville was also lying awake that night. Harry hadn’t noticed that Neville wasn’t snoring.

And, in the meantime, we should hardly be surprised that Snape, who sees just about all the of same evidence that the reader does, and, being Snape, ascribes the worst possible motives to it, should have been driven batty by Neville’s whole “duffer act” since Year 1, and to be determined to take it out of the boy’s hide.



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And it is uncertain that Snape's attitude toward Neville Longbottom ever changed, even though Neville's attitude toward Magic seems to have.

I wonder what Snape thought of Neville as a DADA student?



Unfortunately for Neville, Horace Slughorn was recalled from retirement too late to make a difference for him in Potions class. Which there is every chance he might have. Even leaving aside the Slug Club, which Neville didn't rate, Neville would *never* have been afraid of Slughorn.

Many fans were disappointed by Neville's apparent dismissal to the background in HBP after we finally got to see him come forward a bit in OotP. And I do not blame them. We had higher hopes for Neville than that. But the story is clearly focused upon Harry, and to draw too much attention to Neville apparently would have been in excess of the requirements.

We were delighted to learn of his activities in DHs. As one fan put it; "Neville fell out of the awesome tree and hit every branch on the way down." He certainly seems to have matured into a far more effective leader than Harry ever did.

And at that; Neville seemingly was allowed *one* scrap of unsung glory in HBP.

To all appearances, it was Neville who took out Fenrir Greyback.

It takes some careful reading, but Neville was the only one of the defenders who was in a position to have Petrified Greyback. Everyone else was fully engaged in active combat when it happened.

Harry reached the corridor where the battle was in progress;

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Bill Weasley and Gibbon, the DE who caught an AK meant for someone else, were down, Greyback broke away from a fight and had a go at Harry, someone hit Greyback with a Petrificus. Harry scrambled out from under his body to see Ginny, Minerva, Lupin, Ron and Tonks all engaged in one-on-one battles and Neville down, but conscious, holding his stomach. We later learned that Neville had been injured earlier on, and thrown across the hall by whatever was blocking the staircase.

So unless someone who was *not* one of the defenders petrified Greyback, who else was there to do it but Neville?

Go Neville!



Btw, I was handed a lovely theory on Neville taking Bellatrix out in the final adventure by another fan at the Harry Potter Symposium, Lumos. It follows the classic Invasion of Hogwarts script, and I can't say that I thought it was particularly likely, but we certainly had no reason to consider it impossible, even if Rowling didn't go there. And it's great fun.

It proposed that in the course of the second invasion of Hogwarts, Neville and Bella (and possibly other DEs) end up dodging each other through the greenhouses. Neville, ducking under the table, gets to the earmuffs and starts uprooting mandrakes.

Which all just seems a singularly *appropriate* end for a witch who is notoriously entertained by screams.

In DHs Neville and Sprout *were* lobbing mandrakes at the DEs, but the incident was not really utilized in the narrative.

And of course Rowling opted for a fake, tacky "Battle of

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Hogwarts” scene instead.

A great many people are annoyed that it wasn’t Neville who got to take out Bellatrix. But I am not one of them. I suppose there wasn’t any plausible way that Rowling could let him do for both Bellatrix *and* Nagini. And of the two, it really is better that he should have had the chance to settle Nagini.

And to defy Voldemort to his face into the bargain.



Speaking of theories; I could never buy into the widespread fan conviction that Neville was suffering from a botched memory charm. Never. That never served any real purpose toward advancing the plot. What we needed was a reason to explain why Neville was *significant*, since we could all somehow see that he was. But carrying around suppressed memories of where VaporMort might have been in 1981 just wasn’t likely to be the reason. That’s not required. That’s a false lead.

Oh, Neville was absent-minded, certainly. We’ve ample canon support of that. But none of the incidents of Neville’s absent-mindedness are of a suspicious nature. And indeed, the worst trouble he ever got into over his absent-mindedness was from *knowing* he was absent-minded, writing important information down and leaving it on his own bedside table *inside* the dormitory, where it presumably was *safe*.

He could hardly have been expected to anticipate that Crookshanks would steal it and give it to Sirius Black. I mean, really, who *would*?

But the track record we actually got in the series appeared to be one of people *not asking* Neville the *right questions*.



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He knew the properties of gillyweed. He would have told Harry about gillyweed in a minute. Did Harry *ask* Neville whether he had any suggestions about staying underwater for an hour? No. He didn’t.

Neville doesn’t volunteer much information about himself. In fact, he volunteered less and less information as the series progressed. But the boy *is* wizarding-raised, with a large family from older, and possibly more well-informed generations than Ron Weasley’s parents’, and he has a grandmother who rants at the drop of a hat. He probably knew one hell of a lot, and could fill in quite a few blanks if anyone would bother to *ask* him.

If the pattern we had already been given was holding, he probably doesn’t even realize the significance of what he knows. But he does know it. And he *knows* that he knows it and breaking memory charms isn’t required to get him to tell you about it. All that’s needed is to ask the *right question*.

And maybe someone ought to ask his Gran a few questions as well.



Regarding Potterverse People



Colophon

The layout and formatting of this document was done in Adobe InDesign, utilizing commercial clip art from Getty Images/Dynamic Graphics, and the incomprable Marwan Aridi, modified in Adobe Photoshop. Cover was created in Adobe Photoshop,

Fonts used in this publication: for body text, the MT Cantoria family, by Monotype, modified in Fontographer. Page Numbers, Titles and Drop Caps are set in ITC's Motter Corpus 300. Dresser Rules by Fontcraft is also used for spacers.

Special mention should also be extended to Jack Davis and Linea Dayton for their efforts in producing The Photoshop 7 One-Click WOW Book. More than a decade later, their layer styles still constitute one of my first go-tos.

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