

17 MIRTUL, YEAR OF THE WORM, 1376 DR

THIS BEING A SCRIBED ACCOUNTING OF THE QUESTIONING OF ONE JONATHAN VAZ OF AMN, HUMAN, ADOPTED CHILD OF VARKELL AND BEDATHA VAZ, ELVEN, REGISTERED MERCHANTS, OWNERS AND OPERATORS OF THE BARE NECESSITIES, A SUPPLIER OF GENERAL GOODS WITH SOME REPUTATION AS A CARRIER OF BOOKS AND PARCHMENTS, LOCATED IN THE SOUTHWESTERN CORNER OF WAUKEEN'S PROMENADE IN ATHKATLA, OUR FAIR CAPITAL, RULED WISELY BY THE COUNCIL OF SIX AND PROTECTED BY THE COWLED MAGES, RECORDS THE QUESTIONS PUT TO AND ANSWERS RECEIVED FROM THE SUBJECT AFTER ACCUSATIONS OF UNAUTHORIZED USE OF ARCANES MAGIC; THESE ACCUSATIONS ARE ENUMERATED IN APPENDICES III, IV, VI AND IX TO THIS DOCUMENT AND ARE BEST SUMMARIZED AS BEING ALLEGATIONS OF JINXES AND HEXES EMPLOYED BY THE SUBJECT.

Questioner: Do you know why you're here?

Jonathan Vaz: (long pause) I didn't do it, whatever it was.

Qr: That does not answer the question. If necessary I am authorized to have a Zone of Truth cast around you by a priest of Waukeen.

JV: No, I don't know why I'm here. I haven't nicked anything or been in a fight in a long time. I'm a proper student now.

Qr: Matilda Strings, a young woman whose mother owns a dress shop near your parents' store, has reported that you jinxed her.

JV: Then she's lying.

Qr: So you deny these charges?

JV: Yes.

Qr: Mr. Vaz, do you know the penalty for unregistered and particularly for hostile use of arcane magic in Athkatla?

JV: They toss you into Spellhold, but I'm telling you, I didn't jinx anyone.

Qr: Yes, one is, as you say, "tossed" into Spellhold. It is a very... unpleasant place.

JV: Listen, that Matilda Strings is just jealous, she's lying. I'm no wizard. I wouldn't know magic if it bit me.

Qr: Mr. Vaz, we have reviewed the records and are aware that your adopted parents are registered, lawful magi. I find it difficult to believe you wouldn't know magic if you saw it performed.

JV: ...Well, OK, fair enough. Mom and dad are elves, though, it comes natural to them. They just... know stuff. They've never taught it to me. That would be illegal and they know that and they've...

Qr: Yes?

JV: Well, OK, I won't claim I never asked them to teach me just a little, you know, something simple to pick up my room for me or the like but they've always refused. They say if I want to learn that I've got to go learn it proper from elves but they don't think...

Qr: ...

JV: Well, they say they don't think elves would take me, being... human. Elven magic is something that's in their blood.

Qr: Yet there are many human magi. Our city has suffered at their hands.

JV: Listen, I'm sixteen, I'm not Jon bleeding Irenicus, I'm Jon Vaz.

Qr: What is your original nationality, Mr. Vaz? Where were you born?

JV: ...I don't remember.

Qr: How old were you when your mother and father adopted you?

JV: ...I was an infant.

Qr: You must surely realize we know that to be a lie. You were enrolled at Marjel's-on-Green merely three years ago, at age thirteen, a full year older than other beginning students, and you reportedly spoke Chondathan with a thick and distinct accent.

JV: Why are you asking me questions when you already know the answer, eh?

Qr: Please tell us your nation of origin.

JV: Thay.

Qr: And under what circumstances were you removed from Thay and brought here?

JV: (quite animated) You can't send me back there! You can't! My parents adopted me legal and everything, they paid the fees, they have the papers for me, I'm an Amnian citizen now, I have my rights, you can't send me back there!

Qr: Mr. Vaz, I did not challenge the legality of your adoption and I have no intention of sending you back to a land of wizards who we apparently quite agree do not run a fair or just society. Even were there some question as to your legality, we do not recognize any treaties or have any diplomatic relationship with Thay and do not return their agents to their nation when discovered; we remove them to the Spellhold as rogue magi. I asked under what circumstances were you removed from Thay?

JV: What would Thavian wizards want to spy on Amn for?

Qr: We are a wealthy city on a major trade route and we refuse wizards opportunity to exert undue influence. They have enemies in every land, Mr. Vaz. Thay ferrets out opportunities for sabotage and intrigue wherever they can for sheer love of... trouble. Still, this does not answer my question.

JV: My sister and I helped someone from Athkatla. He got us out in return. I don't want to talk about it. I don't want to talk about Thay.

Qr: Was this benefactor your brother, Leeritan Vaz, of the Meilikkian order known as the Shadoweirs?

JV: Maybe.

Qr: What was your station in Thay?

JV: I don't see how Thay's got to do with Matilda Strings being jealous of me, I can't help it if I'm better in gymnastics lessons. She beats me right out at maths, she's the one who's going to be able to run a store of her own one day.

Qr: What was your station in Thay? I remind you again that I can have a priest of your and your parents' faith force you to speak the truth with none of these conjectures.

JV: We were urchins. We were orphans with no money and no home and barely a stitch to wear. Are you happy? Does it satisfy you to hear me say it? We were the lowest of the low. We were homeless children in a country where homeless children are just slaves waiting to happen. If we were there now my sister would be a whore and I would be her pimp and that's if things turned out good for us. That's Thay for you, Mister... ?

Qr: ...

JV: Right, should have known, you ask the questions and I answer them. Well alright then, that's Thay for you. My brother and his friends were the first people to take pity on us. Ever. He asked us if we wanted to leave, to go somewhere nicer and have parents and a home and food and clothes and learning and we said yes. We'd have said yes for a half a piece of bread and a warm pile of hay, buddy. He gave us a life we couldn't find anywhere for five hundred miles.

Qr: You seem quite sensitive on this topic, Mr. Vaz.

JV: Try letting me ask a few questions about your parentage and we'll see how you like it.

Qr: Your tone does not suggest a helpful, cooperative personality.

JV: Maybe not, but I didn't jinx Matilda Strings. Can't you have a Council wizard, I dunno, check her for magic? Wouldn't someone else have seen it happen? We're on Waukeen's Promenade, it's not exactly a back street. Not a lot of shadows what with the gleam from all that gold around.

Qr: I confess, Mr. Vaz, that we do not find it likely that magic would go unnoticed in that district of the city. It's where our fair people tend to be most watchful given our history.

JV: There you go, then, you don't believe it yourself. Shall I be going, then?

Qr: Not quite. You see, there are permanent enchantments in the area of Waukeen's Promenade which detect the use of magic. On the evening of 9 Mirtul they registered something which the city's registered arcane investigators reported, and I quote, "Is like magic, but isn't."

JV: What's that mean, then?

Qr: We were hoping you could tell us.

JV: I don't have the slightest idea.

Qr: You're quite sure of that?

JV: Quite. And anyway, they said themselves it wasn't a spell.

Qr: They said it was *like* a spell.

JV: So what's the difference, then?

Qr: It's quite technical, I'm told. I've read the report and don't fully understand the distinction myself. If you, as you say, wouldn't know magic if it bit you then I imagine the report will mean even less to you for surely you'd have even worse odds of knowing magic if it merely sniffed around nearby, to extend your metaphor?

JV: ...Fair enough.

Qr: Tell me, Mr. Vaz, what do you know of your parentage, your actual parentage?

JV: (long silence) Nothing. I never knew my human parents. More whores and pimps I'd reckon.

Qr: You've never had any idea? Not even an inkling?

JV: No.

Qr: What of your sister, Maryanna? She's a bit older than you, she might remember them.

JV: She was two when I was born and I don't guess they were around after that. I doubt she remembers anything more than I.

Qr: You never discussed it? Never asked her about it?

JV: We never found the time what with trying to eke out something like survival.

Qr: A pity.

JV: I doubt it and anyway we were short on pity in Thay what with no one having any to spare us.

Qr: Yes, you've been quite clear on that point. And you never had, oh, let's say a brooch or an ornament of some sort, something given to you by your mother or father - your birth parents - that might indicate your heritage? For all its evils Thay is a place where the government does keep excellent records of births and deaths if the subjects are at all worthy of notice.

JV: We weren't.

Qr: I see.

JV: So what happened to Matilda, anyway? Haven't seen her in school for a few days.

Qr: She states that she had teased you about your performance in an examination and that you murmured under your breath and the next thing she knew she'd slipped and broken both legs. She is in recovery in a Waukeenian temple. Her mother is not wealthy enough to afford magical healing and so she is recovering naturally.

JV: She's a klutz, I've already told you I'm better than her in gymnastics. Lucky she didn't break them sooner. As for

that murmuring, unless the law's changed I didn't know it was a crime to call someone a jealous old cow.

Qr: I see.

JV: Am I free to go, then? You say there was no spell cast and I'm no wizard anyway and she's going to be up and about and she's had her fun by getting me hauled in here.

Qr: I believe this concludes our examination, yes.

THIS BEING THE FULL TEXT OF THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE ARCANISTS' GUILD EXAMINER REGARDING THE INFORMATION GATHERED AT THE SCENE OF THE ALLEGED HEX IN QUESTION:

No doubt there was an arcane effect present; it is a hex or other curse which is like magic, but isn't. This kind of arcane disturbance is often only half-intentioned. It suggests the presence of a person or persons of unformed, raw potential. This sort of pseudo-magic can be harmless but isn't necessarily so by nature. Due to its unrehearsed and ill- or unwittingly-applied nature it is of course highly dangerous. Anyone exhibiting such potential for misdirected or poorly controlled magic should be closely watched while within the confines of Athkatla. In other cultures this type of ability is often the source of base rumor and superstition but otherwise left to develop unimpeded; fortunately, the wise leadership of the Council of Six lends Athkatla greater awareness and protection from such powers. The source of such abilities is often hereditary; if borne from a familial talent with magic it is sometimes the marker of the debased and muddled blood of older, more powerful bloodlines. Primary sources of such abilities are Thay, Mulhorand, Unther, Halrua (though that nation almost always recognizes and trains or otherwise corrects the situation), Calimshan, Waterdeep and the convulsive and magically contaminated city-states of the Moonsea.

21 Kithorn, Year of the Worm, 1376 DR

Dear Lee,

Stupid Matilda Strings got out of the temple infirmary this week and is hobbling around on some old wooden crutches. Her mother could buy her new ones, nice ones even, but I think Matilda wants to rub it in that they couldn't afford magic to get her legs mended so she's hamming it up around our block and at school. The arcanists apparently OK'ed that I didn't have a hand in making her land on her smarmy arse so I'm off the hook for that one but they're keeping an eye on me. No trips to the Pockets Club for me though Big Jim sent word by one of the fresh kids to tell you hello if we wrote. Says he misses the days you two were kids and would cut every belt-string that went by of an afternoon just to pass the time. He's long since out of the trade, of course, his wife died this winter and so he's moved in with his grandson. He doesn't get around too fast but he's got a spry look in his eye. I wouldn't reckon to beat him at checkers anytime soon as his mind's as sharp as ever.

Examinations are coming up and I reckon I'll get through alright. Maths are still a problem except for odds; I might make a gambler but I doubt I'll ever keep the books for mom and dad. I've got an ace up my sleeve by way of gymnastics, though, and I'm doing alright enough in history. I can't be much fussed about the political stuff but I'm good at remembering the disasters.

I don't know what made you ask about Matilda - have you been scrying on us again? I get that you worry but mom and dad keep us on a pretty short leash and I don't want to think you've got an eye on us all the time.

Truth told, Lee, I don't think I hexed that hag but I did wish awful hard that something would happen to shut her up about that alchemy examination. I've never been able to get it right, it always blows up halfway through my laboratory session, I can't help it. Don't tell Maryanna I told you this, do you promise? I'm just going to trust that you said yes to that and tell you: when Matilda Strings fell on her square ass and broke both her legs I was so surprised to get what I wanted that I looked around to see who'd seen us standing there for fear I'd take the blame and Maryanna was standing about halfway back towards the shop, watching us, her eyes practically shut so that I could just make out a bit of the gleam of her pupils. She was squinting like she'd had to think real hard of something

and when she saw me and knew I'd seen her in turn she yanked open the door of the shop and ran inside.

I don't know what I'm saying, Lee, but it's like she did hex Matilda Strings. I swear I didn't do it but these Arcanist types are so keen to ask about our families back in Thay that I reckon they suspect we inherited something from old Lavinia Ward. I made out that we don't know a thing about that because there's no way they can check but seeing that made me wonder. Maryanna's always said that we were descended from greatness but a terrible greatness at that, and that we should be glad if we never suffer for the sins of our ancestors. When she was off for two weeks on that trip to Calimshan with dad then I snuck into her room to go over the books she'd got from the library at school, all the genealogy stuff, and history of magic and whatnot, and she's been writing down what she can remember our blood mother telling her when she was little. Lavinia Ward wasn't just one of the last Thavians to give in to Kossuth and the current crew; if that history of magic is to be believed - and that's doubtful given where we are - then our great-grandmother summoned up a bunch of demons and made them her slaves for a while. I reckon I can't imagine what would make a body so desperate but surely watching your whole country go mad for Kossuth would do it for you. I still don't get why she'd think they were reliable. You'll note I don't make the "fight fire with fire" joke here, right? At any rate, I don't see how she thought it was justified but then, if that book right, she didn't much care for justice or right. It makes me shudder to think of a house full of those things, doing my great-gran's every command. What really worries me, though, is the fact of these things they say in this book on magic about people who can do what I know I've caught Maryanna doing. If she's a warlock, real and true, she'll have to get out of this country and fast.

Lucky for us, mom and dad are still big on education. They say we didn't get years we should've in Thay, of course, and that these human schools don't teach enough or give enough time for "genuine mastery" and all. They want to send Maryanna to university in Waterdeep and to be honest I think they're hoping she'll go and be a full wizard. She certainly loves the stuff enough, she got extra homework right when we should be studying for exams because she went and told her teacher that she thought natural spellcasters shouldn't have to register like the wizards do. Set them on a right tear, but I think she's right. Mom and dad told her they were proud of her open mind, though, and if you ask me they've got a clue or two that Maryanna's got some skills already and that's why they're so

keen to help her get out of here.

I still can't decide what I want to do when I finish my O levels but I'll need to decide soon enough. I'm probably going to stick around here to do A levels at Marjer's but mom and dad are pretty clear that if I want to study somewhere else I'm welcome to do so.

I can't tell you enough, Lee, I know you get tired of hearing it, but thank you.

Anyway, what I really want is to come up there with you and help the Shadoweirs. Whatever you're doing's got to be more interesting than an A-level class on the history of magic in a town where everybody jumps three feet if you say "hocus pocus" and wiggle your nose a funny way.

Say hello to Dyson and Pele and El and Venture and Trover and all the rest if you speak. I'd give every one of them a hug if they were here.

Your Brother,
Jon