

## Harry Potter 601

### Chapter 601: A Bit of Practice

The final result disappointed her as expected. Dobby was just a special case and did not represent the vast majority of house-elves.

As Hagrid said, there were one or two freaks in every species.

To other house-elves, it was a disgrace to like freedom and accept wages as Dobby did.

“Thank you, Miss, Master Evan!” said Dobby, grinning toothily at them. “After Winky has been freed, Dobby led her to find a lot of wizard families, hoping they could take Winky in. But most wizards doesn’t want a house-elf who wants paying. ‘That’s not the point of a house-elf,’ they says, and they slammed the door in Dobby’s face! Some wizards are willing to let Winky work for them for free, but Dobby can’t give Winky to them. She needs to work, but she needs to wear clothes and she wants to be paid like Dobby...”

The Hogwarts house-elves had now started edging away from Dobby, as though he were carrying something contagious. Winky, however, remained where she was, though there was a definite increase in the volume of her crying

She was crying so sad that she flung herself forward off her stool and lay face down on the flagged stone floor, beating her tiny fists upon it and positively screaming with misery.

Hermione hastily dropped down to her knees beside her and tried to comfort her, but nothing she said made the slightest difference.

Dobby continued with his story, shouting shrilly over Winky’s screeches.

“And then Dobby had an idea, Evan, sir! Fooby thought of Hogwarts. There is enough work here to make it easy for Dobby to take care of Winky, and Professor Dumbledore took her in. He was willing to pay her,” said Dobby. “He’s the greatest wizard besides Harry Potter and Master Evan. Dobby has heard a lot about him.”

Dobby beamed very brightly, and happy tears welled in his eyes again.

“How much did Professor Dumbledore pay you?”

“He offered Dobby ten galleons a week, but Dobby didn’t want it. Master Evan has already paid Dobby for his work. Dobby is only here to help,” said Dobby. “When the holidays come, Dobby will return to Master Evan’s house.”

“Hum!” Hermione didn’t speak, and she glared at Evan.

She knew that Evan only paid Dobby a Galleon a week. She thought that was not very much.

She had also persuaded Evan to give more money to Dobby more than once, but it was useless.

Every time he mentioned it, Dobby seemed very frightened.

He would hug Evan and wail bitterly, repeatedly asking him if he did not want him anymore!

Dobby thought that too much wealth and leisure time was frightening. In his words, he “likes freedom, but he isn’t wanting too much.”

He preferred work over leisure and riches.

“What about you, Winky? How much money is Professor Dumbledore paying you?” Hermione continued.

If she had thought this would cheer up Winky, she was wildly mistaken.

Winky did stop crying, but when she sat up she was glaring at Hermione through her massive brown eyes, her whole face sopping wet and suddenly furious.

“Winky is a house-elf who has been swept out of the house, but Winky is not yet getting paid!” she squeaked, “Winky is not sunk so low as that! Winky is properly ashamed of being freed!”

“Ashamed?!” said Hermione blankly. “Winky, come on! It’s Mr. Crouch who should be ashamed, not you! You didn’t do anything wrong, he was really horrible to you... ”

But at these words, Winky clapped her hands over the holes in her hat, flattening her ears so that she couldn’t hear a word, and screeched, “You is not insulting my master, Miss! You is not insulting Mr. Crouch! Mr. Crouch is a good wizard, Miss! Mr. Crouch is right to sack bad Winky!”

“Dobby has Winky’s salary. She refused to take it. Dobby saved it to her, and gives it to her when Winky needs it! “Dobby whispered to them in a shrill voice, “Dobby helped Winky decide and asked Dumbledore for the same wage, a Galleon a week. But Winky has no holiday. Dobby couldn’t convince her...”

“You did a good job, Dobby!” said Hermione, looking anxiously at Winky wailing and crying.

When he heard her praise, Dobby smiled shyly again.

“I can’t believe she still thinks Mr. Crouch is right.”

“Winky needs time to adjust, Miss, she is having trouble adjusting!” Dobby continued. “Winky forgets she is not bound to Mr. Crouch anymore; she is allowed to speak her mind now, but she won’t do it.”

“Why? Can’t house-elves speak their minds about their masters?” Hermione asked, frowning.

“Oh no, absolutely not,” said Dobby, looking suddenly serious. “This is part of the house-elf’s enslavement. We keeps their secrets and our silence. We upholds the family’s honor, and we never speaks ill of them... though Professor

Dumbledore told Dobby he does not insist upon this. He said we is free to... to..."

Dobby looked suddenly nervous, and came up to Evan and Hermione. He lowered his voice a little to ensure that no one else could hear him.

"He said we is free to call him a ... a barmy old codger if we likes!"

Then, Dobby raised his body and gave a frightened sort of giggle.

"You can say that to me if you like. It's your freedom, Dobby!" said Evan.

"Me too!" Hermione added.

"No, no, Miss, Master Evan!" Dobby hurriedly shook his head, with a look of fear on his face. He shook his head and clapped his ears. "Dobby doesn't want to do this, Dobby will never do this. Dobby likes Master Evan and his friends very much. Dobby is more willing to keep secrets for you and keep silent for you. And he is proud of it."

"Thank you!" said Evan happily.

Dobby's eyes were full of tears again and he looked at Evan gratefully.

"Oh, then the Malfoys, you can say what you like about them now??" Evan hurriedly asked.

He knew that if he didn't find something to talk about, Dobby was going to cry again with his thighs in his arms.

Hearing Evan's words, a slightly fearful look came into Dobby's immense eyes.

"Dobby ... Dobby could," he said doubtfully. He squared his small shoulders. "Dobby could tell Master Evan that his old masters were ... were ... bad Dark wizards!"

Dobby stood for a moment, quivering all over, horror-struck by his own daring. Then, he rushed over to the nearest table and began banging his head on it very hard, squealing, "Bad Dobby! Bad Dobby!"

Evan hurriedly seized Dobby by the back of his tie and pulled him away from the table.

"Thank you, Master Evan, thank you," said Dobby breathlessly, rubbing his head.

"Well, you just need a bit of practice," said Evan.

Chapter 602: Secrets in Hogwarts Kitchens

"Practice?!" squealed Winky furiously. "You is ought to be ashamed of yourself, Dobby, talking that way about your masters!"

“They isn’t my masters anymore, Winky!” said Dobby defiantly. “Dobby doesn’t care what they think anymore!”

“Oh you is a bad elf, Dobby!” moaned Winky, tears leaking down her face once more. “My poor Mr. Crouch, what is he doing without Winky? He is needing me, he is needing my help! I is looking after the Crouches all my life, and my mother is doing it before me, and my grandmother is doing it before her... Oh what is they saying if they knew Winky was freed? Oh the shame, the shame!” She buried her face in her skirt again and bawled.

“Winky!” Hermione looked at her crying, and said firmly, “I’m quite sure Mr. Crouch is getting along perfectly well without you. We’ve seen him, you know...”

“You is seeing my master?” asked Winky breathlessly, raising her tearstained face out of her skirt once more and goggling at Hermione. “You is seeing him here at Hogwarts?”

“Yes!” said Hermione. “He and Mr. Bagman are judges in the Triwizard Tournament.”

“Mr. Bagman comes too?” squeaked Winky, suddenly becoming angry again. “Mr. Bagman is a bad wizard! A very bad wizard! My master isn’t liking him, oh no, not at all!”

“Bagman ... bad wizard?” Hermione asked, squinting. This was really an interesting piece of information.

In fact, with Crouch’s character, it was difficult for someone to get a high rating from him.

In his eyes, anyone who was not rigorous against dark magic or Dark wizards was not a good person.

“Oh yes,” Winky said, nodding her head furiously. “My master is telling Winky some things! But Winky is not saying ... Winky keeps her master’s secrets...”

She dissolved yet again in tears; they could hear her sobbing into her skirt, “Poor master, poor master, no Winky to help him no more!”

Although it had no effect, Hermione still tried to persuade her not to be so sad and not to worry about Mr. Crouch.

Evan knew, however, that Winky’s worries were actually justified, and that what she was worried about had really happened.

With the help of Voldemort and the vampires, Barty Crouch Jr. had broken free, possibly disguising as his own father and mingling into Hogwarts. They were planning a terrible conspiracy, while Barty Crouch himself was facing an uncertain fate.

Evan thought he might not have died yet. Considering Crouch's status and him knowing many secrets about the Ministry of Magic, Voldemort should not kill him casually, and Barty Crouch Jr. needed to use his body to make the Polyjuice Potion.

Crouch should now be locked up somewhere like Moody, staying there weak and helpless.

For Crouch, who attached great importance to reputation and power, when the truth would be made public, what would happen might be worse than killing him directly.

Evan did not continue to listen to Hermione's persuasion. He asked Dobby to take him around the kitchen.

Dobby was very excited, and as he led Evan, he kept chatting happily about his life as a free elf and his plans for his wages.

"Dobby is going to buy a sweater next, Master Evan!" He said happily pointing to his bare chest, "Dobby wants to buy too many clothes; he has to plan well..."

"I have a lot of small clothes that I can't wear anymore. I can give them to you!" Evan said absently. "You don't mind, do you? I think we might have to shrink them a bit to fit you."

"Oh, Master Evan, you are really..." Dobby was moved and looked at Evan in delight with teary eyes.

"All right, you know where those clothes are, you can take them yourself!" Evan said quickly.

His eyes fell on Dobby, and then he turned to the locked heavy blue-black iron door behind him.

This was the edge of the kitchen. According to the old drawings that Evan found, this was not the end.

He couldn't be sure. After all, the whole pattern had changed too much.

But since there was a door, then the secret or any clues might be behind this iron gate. He had to go in and have a look.

"Dobby, what's behind that door?" Evan asked. "Can we go in?!"

"There is a cold storage room, Master Evan!" Dobby said, "Of course you can go in, but it is a bit cold inside..."

He ran over and opened the iron door, and the cold air hit Evan head on. He couldn't help shivering.

The temperature inside the cold storage room was very low, and there was no light in the darkness. It was like a giant beast opening its mouth to eat.

"There's a lot of space in there, Master Evan!" Dobby said with a shiver, staring in fear. "Dobby has heard other elves say that this freezer is hundreds of years old, older than anything else. We are now using only a small part of the outside, and the elves are too afraid to go deep into it."

Evan nodded. A place that no one had been in for hundreds of years; it was really necessary to go in and check it out.

He took the Marauder's Map out of his sleeve, on which this was already the edge of the kitchen.

It seemed that Harry's father and Sirius did not enter here at the time and did not draw this part on the map.

Thinking about the drawings he had found, there should be a lot of space behind this. What secrets were hidden inside?!

The refrigeration principle of this cold storage was also suspicious. Since it had been used for hundreds of years, there might be a powerful magic at work.

Evan could feel the faint magic in the air, but not magic he was familiar with.

"Lumos Maxima!" he whispered, putting away the map.

Evan led Dobby, who kept shivering, into the dark cold storage. The light of the wand dispelled the darkness around him.

In front of them was a small room that could be seen to the end at a glance, filled with rows of iron shelves.

All kinds of food were piled up on the shelves, which were often used by house elves.

"Master Evan, there is a door behind these shelves that leads to the inside!" Dobby said.

He pointed to shelves full of potatoes and it seemed that he had figured out what Evan was going to do.

Evan nodded and gently raised his wand. All the potatoes and heavy shelves flew into the air and landed somewhere else.

Behind, there was a loose blue brick wall.

The house-elves might have built it themselves; the workmanship was too rough.

Chapter 603: Heads of House-Elves

Behind the brick wall was a wide space. As soon as Evan entered, he was shocked. He was facing a huge wall dotted with so many strange things.

A closer look revealed that they were all wrinkled heads of house-elves. They piled up densely with the same ugly noses.

These were much more vivid than the row of heads of the house-elves Evan had seen before in the Blacks' old house. Under the low temperature preservation, they looked so lifelike, looking at him with their bulging eyes, as though still alive. Many of them had humble faces, with an exaggerated smile that forced the corners of their mouths upward.

In this case, these smiles went beyond sinister, and no trace of kindness could be sensed through them.

Imagine the sensory stimulation, shock and pressure that thousands of ugly heads piled together could bring.

If he didn't already know that the house-elves had the habit of cutting off their heads and hanging them on walls after death, Evan would have thought that this was the base of some of the most evil Dark wizards, for only those psychopaths would hang such things on the wall.

Only separated by a wall, on one side was the cold storage for food to Hogwarts, and on the other side was a really hellish showroom of severed heads.

If the students saw this scene, he didn't know if they could still eat the food made by the house-elves.

When Dobby came in behind Evan, he let out a sudden scream and covered his eyes with his right arm.

Dobby clenched Evan's robes with the other hand, following him forward trembling, greatly frightened.

"Master Evan, let's go back," said Dobby, "Dobby feels uncomfortable here."

"Uncomfortable?!" asked Evan. "Isn't it your tradition to cut off your heads and hang them on the wall?"

As far as he knew, most of the house-elves had that terrible belief, such as Kreacher.

His biggest dream was to have his head cut off and hung with his ancestors' in the old house of the Blacks.

"Dobby doesn't like this tradition. Dobby doesn't hang his head here!" Dobby squealed. "Dobby is a free elf. Dobby will be buried like a wizard after he dies... let's go back, Master Evan!"

"Wait, let's have a look!" said Evan, looking amusedly at the house-elf shivering at his feet.

He led Dobby through the rows of heads, holding up his wand and carefully looking around.

The spacious room was cold and quiet. Perhaps because someone cleaned it regularly, there was not a speck of dust on the floor.

Only those heads on the walls hang quietly there, with strange expressions on their faces.

Some of the house-elves were solemn, some had a smile, others were angry, and others were very humble...

In a sense, this was the Holy Land of Hogwarts House-Elves.

These heads on the wall revealed the changes in history and in the status of the house-elves.

The house-elves in different times dressed differently and had different facial expressions.

The elves' heads Evan had seen at the beginning were mostly full of expressions of confidence and had many exaggerated ornaments. Many ornaments had high value, and Evan could even feel the magic from them.

It was conceivable that the house-elves of that era were relatively rich and possessed considerable personal property.

This was in the early days of Hogwarts, and before they became slaves of wizards, they were a free and independent species.

Their status was near that of wizards, because they were gentle, peace-loving and possessed relatively strong magic power. The house-elves in that era were the most closely related non-human intelligent creatures to wizards. They accepted the employment of human wizards and acted as assistants to wizards in various fields of magic.

Evan continued to move forward, recalling the history of the house-elf races she had seen in a book.

The closer he got to modern times, the humbler the faces of the elves on the wall were, and there were no more ornaments.

At that time, they were no longer free species, but slaves to wizards.

There were heads hanging on the wall, on which the faces of the house-elves were missing a part or more.

Each face looked extraordinarily shocking.

They seemed to have suffered some kind of cruel abuse and permanent damage caused by irreversible magic.

This was the period when pure blood theory and Dark magic were most prevalent, and house-elves suffered the most from wizards' persecution.

Even the house-elves in the schools couldn't avoid being attacked and abused by students as a means of entertainment.

It was conceivable how miserable the elves that lived in the pure blood wizard families would be.

In fact, in those Dark Ages, the same thing happened to other creatures.

Under such circumstances, many non-human intelligent creatures began to rebel against the brutal rule of human wizards.

The most famous were the goblin rebellions. They had rebelled many times.

The largest and most successful one occurred in 1612, when the goblins used the Three Broomsticks Inn as their headquarters to attack the wizarding world.

At the beginning of the battle, the crafty goblins were hiding behind the scenes and were ostensibly allies of the wizards.

But in the dark, they had a secret alliance with the giants and let them come out to make trouble.

When the army of the Ministry of Magic fought with the giants, the goblins suddenly rebelled and attacked.



The unexpected changes caused the wizards to be hit hard, and many of them died in the battle.

The goblins quickly occupied the Ministry of Magic and Diagon Alley. Even the pure-blood wizard families had been attacked, and everyone was in danger at that time.

The final and most tragic stage of the war was the attack on Hogwarts.

The goblins continued to consolidate the advantages they had gained. They united non-human intelligent creatures such as Centaurs, giants, Merpeople, vampires, as well as a large number of dangerous magical creatures and the help of many evil Dark wizards. Their forces far exceeded those of the wizards' coalition of the Ministry of Magic.

The wizards huddled in Hogwarts Castle, and their allies were only house-elves and a few magical creatures.

The house-elves were the only non-human magical creatures that did not betray the human wizards in the goblin rebellion.

The Ministry of Magic and the pure-blood wizard families at that time probably promised a lot of things to the house-elves before they convinced them to become their allies.

There was no way to find out about it, and Evan didn't know how they did it.

The only thing that could be known was that the bitter war ended in a draw. The goblins did not successfully seize Hogwarts, but the wizarding community had recognized the independent status of the goblins, Centaurs, Merpeople and other non-human intelligent creatures. They were no longer wizards' slaves.

Only the status of the house-elves who helped the wizards in the war had not changed. On the contrary, they were confronted with more deformity and severe enslavement and oppression. Foolish slaves to the humans, and traitors to everyone else; at that time, no one spoke for them...

#### Chapter 604: Iced Passage

In the eyes of the goblins, the house-elves were cowardly traitors and were not worthy of forgiveness. The cruelty and miserable life they suffered was entirely their own fault.

And in the eyes of human wizards, the house-elves were only slaves and private property wizards. They had the right to dispose of their own house-elves, even to kill them, regardless of their own thoughts.

After the goblin rebellions, the house-elves lived a very miserable and dark life.

Fortunately for them, with the end of the era of pure blood glory and the prevalence of Dark magic, their status improved to some extent.

Although they were still slaves to wizards, there had been a few cases of inhuman persecution.

However, judging from the treatment Dobby received at the Malfoys, they were still abused.

The terrible thing was that both the pure-blood wizards and the house-elves took those things for granted.

Evan hoped that Hermione's Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare would be able to change this situation, although its effect might end up being negligible.

He walked fast for five minutes and came to the end of the room.

There were no heads of house-elves on the front wall. Instead, there was a stone ladder extending downward.

The end of the stone ladder was tightly closed by a heavy iron gate.

“Where does that door lead to?” Evan asked, looking around carefully, feeling a little bit wrong.

He had a panoramic view of the whole room, and this was the only way forward, but he always felt that things were not that simple.

“I don’t know, Master Evan, Dobby hasn’t been here before!” Dobby answered, looking fearfully at the dark corridor.

“We can go in and check it out later!” Evan paused, and there was a flash of inspiration in his mind. “Hold on, since this cold storage can keep this low temperature, there must be a magic at work, but I don’t feel it here.”

On the contrary, the temperature near this ramp seemed to have risen.

Evan closed his eyes, felt the magic fluctuations in the air, and led Dobby back.

He took a few steps and stopped in front of a row of shelves full of mutilated, persecuted house-elves’ heads.

The heads of these elves above the shelves were all more or less missing an organ or suffering some kind of damage, just like Moody’s face.

Besides, they emitted a strange light blue, which was particularly ghastly and terrible. They all stared ruthlessly at Evan and Dobby with scary, big bulging eyes.

Evan didn’t know what kind of abuse they had been subjected to, which made them look so horrible with such looks of hatred on their faces.

Arguably, this kind of expression should not appear on a submissive creature like a house-elf. Even if their owners killed them, they probably wouldn’t reveal this expression...

Dobby howled and covered his eyes again.

Evan directly ignored it. When he first passed by, he thought it was because of a problem with the formula of the anticorrosive potion that made the heads of the house-elves so weird. Now it seemed that was not the case at all. The magic around here was very strong. What should be the explanation?

Resisting nausea, he used his wand to knock one by one on the blue heads of the house-elves on the shelves

“Master Evan!” Dobby looked at him anxiously, not knowing what he was doing.

When Evan’s wand landed on the head of the third house-elf on the left with a missing nose, the elf’s frozen eyes suddenly moved.

He looked at Evan fiercely as if he were going to eat him alive.

Evan subconsciously stepped back and saw three dark green fires appear in front of him.

The magic fire quickly rushed to Evan. In Dobby's scream, Evan lowered his head and avoided the fire.

He cast Protego on himself at the fastest speed, and the remaining two flames hit the shield, making a repressed sound.

A few seconds later, Evan got up from the ground and looked at the shelf in front of him with horror.

He didn't expect to be attacked, but fortunately he had reacted quickly...

It seemed that no matter where he was, he couldn't take it lightly.

He cast another protective spell on himself and continued to try to crack the device.

This time he was lucky. When his wand landed on the fourth head of the house-elf, the whole shelf suddenly trembled and slid to the right to give way for a secret downward passage.

Dobby let out another scream and looked at the suddenly opening secret passage in surprise.

For Evan, who had rich experience in castle exploration, he was already familiar with this scene.

In Hogwarts, secret passages could be hidden anywhere, even bedrooms or the headmaster's office.

"Let's go in and have a look!" said Evan.

He remained vigilant, strengthened the light of his wand, and pulled Dobby down the stairs.

The passage stretched downward, and the staircases on both sides and on the ground were paved with the distinctive black rock of Hogwarts Castle, dark, cold, and extraordinarily gloomy, as though absorbing all the light.

The further he went, the lower the temperature was. Evan noticed that when he breathed, he emitted white mist.

The ground was slippery with a thin layer of ice on it.

Under the fluorescent light of the wand, Evan could see that everything had a strange cyan luster.

That was the color of the frost, here was the world of ice.

He had a feeling, just like entering one of its own isolated ice caves.

The low temperature of the above cold storage was transmitted from here, and he didn't know what was underneath.

"Master Evan," said Dobby, trembling, "Dobby feels cold and uncomfortable..."

Evan looked down and saw that the house-elf was shivering at his feet and curled up into a ball.

He thought for a moment and gently tapped himself and Dobby's head with his wand, and a warm current flowed in from where his wand touched, as if a stream of hot water were spinning in their bodies, dispelling the cold around them and warming himself and Dobby.

With the cold being driven out together with uneasiness and fear, the dark cold storage seemed less terrible.

Dobby's face gradually calmed down, but Evan secretly raised his guard.

He could feel that the strange magic that made the surrounding cold and the temperature lower was gradually increasing.

After the heads full of hatred of those house-elves and that trap, he had to be careful in the face of this unknown environment.

Chapter 605: Devil's Altar

While on guard, Evan was full of doubts.

He was not surprised that he could find a hidden passage. There were many such secret places in Hogwarts Castle.

For example, Slytherin's Chamber of Secrets, the secret treasures of the Four Founders in the huge statue, and the Room of Requirement. In his first year, he had followed the basilisk through the pipeline and found the Blue Room, somewhere in Ravenclaw Tower. And there were also many more secret passages.

Even after a thousand years, there were still many unknown secrets in the castle waiting for future generations to excavate.

If exploring students were lucky enough, they could gain something in these secret rooms and find rare magic items or magic books left by the ancestors.

If they were unlucky enough to enter Slytherin's Chamber of Secrets, they must be prepared to become the Basilisk's food.

Of course, most of the chambers had nothing inside, or had already collapsed into ruins long ago.

Whatever their purpose, the wizards who built these secret places were once part of Hogwarts. Most of them were full of goodwill or neutral attitudes. They did not leave dangerous traps, magical creatures, or cursed hidden treasures or tombs.

But the secret space Evan found in the kitchen floor was extraordinarily different.

At the entrance, there was a shelf full of heads of persecuted house-elves, and traps were set.

Along the way, Evan also found many traces of such Dark magic, but because of the long time, these magic had expired.

Fortunately, they had failed. Otherwise, Evan did not know how many times he would have been attacked now.

This evil dark style was completely different from other secret rooms in the school.

It was conceivable that the wizard who had built this place was a Dark wizard, with a distorted and dangerous character.

He probably lived in the early days of Hogwarts, hundreds of years ago, and built this secret passage deep underground in the school for some dark purpose.

Because he didn't want to be discovered, he left a lot of black magic and curses inside and outside the secret passage.

The truth was, Evan didn't want to know what a Dark wizard had intended to do a few hundred years ago, and he didn't plan to get into new trouble. He just wondered if it had anything to do with the key to the secret treasure left by Hufflepuff...

He had already got the Philosopher's Stone left by Gryffindor, and had some clues and progress about Slytherin and Ravenclaw.

Following the two tracks of the Merpeople and the Vampires, he would gain something sooner or later.

The only key he had no clues about was Hufflepuff's. Although he had speculated that Hufflepuff had left the treasure keys in the custody of a house-elf, this had little effect. The house-elves whose civilization had broken down did not pass down this important secret.

The house-elves of today and the house-elves of ancient times were completely two species of different civilizations.

It was almost impossible to find useful clues from them, and he can only find them by himself.

With his current situation, Evan was reluctant to give up on anything that might be related to Hufflepuff.

He was going to take a look at the end of this secret passage to see what was underneath.

The temperature in the passage was very low. Evan and Dobby walked for more than ten minutes, and the winding stairs seemed to never end.

Now, everything around them had been completely frozen by the ice, sparkling under the light of Evan's wand.

The ground was covered with thick ice, oddly shaped, with not much place to settle.

Evan walked very hard, waving his wand to make a foothold for himself.

The ice was not white like ordinary ice and snow, but had a strange color of blue halo.

That was because there was magic in it. The ice was not formed naturally, but created by magic.

The magic in the air was also strong. This was a strange magic rhythm that Evan had never encountered before.

He was somewhat uneasy, but encountered no real danger.

This powerful magical reaction made him think of the Philosopher's Stone involuntarily, but he felt a little bit wrong.

As for the power of the Philosopher's Stone, Evan had seen it in four places: in the Centaurs' colony Moon Temple, the ruins of the fallen Centaurs city, the underground gold caves in the mountains

around Beauxbatons, and the silent Temples in the swamps. Everything in them was more shocking than here.

If this ice magic really used the Philosopher's Stone as its source of magic, its power should not be small. Even if the entirety of Hogwarts were frozen, Evan would not feel it would be strange.

But if it weren't the Philosopher's Stone, then what was the source of this magic?

It stood to reason that without a stable source of magic, and over time, no matter how strong the magic spells were, they would gradually lose effectiveness.

Powerful wizards might keep this process as long as possible, but it would never last for hundreds of years. The ineffective black magic Evan saw along the passage was enough to prove this.

The Dark wizard who built this place did not have the strength to keep his magic for that long. Even if he could, the magic power he left behind would be too weak to mention, not as strong as it is now.

With many doubts, Evan and Dobby went down to the bottom, and at the end of the passage was an ice wall.

"Master Evan..." said Dobby worriedly, looking at the thick ice wall in front of him at a loss.

What worried him was what was inside the ice wall. A circular altar-shaped building could be seen vaguely.

There was a statue in front of the building. From time to time, blue light and intricate magic runes appeared in the middle area.

Evan did not act rashly to break the ice wall. He lay prone on the ice wall and looked inside for a while. The more he looked, the more he felt bad.

According to the information he got from his magic book, it might be a devil's altar in the ice wall!

Following this train of thought, Evan suddenly understood everything.

Why was there such a powerful magic reaction here for so long?

The Dark wizard who built this site intended to summon the devil underneath Hogwarts, and from the many traces around him, he had successfully summoned it once.

All the magic that made Evan feel strange and uneasy was the power of the devil.

A devil altar, which was a very, very evil black magic, should definitely be banned.

Indeed, demonic magic was the strongest branch of black magic, and it was once prevalent in the Dark Ages of the Middle Ages and earlier.

Finally, because this kind of magic was too evil and too esoteric, it gradually disappeared from the wizarding world.

In the book "Secrets of the Darkest Art", two simple methods of summoning demons were recorded.

Starting from those two, Evan had studied this aspect and read many magic books.

The more he knew, the more he could realize how devilish and terrible the Dark magic was.

Chapter 606: Demon Dark Magic

“Master Evan, let’s go back, Dobby is afraid!” Dobby said trembling, feeling fear.

Unlike before, his fear was no longer from darkness and ice, but from the strange circular building in front of him.

Even with a thick ice wall between them, Dobby didn’t feel much at ease. He clasped tightly to Evan’s robes, his big bulb eyes staring nervously at the altar behind the azure blue ice wall.

Seeing the cyan light shining above the altar, Dobby shrank back and hid behind Evan.

He didn’t know that it was an altar to summon the devil, but felt fear and pressure by instinct that told him it was dangerous to stay here any longer.

If it hadn’t been for Evan, Dobby would have run away!

Unlike Dobby who felt nothing but fear, Evan became a little excited after a brief shock.

“Don’t worry, Dobby!” he said softly, and stepped closer to the ice wall. “The thing inside can’t come out. We’re safe. A devil altar that has been successfully activated, this is a rare research opportunity!”

Evan looked at the devil altar behind the ice wall with interest, as well as the light and magic runes that flashed on it from time to time.

All signs showed that this was an active devil altar.

In fact, he never expected to find such a thing in Hogwarts, which was too rare.

Even if he didn’t find a clue about Hufflepuff’s treasure, this devil altar alone was a big harvest.

If other young wizards were present, they might just turn around and flee in a hurry to tell the school professors about it.

But Evan didn’t intend to do that, at least not until he understood the whole principle of the altar.

He was also worried that it would be a powerful and aggressive Dark magic, but when he saw the demon’s Altar, he was completely relieved.

From the point of view of evil and taboo, the existence of demon’s Devil Altar totally exceeded that of the vast majority of Dark magic.

But this thing was not dangerous, as long as the demon was not summoned out, nothing would happen.

On the other hand, only by meeting the corresponding conditions and paying the right price could the altar be used to summon its demon.

With Evan’s understanding of the demon black magic, he knew that the value of an active devil altar was no less than a Philosopher’s Stone.

From the perspective of magic research, the value and significance of this altar were even more unimaginable.

In fact, demon magic had once flourished, and was the most important magic branch mastered by ancient warlocks.

They created and summoned many powerful demons to enslave them, making these magical creatures their own slaves.

Regardless of whether or not they specialized in this, almost every ancient warlock had his own demon, the most famous of which was King Solomon and his demons known as his seventy-two pillars.

The legendary stories about them had also been circulated among Muggles for thousands of years.

In Muggles' eyes, Solomon was the third king of the ancient kingdom of Israel, frequently appearing in Biblical records.

But in the eyes of the wizarding world, he was a powerful ancient warlock like Prophet Abraham.

However, his status and strength were below those of his predecessor.

The greatest feat of Solomon was the construction of the temple, in which he was said to have placed the Ark of the Covenant of Moses and the Israelites. It was a legendary magic item with a very special status and significance, even considered as a symbol of God's presence.

Besides, there were seventy-two pillars in the hall of the temple, which sealed the seventy-two demons created by King Solomon.

These seventy-two demons were also known as the seventy-two pillars of the demons, and the giant pillars that sealed them were also the altars that summoned demons.

King Solomon ruled his territory by relying on the Ark of the Covenant and the 72 demon gods. No one dared to resist his rule.

This lasted until his death, when the seventy-two pillars of the demon fell apart and completely disappeared from the world, and along with them the country he had ruled.

The descendants compiled the Lesser Key of Solomon according to the seventy-two pillars of the Temple Hall, which detailed the method of Solomon's summoning of the seventy-two demons.

Unfortunately, this book was also finally lost in the long river of history.

Solomon and the demons he created and summoned are only an outstanding representative of demon magic. After his death, ancient magicians continued to develop and expand this magic and summoned all kinds of extremely powerful demons. They combined demonic magic with other magic categories in an attempt to create more powerful creatures until they called out evil spirits.

After that, the splendid ancient magic civilization dominated by ancient warlocks quickly disappeared, leaving only legends and ruins to be passed down to the world.



Although the ancient warlocks had disappeared, the remaining demonic magic was inherited and considered as a kind of black magic.

Due to the loss of many important books and the lack of such powerful magic and magical materials to make altars, the demons summoned by wizards were far less powerful than the evil gods of ancient warlocks, and the method of summoning was more evil and bloody.

As a remedy for the lack of material and the lack of magic, Dark wizards chose sacrifices for the demons, the most popular of which was human beings, and more precisely human wizards!

Dark wizards believed that the stronger the power of the wizard as a sacrifice was, the greater the power of the summoned demon was.

Or else they had another way, which was to choose a witch under the age of fifteen.

The purer the girl's body and mind, the more beautiful she looked; the more she could attract the attention of powerful demons.

According to different methods of summoning, the selection criteria of sacrifices were different, but they were generally such a set of deformed evil theories.

After a brief revival in the dark Middle Ages, this twisted dark magic was quickly abandoned by the mainstream of the wizarding world, prohibiting any wizards from conducting research.

The most Evan could find now was the decree of the Ministry of Magic and International Confederation of Wizards on the prohibition of studying the demon black magic, and all the magic books related to it had been burned.

Up to now, the demon black magic had been very unpopular.

Even if any evil dark wizard wanted to use it, it was unlikely he could find relevant information.

The two methods of summoning demons recorded in *Secrets of the Darkest Art* could only summon lower demons.

Besides this book, Evan could find all the basic information about the demon Dark magic.

It only recorded the rudimentary knowledge. No matter how he studied it, he could only know at most was superficial.

Evan was very interested in this kind of magic, but had not been able to conduct in-depth research on it.

If he relied on the superficial knowledge at hand to summon a demon, then that would purely mean looking for death!

#### Chapter 607: Demon Statue

The main difficulty in summoning demons is to successfully build a demon altar and then create a pure magical creature.

The construction of the demon altar was very difficult and required a lot of materials and evil, bloody sacrifices.

Evan could neither collect nor use most of these things.

Needless to say, the process of building the demon altar and the first summoning of the demon was very dangerous and prone to have accidents.

If not careful while using this kind of deep Dark magic, he could lose his life.

With Evan's current superficial knowledge, there was no hope of success at all.

With all kinds of unfavorable factors superposed, he would naturally not try the summoning method recorded in Secrets of the Darkest Art.

But if there was a successfully activated demon altar, most of the problems could be solved, and there would not be so many concerns.

As long as the conditions were met, the demon created by the altar could be summoned.

All that needed to be done was to satisfy the requirements of this altar and use magic to enslave the summoned demon.

With Evan's current strength, there was a great chance of success.

Evil and taboo aside, demon magic was very powerful, far more than the general sense of dark magic.

Controlling a powerful demon could help wizards overcome most of their opponents.

From the magical traces around it, this demon altar could summon a high-ranking demon with ice attack ability.

With such a powerful assistant, Evan would not have had so much trouble in the last battle against the Manticore. He wouldn't have had to wait that long and find Caresius's help to get into the ruins.

A demon could help Evan do many things that he could not do before. He had a lot of people behind him, but a few of them could really help him.

In fact, after seeing this demon altar, he was somewhat moved.

However, what needed to be done now was not to call out demons. There were still many things to be understood.

"Dobby, let's go in and have a look!" said Evan.

He walked down the steps and pointed his wand on the ice wall in front of him.

At the end of his wand, white mist kept coming out, and soon, the thick ice wall melted out making an entrance.

Evan led Dobby in. Though feeling shocked, he had a clearer visual understanding of the whole picture of the entire demon altar.

The altar was made up of huge stones, forming a concentric circular shape, which was more magnificent than it looked from the outside.

The stones were roughly rectangular, standing upright above the ground, more than ten feet high.

On top of the adjacent stones, there was another stone lying on the top, or across two or four, arranged in a strange pattern.

Several important locations seemed to be related to planetary changes, not shapes that had no meaning.

The top of the stone wall was irregularly filled with grotesque holes, inlaid with gems, emitting a faint glow.

The most striking thing was the center of the concentric circle, which was made up of a whole piece of cyan boulder.

The boulder was painted with dark golden magic symbols and complex lines, and the whole body shone with light blue light from time to time.

Every time the light blue light flashed, a lot of cold air, with extremely low temperature, was released to meet the surrounding air, arousing a lot of white mist.

Even with the protection of magic, Evan felt a chill approaching him.

He pulled Dobby carefully behind the boulders to avoid the ice fog. After the fog disappeared, he continued to move forward, bypassing the boulders to the core of the altar, and saw the giant demon statue he had seen from the outer steps.

Before there was an ice wall, and he could only see it vaguely. Now when he went inside, he noticed that it was like a house-elf. More accurately, it was a demon with a variant form based on a house-elf.

This house-elf had blue skin; and on his face, there was not the humble, flattering smile that Evan was familiar with.

On the contrary, with some indescribable cruelty, there was a slight sneer at the corners of his mouth. His hands were slightly raised upward, making a strange gesture.

Evan carefully observed the statue, and no accident, the demon that the altar could summon was this fellow.

What he didn't expect was that this demon would actually be a house elf!

He had to admit that the Dark wizard who built this place had a really unique taste and hobbies.

Evan did not enter the center of the concentric circle that flashed blue light from time to time. He used the outer boulders as a cover and turned around the entire altar.

There were signs of a connection between this demon altar and Hogwarts' house-elves.

Every now and then it appeared here for no reason, and there was definitely a hidden secret behind it.

On the stone platform in front of the statue, which was used to place the sacrifices, were carved dense ancient magic inscriptions.

Not surprisingly, it should record the origin of the demon and the tribute to summon it.

These ancient magical texts were not too unpopular, but it would still take time to crack them all.

He recorded all these words and magic symbols on the ground, searched the altar carefully, and then left the place with Dobby, ready to study them all and take the next step.

Dobby finally breathed a sigh of relief and watched with trepidation as the cabinet filled with the heads of blue house-elves returned to its original place, completely blocking the entrance to the passage.

He finally came out from the terrible place below, and he vowed never to go there again.

Evan warned Dobby not to tell anyone about today. An activated demon altar, if known about, would soon get the place filled with Aurors sent by the Ministry of Magic to investigate.

Before leaving the underground icehouse, Evan also looked at the room that had been closed by heavy iron gates. Inside was the ancient Hogwarts water intake system, which was still in use today.

In the room, he could see canals paved with bluestone and many modern pipeline networks.

Under the influence of magic, water flowed from the ground and was supplied to the whole castle through here.

As soon as Evan and Dobby entered, they could hear the sound of water flowing.

Under the light of the wand, he found that the canal was very wide and the top was connected with the main pipe of the castle.

The inlet end extended all the way to the ground, and there was no end to the darkness.

Unexpectedly, through the water surface, a stone ladder could be seen in the place where the channel extended downward.

This showed that when the canal had first been designed, people could enter it. But Evan didn't know what was hidden underneath.

Evan didn't know the designer's principles, nor was he interested in drilling into dark underground pipes.

After checking it again and finding no clues, he left with Dobby.

## Chapter 608: Busy Time

When Evan and Dobby returned to the kitchen, Hermione was frowning and sitting there, Winky still beside her.

She buried her face in her hands, tears streaming down the gaps between her fingers.

Things hadn't changed much from what they had been before Evan left, or worse. Winky looked even sadder!

Hermione seems to have given up trying to persuade her, and she painfully looked at the house-elves in the distance.

More than a hundred house-elves were hiding far from the wall, as if they were scared, but did not dare to leave.

They stared at Hermione in panic with wide eyes, in which only fear, humbleness, and obedience could be seen.

Evan sighed. These house-elves now were quite different from their ancestors he had seen below. Centuries of slavery had completely distorted their hearts and they fundamentally abandoned the idea of independence and freedom.

Although their appearance had not changed, these house-elves and their ancestors were completely different species.

They were the slaves of the wizards, the willing slaves, nothing more.

“I interviewed them and got to know their opinions. I just asked a few key questions. They all ran away!” Hermione sighed and turned and asked, “By the way, what were you two doing just now?”

“Dobby showed me around and I made a lot of interesting discoveries.”

Seeing Evan’s expression, Hermione did not continue to ask. She knew why Evan was here. Since it was an interesting discovery, it was not suitable to talk about it here.

Her eyebrows stretched out and her attention turned back to the house-elves, annoyed at their performance.

A few minutes later, when Evan and Hermione were preparing to leave, the house-elves who had been trembling by the wall came back. They pressed in upon them, offering snacks to take back upstairs.

Hermione refused, with a pained look at the way the elves kept bowing and curtsying, but Evan loaded his pockets with cream cakes and pies. Climbing on the ice ladder just now had consumed a lot of his energy.

“Goodbye, Master Evan!” Dobby waved and said, “Goodbye, Miss Granger!”

“Good night, Dobby!” said Evan, “Remember to go up and take the clothes I gave you.”

When he heard him, Dobby beamed.

Hermione also waved at Dobby and glanced at other humble house-elves.

“I’ve just thought about it carefully. I think the best thing to happen to those house-elves is for them to observe Dobby more,” said Hermione, leading the way back up the marble staircase. “I mean, the other elves will see how happy he is, being free, and slowly it will dawn on them that they want that too!”

“That’s a good idea. If you want to help the house-elves fight for their rights and interests, the first thing you need to change is their own abnormal idea of being enslaved,” said Evan, filling his mouth with pie. “Dobby might be able to play a leading role. It’s unlikely, but it’s better than you acting rashly. Let’s hope they don’t look down too much at Winky.”

“She’ll cheer up too,” said Hermione, though she sounded a bit doubtful. “Once the shock is worn off, and she’s got used to Hogwarts, she’ll see how much better off she is without that Crouch man!”

“I hope so!” Evan nodded. If she had stayed in Crouch’s house she might have been killed. From this perspective, Winky should indeed be happy.

For the next few days, Evan was thinking about the house-elf demon under the kitchen. He read a lot of information in the library, but did not find any clues.

Relying on the information at hand, it was almost impossible to investigate a Dark wizard who lived in Hogwarts hundreds of years ago, not to mention the more mysterious demon altar. Evan could not find relevant information.

In the end, he could only focus his attention on deciphering the ancient magic text he had brought back.

Compared to the information of the ancient warlock era found in the swamp ruins, the cracking of these magical texts was not so difficult.

Evan went under the kitchen alone to observe several times to make sure there were no omissions.

Although these magical writings were hundreds of years old, most of the magic civilizations at that time were in line with today’s concept of magic.

It was only a matter of time before he could crack this magic script.

Also worried about the house-elves was Hermione, who didn’t report Dobby’s story in the end.

She accepted Evan’s suggestion and was ready to focus on changing the mindset of the house-elves as the next step.

In the midst of a busy schedule, time passed quickly, and in the blink of an eye it was December.

The start of December brought wind and sleet to Hogwarts. Drafty though the castle always was in winter, everyone was glad of its fires and thick walls every time they passed the Durmstrang ship on the lake, which was pitching in the high winds, its black sails billowing against the dark skies.

Many people thought Durmstrang’s mobile home must be cold enough.

No wonder Krum ran to the school library when he had nothing to do, while the other students from Durmstrang were used to spending time in Slytherin’s Common Room. They got along well.

Compared with Durmstrang’s students, the students from Beauxbatons were more accustomed to staying in their carriage.

Only Gabrielle was an exception, she was very popular in the Gryffindor Common Room, second only to Fred and George.

Fleur never came, and she seemed to be very confident entrusting her sister to Evan.

The school was calm, everyone seemed to have recovered from the shock brought by the dragon, and began to look forward to the next task.

Evan noticed that Hagrid was keeping Madame Maxime's horses well provided with their preferred drink of single-malt whiskey. The fumes wafting from the trough in the corner of their paddock was enough to make the entire Care of Magical Creatures class light-headed.

This was unhelpful, as they were still tending the horrible skrewts and needed their wits about them.

"I'm not sure whether they hibernate or not," Hagrid told the shivering class in the windy pumpkin patch next lesson. "I thought we'd just try and see if they fancied a kip ... we'll just settle them down in these boxes..."

There were only ten skrewts left. Apparently their desire to kill one another had not been exercised out of them.

#### Chapter 609: Band-Ended Skoots

Each of the skrewts was now approaching six feet in length. Their thick gray armor; their powerful, scuttling legs; their fire-blasting ends; their stings and their suckers, combined to make the skrewts the most repulsive things Evan had ever seen.

The students looked dispiritedly at the enormous boxes Hagrid had brought out, all lined with pillows and fluffy blankets.

"We'll just lead them in here," Hagrid said, "and put the lids on, and we'll see what happens."

But the skrewts, it transpired, did not hibernate, and did not appreciate being forced into pillow-lined boxes and nailed in.

They probably thought it would be very boring. As soon as the lid was closed, the Blast-Ended Skrewts suddenly became violent.

After a few bangs and screams, Hagrid yelled "Don't panic, now, don't panic!" while the Skrewts rampaged around the pumpkin patch, now strewn with the smoldering wreckage of the boxes.

Many students had fled into Hagrid's cabin through the back door, and Evan, Colin, Ginny, Gabrielle and other classmates remained outside trying to help Hagrid.

Together they managed to restrain and tie up the ten skrewts, though at the cost of numerous burns and cuts.

In Evan's view, Hagrid was simply going further and further on the road to disaster.

These skrewts were gradually getting out of his control and became dangerous creatures like the Manticore.

The sensible way to deal with these skrewts was to kill them before they killed anyone. But Evan was sure that Hagrid would never do this.

In fact, he did not blame Hagrid for his choice. He devoted more and more energy to the study of dangerous magic.

In fact, after bringing back the ancient magic text to decipher it, Evan was also ready to summon a demon.

Although there were sufficient reasons, the matter itself was terrible, evil, and incredible.

If someone had told Evan about these things in his first year, he would definitely think that person was mad!

At that time, his understanding of Dark Magic was still on the level of waving the wand and casting a few spells.

The Avada Kedavra was really powerful and effective, but not as evil as imagined.

Evan thought Dark magic was no more than that, but with a deeper understanding of magic, he discovered that he was wrong.

In order to become stronger, Voldemort did more cruel things on himself than what most wizards could imagine.

Evan was sure that Voldemort had also summoned a demon, but what he did with the devil was definitely beyond everyone's expectations.

Back to Hagrid, who was now likely to be killed by more and more violent skrewts at any time. Or worse, that is, these things were reported by Rita Skeeter.

After the end of the first task, the woman did not leave school to return to London.

She camped around Hogwarts, looking for all the opportunities she could take advantage of, hoping to get more exciting news.

Evan knew she was an illegal Animagus and wanted to catch her when she became a bug. Or, more directly, give her a good beating and make her stop talking nonsense.

But Evan couldn't do that. He also doubted whether this could be effective.

Even in the face of the Ministry of Magic, Fudge and Dumbledore, Rita Skeeter did not hesitate to spread rumors.

Perhaps only a Dark wizard like Voldemort, who killed people at will, could make her feel frightened.

Evan had planned to bring out the fact that Rita Skeeter was an illegal Animagus, but this woman was very careful and never deformed when someone was around. She never approached a strong wizard in a deformed state.

Obviously, Evan was one of the people she was determined not to approach.

Evan couldn't follow her everywhere around the school, waiting for her to transform. He didn't have time for that.

Looking at Rita Skeeter coming from the edge of the Forbidden Forest, he thought it was time for Dobby to practice!

“Well, well, well ... this does look like fun.”

Rita Skeeter came over and leaned on Hagrid's garden fence, watching everyone join forces to trap a skrewt into the box.



She was wearing a thick magenta cloak with a furry purple collar, and her crocodile-skin handbag was over her arm.

“Who are you?” Hagrid asked Rita Skeeter as he slipped a loop of rope around the skrewt’s sting and tightened it.

“Rita Skeeter, Daily Prophet reporter.” Rita replied, beaming at him. Her gold teeth glinted.

“I remember you. Dumbledore said you weren’t allowed inside the school anymore,” said Hagrid, frowning slightly as he got off the slightly squashed skrewt and started tugging it over to its fellows.

Rita acted as though she hadn’t heard what Hagrid had said, and she asked, beaming still more widely, “What are these fascinating creatures called?”

“Blast-Ended Skrewts,” grunted Hagrid.

“Really?!” said Rita, apparently full of lively interest. “I’ve never heard of them before ... where do they come from?”

If possible, Evan wished Hagrid would stop talking.

He walked over and gently stepped on Hagrid’s foot. The latter stopped and looked at Evan in confusion.

“You’re here too, Evan!” said Rita Skeeter as she looked around. “So, you like Care of Magical Creatures, do you?”

Evan didn’t want to talk to her. He was ready to drag Hagrid back, but when he looked up and saw Hagrid beaming at him expectantly, he had to nod. “Yes, many of us like this course. Hagrid is a good teacher!” said Evan.

“Lovely,” said Rita. “Really lovely. Been teaching long?”

“This is only my second year,” said Hagrid, a dull red flush rising up out of Hagrid’s wild black beard out of excitement.

“Lovely ... I don’t suppose you’d like to give an interview and share some of your experience of magical creatures, would you? The Daily Prophet does a zoological column every Wednesday, as I’m sure you know. We could feature these ... er ... Band-Ended Scoots.”

“Blast-Ended Skrewts,” Hagrid said eagerly. “I’d like to be interviewed and share my experience of taking care of these cute little guys. Evan’s newspaper has done it many times, but I think the Daily Prophet may be better!”

“That’s good. We’ll meet in the Three Broomsticks on Friday for a good long interview,” said Rita with satisfaction, turning her head to Evan, “I’ve already written about the first task and your overcoming of the dragon. You’ll like what I think of you, Evan. however, I still need to know...”

## Chapter 610: The Yule Ball

Evan pulled Hagrid around and left, not caring about what Rita wanted to know

He was sure that no matter how Rita Skeeter evaluated him, he would not like it.

That woman could twist everything, whether for the good or for the bad, it was not what Evan wanted to see.

He needed to keep a low profile now, and he didn't want to attract the attention of Rita and the Death Eaters when Voldemort was about to return.

Thinking about it, it had been so long since the first task ended. Hogwarts Magic report on the task had been published long ago, but Rita Skeeter and the Daily Prophet seemed not to be in a hurry at all.

Obviously, their focus was not at all on the task.

Evan was not ready to give Rita Skeeter a chance to twist information, and it was a dead end to have a long talk with her like Hagrid.

When Evan told Harry, Ron, and Hermione about it, the three of them also agreed with his point of view.

"You're right, Evan, she will twist everything Hagrid says," said Harry anxiously.

"Just as long as he didn't import those skrewts illegally or anything," said Hermione. They looked at one another; it was exactly the sort of thing Hagrid might do.

It was impossible for him to get Fire Crabs from regular channels. They were magical species protected by the Fijian Ministry of Magic.

"Don't worry, Hagrid has been in loads of trouble before, and Dumbledore has not sacked him," said Ron consolingly. "The worst that can happen is Hagrid will have to get rid of the skrewts. Sorry ... did I say worst? I meant best."

Everyone laughed and felt a lot more cheerful.

Next, Evan began to look down on the ancient magic words, and Hermione also took out a lot of parchment to write and draw.

After Harry and Ron finished their homework, they picked up two of Fred and George's fake wands and began a sword fight.

They fought fiercely, and a group of people gathered around to laugh and watch.

Professor McGonagall had informed everyone that they must gather at the Common Room at 8 o'clock this evening, so everyone did not run around.

"Potter! Weasley!" Professor McGonagall said angrily, walking into the Common Room, "What are you doing?!"

The two looked up in surprise, Ron holding a tin parrot and Harry, a rubber haddock.

“Can you be kind enough to act your age?” said Professor McGonagall, with an angry look at the pair of them as the head of Harry’s haddock drooped and fell silently to the floor. Ron’s parrot’s beak had severed it moments before. They looked up at Professor McGonagall in fear.

“Sit down over there; I have something to say to you all.” Professor McGonagall glared at them again and turned her eyes to the others in the Common Room. “Maybe you all know that the Yule Ball is approaching. This is a traditional part of the Triwizard Tournament and an opportunity for us to socialize with our foreign guests. Now, the ball will be open only to fourth years and above, although you may invite a younger student if you wish.”

Evan blinked and unconsciously turned to look at Hermione, but Hermione didn’t look at him.

She looked at Professor McGonagall in dismay, not even noticing that the parchment she had dropped to the floor.

Evan also put down the parchment full of ancient magic words and looked at Hermione for a while, suddenly a little nervous.

Since December entered, the Yule Ball had been put on the agenda.

Everyone needed to find their own partner. Normally, it was the boy who invited the girl, but Evan did not seem to have this qualification.

He was only a third year, and if no one invited him, he couldn’t go to the ball at all.

So, would Hermione invite him?

After hearing Professor McGonagall’s words, the Common Room suddenly became excited.

Everyone was muttering, especially the girls, and many of them had a sharp giggle.

“Dress robes will be worn,” Professor McGonagall reacted a bit dissatisfied, but she did not stop them and continued, “The ball will start at eight o’clock on Christmas Day, finishing at midnight in the Great Hall. Now the ...”

She paused and looked at everyone calmly.

“The Yule Ball is of course a chance for us all to ... er ... let our hair down and relax,” she said, in a disapproving voice.

The girls, especially Lavender Brown, giggled harder than ever, with her hand pressed hard against her mouth to stifle the sound.

Professor McGonagall, with her hair in a tight bun, looked as though she had never let her hair down in any sense.

Everyone was imagining how she would let her hair down!

“Hmm, but that does not mean,” Professor McGonagall went on, “that we will be relaxing the standards of behavior we expect from Hogwarts students. I will be

most seriously displeased if a Gryffindor student embarrasses the school in any way.”

Then, instead of managing the mess in the Common Room, she waved to Ron.

“Weasley, come here for a minute. I have something to say to you.”

She led Ron out into the empty corridor, where they could still hear the excited shouts coming from inside.

Ron stared nervously at Professor McGonagall, wondering what she was going to say to him.

“Weasley, the champions have their own partners!” Professor McGonagall said, “You must invite a partner.”

“Partner?!” Ron was taken aback. “What partner, I don’t dance!”

“Don’t say stupid things, you have to dance,” said Professor McGonagall irritably. “That’s what I’m telling you. Traditionally, the champions and their partners open the ball. You have to find yourself a dance partner, Weasley!”

“I’m not dancing!”

“You have to, it is traditional,” said Professor McGonagall firmly. “You are a Hogwarts champion, and you will do what is expected of you as a representative of the school. So make sure you get yourself a partner. That’s all. You can go back!”

When Ron returned, everyone was still talking about it.

Everyone was very excited, talking about the Yule Ball and partners. Everyone was choosing their own goals.

Evan, who was not qualified to invite others, could only sit there. He hoped Hermione could invite him.

Hermione didn’t seem to mean this, or, rather, didn’t intend to invite Evan when there were so many people.

Now everyone was discussing, but no one was acting rashly. Everyone was waiting...