

## *The return of Dumbledore's Army*

Attilius spent the rest of the holiday break in the Pensieve Cavern, diving daily into the memories of Salazar Slytherin and uncovering a trove of information about the Hogwarts founder. He discovered that Slytherin had performed numerous magical feats after leaving the school, forming a circle of followers who believed, like him, that magic should be reserved for purebloods and that Muggles should be nothing more than slaves at the service of those wielding powerful magic.

The more time Attilius spent there, the more he began to understand Slytherin's motivations. He grasped the root of his fury towards Muggles for their atrocities and the massacres they committed in the name of a so-called divine conscience. Each time he lived through Slytherin's memories, he was filled with a murderous impulse, feeling the urge to destroy the first non-magical person who crossed his path.

Each night, he wandered through the Forbidden Forest, brooding over the dark thoughts awakened by the Pensieve. He moved carelessly among the creatures, undeterred by the hostile glances of those who tried to chase him off.

He even ventured through the centaur camp, ignoring their pointed arrows and their orders for him to stop. When he didn't heed their warning, one centaur let loose an arrow, which buried itself in the ground mere inches from his foot.

"The next one will lodge between your eyes!" the centaur shouted amid the jeers of his kin.

Finally, Attilius regained his senses and realized where he had ended up. He caught the centaur's gaze, reading in his mind a deep-seated desire to keep wizards away. This hatred only fueled the anger Attilius had accumulated from Slytherin's memories, pushing him into a frenzy. With a swift gesture, he drew his wand and pointed it at the centaur, conjuring a rope that wrapped around the creature's neck. Attilius gave a sharp tug, toppling the centaur from the ledge where he stood proudly.



The others, taken aback by his attack, loosed a hail of arrows, which he deflected with a Shield Charm. With his free hand, he lifted the fallen centaur and held him by the throat.

“Do you know who you’re facing?” he thundered, his voice amplified by magic. “Do you think your puny arrows can harm me?”

A wave of shock rippled through the herd. Drawing from his darkest magic, he cast an aura of fear among the centaurs, who trembled, caught between the urge to flee and the need to defend their territory.

“Never forget that in our presence, you are nothing!” he growled before releasing the centaur, who straightened with as much dignity as he could muster and hurried back to his fellows, who disappeared among the trees.

When they had all gone, Attilius resumed his journey back to the castle for dinner. He hadn’t gone far before he stopped, paralyzed. What have I done? He had attacked the centaurs, peaceful creatures, nearly wiping them out with his barrage of deadly spells.

He knew it. He could feel it in his hands, an itch for violence. The urge was strong, to hunt them down and bring them down one by one, like prey at the start of hunting season.

His legs gave out beneath him, and he collapsed, clutching his head in his hands. He had acted just as Slytherin or Voldemort would have. Like Romulus. Like his heartless, ruthless brother.

And that was something he couldn’t accept.

He had sworn it, long before the Dark Lord assigned him his mission. He had promised himself he would never be as cruel as his brother, the source of so much pain.

Slowly, he forced himself to stand and headed back toward the castle. Passing Hagrid’s hut, he saw the gamekeeper through the window, shelling peas. Attilius stopped to catch his breath. He didn’t know what was wrong with him; he wasn’t himself. An internal struggle raged within him, making each step forward difficult.

Then, with a dull thud, he collapsed, losing consciousness.

When he reopened his eyes, it was already night, and the room he found himself in was unfamiliar. Rows of beds lined the space, some shielded by curtains drawn around them.



Turning his head, he saw a small figure bustling in the corner.

“Excuse me,” he called, his voice weak.

The figure turned, revealing a small, thin creature with bat-like ears, bulging eyes, and a pointed nose, dressed in tattered rags.

“You called for Dobby, sir?” asked the house-elf.

“Yes, can you tell me where I am?”

The elf wrung out a damp cloth and placed it on Attilius’s forehead.

“You are in the infirmary, sir. Hagrid found you outside his hut and brought you here.”

Attilius tried to sit up, but the elf gently pressed him back down.

“Sir, you must rest. You were exposed to very dark magic.”

Attilius regarded him with curiosity.

“How do you know that?”

The elf gave a small smile.

“Dobby overheard the professors discussing it. They think you sneaked into the Library’s Restricted Section to read books on dark magic.”

“That’s not true!” Attilius protested.

“Dobby knows, sir,” the elf reassured him. “Dobby has seen you going to Slytherin’s Cave all through the holiday.”

Attilius tried to respond, but no words came out. He knew that house-elves possessed powerful magic, but he hadn’t realized they were capable of such feats.

“Have the professors mentioned a punishment?” he asked.

“I don’t know, sir,” Dobby admitted. “I only know that Professor McGonagall argued with the headmaster.”

Attilius’s face showed his surprise.

“Argued? About what?”

“Dobby couldn’t hear, sir, but they mentioned your name and your age.”

Attilius fell silent.

McGonagall couldn’t possibly know the true nature of his mission. There was no way Snape would have told her. The Dark Lord had insisted that no one



jeopardize his cover and that the Carrows support him in his mission rather than hinder it.

He had noticed a shift in their behavior. They no longer showed him the same hostility. Now, they simply ignored him.

“What else did you hear, Dobby?” he asked.

The house-elf shrugged.

“All Dobby knows is that the headmaster has insisted you join him in his office to tell him what you have discovered.”

Neville and his friends eventually agreed on meeting Friday evening, right after the last class. They would all head directly to the Room of Requirement. The older members would guide the new and younger students, so they could understand how the room worked.

On Friday, Neville, Seamus, and An quickly packed up their books and were the first to rush out of the classroom, under the astonished gaze of Professor Carrow, who had just wrapped up a lecture on Muggle torture.

They were the first to arrive at the wall on the seventh floor. They paced back and forth in front of it, focusing on what they needed most. After their third pass, a wooden door appeared in front of them. When they entered, Neville and Seamus recognized the walls covered in spell illustrations, the cushions and mats arranged on the floor, and the practice dummies stored in a corner.

A few minutes later, Ginny, Luna, and other sixth-year students joined them. Most of them were unfamiliar with this room, gazing around with wide eyes and pointing out every detail in wonder.

Several other groups joined them, and when Padma, Erine, and the seventh-year Ravenclaws arrived, they assumed everyone had made it.

"Welcome, everyone," Neville greeted them. "I recognize some familiar faces from the D.A., but I also see many new ones."

He looked over the younger students.

"This year, classes won't be taught by just one person," he continued. "Each of us has used the holidays to study a spell or two to share with the group."

Some students began whispering among themselves but quickly fell silent under Ginny's stern look.



"We'll start by reviewing the basics to make sure everyone remembers the spells Harry taught us."

Neville paired each older member with a new one. Seamus teamed up with An, while Padma paired with Erine.

They began with the Disarming Charm, and it became evident that there was a noticeable skill gap between the experienced D.A. members and the newcomers. However, a few of the new members displayed impressive skill. An and Erine, in particular, showed real dueling talent. Padma struggled against Erine, who cast spells with such ease that the Head Girl could only counter her attacks.

Their duel grew so intense that the other pairs stopped to watch. Neville wanted to step in, but Seamus held him back.

Sparks of light flashed across the room for several minutes until Erine, spinning gracefully like a dancer, dodged Padma's Full Body-Bind Curse and immobilized her with conjured ropes that wrapped around her.

Padma collapsed to the floor, and Erine pointed her wand at her throat, a faint smile on her face.

"Do you surrender?" she asked, breathless.

Padma smiled back and nodded. Erine dispelled the ropes with a flick of her wand and helped her friend up.

They turned to face the group, who stood in stunned silence. After a few moments, Ernie began to applaud, soon joined by the others.

"This is the level you can expect to reach if you're diligent and practice your spells every day," Neville said, clapping louder than the rest.

Erine and Padma were soon surrounded by students eager to train with them. The younger members lined up for a chance to duel them, amusing the older D.A. members who jokingly pretended to be jealous.

"After a display like that, we're going to look bad," Seamus quipped.

"Speak for yourself," Ginny laughed. "I'm sure I can keep up."

Seamus drew his wand. "Oh, really? Prove it!"

Ginny pulled out her own wand, and the two friends engaged in a lighthearted duel, to the laughter of the other D.A. members.

The session lasted an hour and a half. By the end, everyone was drenched in sweat but wore satisfied smiles. They had given their all, showing their eagerness



to learn more and develop into skilled duelists. Neville noted the determination among the younger students to catch up to the seventh years.

"Don't try to learn everything at once," he advised them. "It's better to master the spells you know before moving on to new ones."

They all said their goodbyes and left the room in small groups, scattering down the hallways.

Neville lingered with those who had attended the previous night's meeting.

"I think it went well for a first class," he remarked, sinking into a thick cushion.

"Was it this intense when Harry taught you?" An asked.

They all shook their heads.

"Not at first," Ginny replied. "It took a few sessions before we found our rhythm and really started to improve."

"I remember Neville struggling quite a bit," Ernie interjected.

Everyone turned to look at him, and he had a thoughtful smile.

"But he soon became the fastest learner," Hannah added. "I recall you even kept up with Hermione and the Weasley twins."

Neville's cheeks flushed, unused to such praise. He gave Hannah a shy smile, which she returned with a friendly wink.

Before they left, they each retrieved the enchanted Galleons the room provided. The Ravenclaws left first, followed by the Hufflepuffs, with the Gryffindors bringing up the rear.

About ten minutes later, Neville and his friends gathered in the Great Hall, savoring a delicious dinner, proud of the initiative they had started.

Several times, Neville caught Hannah's gaze from the Hufflepuff table where she sat with Ernie. She sent him a few shy smiles, which Ginny noticed. Nudging him, she snapped him out of his reverie.

"Watch it, Neville," she teased. "You're starting to drool."

Neville wiped his chin and looked at her.

"Looks like a girl's caught your eye," she teased.

He frowned. "I hadn't really thought about it before, but I must admit, Hannah's very pretty."



He started to say more but stopped at Ginny's amused smirk.

"Oh, go on and laugh," he grumbled. "You weren't any better with Harry."

She nodded, a pensive look in her eyes.

Resuming the D.A. sessions and captaining the Gryffindor Quidditch team reminded her of the man she loved. She couldn't help but think of him and the dangers he faced.

He wasn't alone. Ron and Hermione were by his side, taking great risks to defeat Voldemort.

On her part, she knew she had to do her best to excel and secure her future. She needed to prepare the next generation of D.A. members for what Ernie had warned them about.

She leaned over to Neville and whispered in his ear.

"Have you heard about Potterwatch?"

Neville shook his head.

"I was going to ask you the same thing," he admitted. "I thought your brothers would've mentioned it."

Ginny chuckled.

"Are you kidding? They didn't even let me join the rescue mission for Harry."

Neville nodded. "I understand your parents' point of view. With six sons risking their lives against You-Know-Who, I can see why they'd want to protect you."

Ginny wanted to reply but saw the resolute look in Neville's eyes and thought better of it.

She knew he was right. She had turned sixteen a few months earlier, and her mother had forbidden her from joining such a dangerous operation.

This was why she wanted to dedicate more of herself to her passions. Professor McGonagall had informed her that scouts from major Quidditch teams would be attending the final match against Slytherin, which was scheduled for March.

In the first two matches, she had managed to assemble a strong team. In the opening game, Gryffindor had struggled against the new Hufflepuff team, led by Zacharias Smith who was as aggressive as any Slytherin. The Beaters had to make multiple attempts to knock him off his broom and interrupt his relentless attacks on Garrett's goalposts, which he defended as best he could.



Ginny's thoughts were interrupted by Neville and his friends as they left the table. She stood up and joined them as they chatted about the first AD training session.

Neville noticed her from the corner of his eye and turned as if to fetch her, but his attention was redirected by the arrival of Hannah, accompanied by Rolf Scamander, who waited with a gleaming white smile.

"Hi, Neville," Rolf greeted. "Hannah told me you wanted to talk to me."

He glanced at the petite blonde, who gave him a wink before heading back to her friends with a giggle.

"Hi, Rolf," he replied. "I don't know what Hannah told you, but I was curious about Attilius."

He paused before continuing. "I know he's your friend, but it seems like something happened over the holidays."

Rolf hesitated before replying. "I think you're right," he sighed. "I feel like he's hiding something from me. He mentioned a discovery he made in the castle."

"A discovery?" Neville asked, surprised. "What kind of discovery?"

Rolf shrugged. "I don't know," he admitted. "He only told me that he made a big mistake — an unforgivable mistake."

Neville's eyes widened, eager to learn more.

"The only other thing he mentioned was that he's been increasingly interested in Salazar Slytherin these past few months."

Neville nodded silently. The pieces were beginning to fall into place in his mind. Attilius must have stumbled upon the Chamber of Secrets and uncovered something new about its creator.

He knew he had to act quickly. He needed to talk to someone in authority, someone who could keep an eye on Attilius. He needed to speak with Professor McGonagall.

He left Rolf there and began his search for the Gryffindor Head of House. Glancing at the staff table, he noted her absence. Leaving the Great Hall, he hurried in the direction of her office. He ran up the stairs, skidded across the second-floor landing, and dashed towards the Transfiguration classroom.

As he reached the door, he froze at the sound of a voice that made his blood run cold.





“You shouldn’t concern yourself with Mr. Malkin,” advised the slow, rough voice of Professor Snape. “It’s not your place to punish him.”

“And why not?!” she exclaimed indignantly.

Neville gently pushed open the door and peered through the gap. He caught sight of the dark figure of the Headmaster, his black, greasy hair falling limply over his dark eyes and hooked nose.

“Mr. Malkin falls under Professor Slughorn’s authority.”

McGonagall appeared ready to argue, but Snape cut her off with a wave of his hand.

“There is no need to continue this discussion, Minerva. The matter is settled.”

Neville watched as the Headmaster turned halfway around, his black robes billowing as he strode toward the door. Neville barely had time to step back before Snape’s hostile face appeared on the other side.

A twisted smile stretched across Snape’s lips.

“Mr. Longbottom... why am I not surprised to find you here?”

Neville tried to respond, but the Headmaster didn’t give him a chance. He turned away and walked toward his office, leaving Neville watching him until he disappeared down the hallway.

“Mr. Longbottom?” Professor McGonagall asked, surprised. “What brings you here?”

Neville moved forward and settled into one of the tartan-covered chairs in front of her desk.

“What’s going on?” he asked his Transfiguration professor. “Why is the Headmaster trying to cover up Attilius’s actions?”

She removed her square glasses and rubbed her eyes.

“I’m not sure what Mr. Malkin has awakened, but there have been several odd occurrences in recent weeks,” she explained. “To start with, Professor Dumbledore’s tomb has been desecrated.”

Neville’s eyes widened.

“Who would commit such a dreadful act?”

McGonagall sighed. “There’s only one person I can think of capable of such a heinous crime.”



“And what did they take from the tomb?”

“The body of our late Headmaster is still there and appears untouched,” she explained.

Neville rubbed his chin thoughtfully. “Maybe whoever opened the tomb was looking for something else.”

“There’s only one missing item.”

Neville frowned in confusion.

“What is it?”

McGonagall’s gaze grew panicked.

“Professor Dumbledore’s wand... the Elder Wand.”

