



**THE LEGENDARIUM
OF WITCHES**







WORLDBUILDING & WRITING

Robin Hegedűs

“SEPTIMA” CHAPTER WRITING

Michael Durrant

TRANSLATION

Csenge Dávid

PROOFREADING

Michael Durrant & Tünde Máté

EDITING

Ágnes Kismárton & Villó Farkas

CULTURAL CONSULTATION

James Mendez Hodes & Réka Szilárdi

with

Barbara Bernát witch arts

& Villó Farkas illustrations

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ALBERT





Albert is one of the few people who have been fully aware of their magical powers from an early age. Even as a baby he often transformed objects given to him: a worn-out rag into a teddy bear, a rusty nail into a lead soldier, even the firewood turned into a rocking horse the second Albert laid eyes on it. However, the magic did not last forever: the moment his attention was steered away by the porridge his mother was cooking, all the toys shifted back to being shabby household items. Albert's mother cautioned him and begged him to stop, explaining that the entire family could lose their lives to the pitchforks of the angry townsfolk if someone got wind of his magical abilities. As Albert grew into a teenager he became less and less concerned about his mother's warnings and grew increasingly daring every day. Every now and then he resorted to his spells chasing after a girl's heart, showering his loved one with spectacular gifts at the snap of his finger, or in times

of need, he used his illusions to make some money. It was the following string of events that led to his expulsion from his hometown: first, he transformed a crate of rotten onions into crunchy apples and made good money by selling them at the market, then he lost all his income gambling. When the usurer he owed money to tried to collect Albert's debt, he offered the unsuspecting loan shark a garden toilet he previously had transformed into a marvelous carriage. As could be expected, he was soon caught and taken to the debtors' prison in chains, but while there, he convinced the priest visiting him that he would replace the old, storm-beaten church with a beautiful cathedral with his powers given to him by God if he were set free. Naturally, this miracle was not permanent either, and Albert was last seen riding out of the city, on a pig that he temporarily promoted to a noble steed, to seek new opportunities.



ALICE



Alice was not expecting anything good when she was introduced to her soon-to-be husband. Her sisters left home one by one, glowing after their wedding but came back to visit later with a broken spirit. One of her sisters got married to a wealthy cobbler, but it soon became clear that wealth was not enough to make up for their home constantly smelling of the husband's smoking pipe. Another sister married a sea merchant who grew tired of living the life of a simple law-abiding citizen, and soon returned to his old ways he carelessly enjoyed as a pirate. All Alice knew about her husband Bernal was that he was a man of science, and her mother was overjoyed at the idea of Alice parading around from mansion to mansion on the arm of her celebrated husband. Alice's fears turned into reality. Bernal's expectations were much higher than what she was comfortable with; besides expecting a freshly



cooked meal on his table and a spotless house, during the day Alice also had to double as an assistant in his laboratory. With her many duties, she knew she could only catch up with her tasks if she learned all the experiments conducted by her husband and brought an end to his dilly-dally by inventing her own methods. Alice soon realized that Bernal was often bluffing and wasting his time with pointless experiments in hopes of a serendipitous discovery. Unlike her husband, Alice acquired more and more knowledge, often sneaking into the laboratory in the middle of the night to continue her research. Within a few months, she perfected a reduction process with which she managed to condense a cauldron of liquid into one tiny vial. One morning, after falling asleep next to her desk, she was awakened by her husband towering over her disapprovingly. During their quarrel, Bernal hastily gathered all of her notes and stormed out of the house. Alice cried, feeling crushed and defeated. She could see in her mind's eye the man, fueled by jealousy, throwing her findings in the fire. A few days later Alice was browsing in the market when several people approached her, congratulating on her husband's success. At first, Alice had no idea what the fuss was about but she soon discovered that Bernal was appointed the chemist of the royal court after he demonstrated his revolutionary reduction process to the royal trustee. She was angrily poking the fire in the laboratory when

Bernal got home and started rubbing up against his wife like a guilty pet. In the following days, Alice dived into her work, experimenting with a light-sensitive metal sheet. One afternoon, as she was working in the kitchen, she could hear that Bernal was rummaging through her notes. When she woke up the next morning, he was nowhere to be found. Alice packed her belongings into a rucksack, locking her most important laboratory equipment in a chest. She started walking towards the border of the city as she knew that Bernal had rushed to the mansion of the royal trustee with "his" new invention. Hiding in the shadow of the trees, she watched Bernal setting up everything according to her notes: he placed the light sensitive metal sheet in a wooden case behind a glass lens, with the trustee sitting on a podium in front of him. Bernal was walking around haughtily, checking his pocket watch from time to time, and when the right amount of time had passed he ran to the wooden case, took out the metal sheet and handed it to the trustee. Alice was the only one who knew that the trustee was looking at the image of a pig that she had developed onto the metal sheet just a few days before. As the trustee stood up furiously, Alice stepped out from the shadows, curtsied towards her husband, and then took off running as the men started shouting.



AYLANA



The signs were clear when Aylana was born that the child was unique: the moon turned red, water started flowing again from the dried out spring bordering their village, and the little girl was gripping onto the wolf fang amulet hanging from her mother's neck with six fingers on one hand. They had had to survive without a whisperer, a spiritual leader, for years by that point and illness had spread throughout the region decimating the population. The leaders of the tribe were mumbling in disbelief when they took a glance at the girl, saying they had to wait longer, until the spirits gifted them a real whisperer who would free the village from the curse. As Aylana grew older, the strange signs multiplied around her, but the leaders could not be convinced, instead appointing a rich farmer's son as the new whisperer.



The boy had no talent for magic whatsoever, but without his family's help the village would have faced starvation, so they had to come to terms with the boy dancing around the fire wearing antlers on his head, and beating the sacred drum embellished with motifs of deers left behind by their ancestors without any sense of rhythm. After the false rituals his father would always offer some sheep stew to his son's 'followers'. One night, Aylana had a terrible nightmare: the band's oldest basket weaving matron was being held captive by vipers with eyes flashing like rubies. The girl's hands moved involuntarily to free the suffering old woman from the serpents' grip. The next morning, she heard that the young whisperer was being celebrated for saving the old woman's life with an incantation, but the woman later beckoned Aylana over to tell her in private that she remembered her from the dream and knew exactly who she had to thank for her life. However, she said, times were hard and the truth of the Moon was hidden by arrogant clouds. She advised Aylana to leave and learn her craft elsewhere because, as the real messenger of the spirit world, she would not be safe from her wrongdoers if she stayed. Aylana took the advice and headed west, even stitching herself a pair of leather gloves to hide her eleventh finger. As she traveled from big cities to even bigger ones, the purpose of her embarking on this journey all those years ago faded. She enjoyed the buzz of the cities, but her dreams became chaotic, as if hundreds of voices were trying to outscreech one another in her head. She found a job as a maid working for a noble house, where her duties included everything from cleaning to disciplining children. One day, as she was returning from the store, she saw the lady of the house lying in the saloon, completely shattered—their house had been broken into and their youngest boy kidnapped. The city guards organized a search for the boy immediately and Aylana joined them as a volunteer. She was searching in the forest when night fell, so she set up camp under an oak tree and fell asleep. She had the clearest dream in a long time: a pack of wolves were chasing after a fawn that found shelter in a nearby cave. Aylana woke up startled and ventured off to the cave, using a torch to light the way. As she got to the cave, she noticed

the silhouette of the small boy in the shimmering light of the torch. He was covered in dirt but unharmed, and he explained how he had managed to escape and hide from his kidnappers. Aylana gave him a hug, covered him with a blanket and they both fell asleep. She was visited by a doe in her dream, who rubbed against her legs in appreciation for saving her son, and as she put her arms around the animal she could feel it transforming. When she looked up in her dream, she was holding a drum made from stretched out leather with a deer painted on it and decorated with bones and bells. She immediately recognised her ancestor's sacred relic. As dawn broke and the early light started shining into the cave, she noticed the drum from the dream, propped up against the rocks. Aylana knew that this gift from her ancestors came with tremendous responsibility, but she was happy to hold it in her hands and started to play a slow rhythm coming from deep within.



BERTA





Berta spent most of her life traveling on her sleigh, never staying longer than a few weeks in any given place. She traveled across the ice fields with her loyal dogs, journeying through snow covered trails and frozen rivers. When it was necessary, she sheltered with her canines in her tent made of leather, keeping each other warm with their body heat. Berta was well known across many villages and cities, the tinkling sounds of her sleigh giving her away as she approached the border of a town. The jingling sound was made by the thousands of glass containers and vials transported in her vehicle's trunk filled to the brim with a variety of ingredients and potions wobbling around during their transit. She set up her tent, built a fire and threw scented weeds on top of the flames. By the time she finished setting up her camp, people from the city had started to appear. She did not accept anything in exchange for her help, only wanting to hear stories from the people whose illnesses she was curing. They needed no further encouragement; everyone was happy to reminisce about their younger years or talk about their eventless daily routines as well as some exciting adventures. The people who she tended to all returned to their homes grateful having healed faster thanks to Berta's methods, but some of them experienced some peculiar changes. One person tried to recall what meal he had made for the previous year's Christmas feast, but the memory

of the holidays disappeared from his brain without a trace. A girl who picked berries looked down in amazement, suddenly having no idea why there was a healed bite wound on her shin. The prison guard had a tough time remembering why he had arrested the baker's wife the day before. As Berta was leaving, she stopped with her sleigh not far from the city so that her dogs were able to drink from the cold water of the spring whilst she conjured her compass from the leather pouches. The tool made of yellow brass had been passed on from mother to daughter, as had the duty to find the Wind Swindler, the thundering lord of deceptive weather, who had made Berta's family penniless many generations ago. As a small child, she would travel along on her mother's sleigh and when her mama's soul passed on, Berta had no choice but to continue the search. The Wind Swindler dashed across the regions, but Berta was onto him, collecting all of the memories in which the Wind Swindler appeared (naturally, without actually revealing his real identity to the simple folk). She had seen the Wind Swindler ripping the roof off from above the heads of family celebrating Christmas. She had witnessed it chasing the wolf into a garden and it making the baker's poor wife dance inappropriately by slipping under her skirt. And she had seen the Wind Swindler moving towards the west, so she knew where she had to go to continue her search.



BRYN



According to Bryn, the ink that got into their body as a child outweighed the amount of their mother's milk; their father was a printer and they used to toddle around him all the time, their hands black from touching the machines. The craft of a printer was admired and held in high esteem, and because their entire family devoted themselves to making books, they were almost as well-respected as monks. While others had a tanned complexion from working on the fields, they were running around the machines like pale, ink-stained ghosts trying to duplicate as many copies as they could from the volumes entrusted to their care. Bryn's father was obsessed with printing techniques, always coming up with structural innovations that allowed them to print the orders sharper, faster and with more colors. He was equally obsessed with the idea that the worldwide distribution



of books would generate huge progress in all corners of the world, so he tried to fulfill the requests of all his customers, even those with the most outlandish ideas.

He printed cookbooks, geological studies, announcements, poetry and religious works. One day, the apprentice of the region's most infamous witch hunter came through the door of his workshop clutching some wanted posters, hoping to produce more copies of them. Bryn's father refused his request as he did not wish to be involved with anything that would cause suffering to others. He believed in a world built by books, not destroyed by them. The apprentice dragged his feet out through the door, feeling humiliated. A few days later Bryn was on their way home when they spotted the exact same wanted posters that their father refused to duplicate among the announcements at the marketplace. As they were inspecting the drawings of women depicted with warts and evil grins on their faces, their eyes stumbled upon the distorted image of their father, with accusations of witchcraft and a price on his head. Bryn rushed home—the workshop was silent. They became mute for years, did not talk to anyone nor accept requests from customers, and by seeing the boarded-up windows, people started to believe that they too had perished. Everyone had forgotten about them by the time the first Witches' Clarion was published. In this newspaper, all the crimes of the leaders of the city and the church were enumerated, surrounded by illustrations of laughing witches. Even though the city guards immediately confiscated all of the copies, the Witches' Clarion was passed between people in secret, despite the fact that the mere possession of it was declared to be an act of heresy. Just when the scandal seemed to be calming down, a windstorm like no resident had ever seen swept through the streets carrying countless sheets of paper, and one could not

take a step without a copy of the Witches' Clarion sticking to the bottom of their shoe. Meanwhile, Bryn was already working on the third issue in their lair; they even enchanted the machines to make the depictions of the witches move on the pages, slapping their knees from laughter. A comprehensive search was ordered and Bryn's hiding place was soon discovered. But Bryn was prepared. They had known for a long time that they wanted to spread their derisive pamphlets all over the world, as this was their only opportunity to agitate their father's murderers. Right after they jumped on their horse, Bryn threw a big batch of newspapers in the air, and as the guards who were chasing after them stopped to pick the Clarions up, the papers immediately burst into flames in their hands. Bryn's laughter echoed throughout the abandoned streets for days after.



DRAGOMIR





It took a long time for Dragomir to understand why all the other kids suddenly fell silent the second he walked by them, why the parents started whispering to each other with fear in their eyes and why the vendors at the market were so exceptionally kind to him whenever his parents sent him to buy some vegetables. It was difficult for him to comprehend that while others had to pay for the crops, they received goods without the expectation of any compensation and his parents spent their days at home while every other adult had to work hard. His father rarely left the house, and when he did, it was only before daybreak. Dragomir's father always carried a rucksack with him that was as tall as a human and he carefully locked the front door every time he left. His mother used to command Dragomir to his room when his father left and he was not allowed to go downstairs until dinner time. Always the same script: Dragomir heard the cork of his father's flask pop as he got home, his mother rushed to do the laundry and then use the mangle, and Dragomir saw from the window of his room that it was his father's clothes that were being cleaned. One day, he decided to sneak out through the window and follow his father to finally unveil the big secret of their family. The slow steps of his father made the townsfolk clear out of his way, similarly to when Dragomir showed up on the streets. He followed his father at the crack of dawn to the main square, which was surprisingly crowded at such an early hour. Hiding behind a carriage, Dragomir watched his father take out an enormous ax from his rucksack. The choreography that followed

reminded the boy of a play where each movement was carefully planned and well-rehearsed, and the suspense was palpable. Only when his father raised the ax in the air did Dragomir realise that he is the son of an executioner, thus wearing a mark of terror on his forehead until the end of time.

Dragomir decided to join the army, where his comrades were unsuspecting of his pedigree. It was almost a relief that before the battles he was able to experience a different kind of fear. In the scented fields of the region an elderly soldier started teaching him mystical healing practices which were forbidden to even talk about back at home as doing so would result in encountering his father's ax.

Some years had passed when the news came about the death of the old executioner and traditionally Dragomir was required to take over the position. He arrived home with a myriad of forbidden knowledge, hoping that the fear from his position would prevent people from realizing that he was no stranger to ancient rituals. He decided to take the responsibility that comes with the ax but also promised himself that no innocent person would die by his hand. Sometimes it was enough to visit an alleged eye-witness, who, seeing the determination in Dragomir's eyes, decided to give up their accusations. At other times, Dragomir used an illusion to make the townsfolk believe that the execution had been carried out properly while he set the innocent witches free, convincing them to never set foot back in the town again.



EDITH





Edith's family grew citrus for a living. Her father was in charge of handling business, while other members of the large extended family each took care of specific tasks on the seemingly endless fields. Even as a baby, Edith was always outside in the citrus orchard with her mother, and as soon as she was old enough to climb a ladder, she was ordered to prune and harvest with the others. Due to the sheer amount of work that had to be done, she barely saw anything other than the orange groves: if she was hungry, she had oranges, if she wanted to play, they carved toys out of dry branches, and when she fell ill, they used the herbs that grew in the shade to make a compress. One day, during harvest, a snake slithered out from under the bushes, and Edith was the first to notice. The reptile was staring at her and flicking its tongue when suddenly Edith realized she could distinctly hear the snake's thoughts in her head. The animal expressed its careful curiosity and asked the girl for directions. Edith answered with uncertainty, showing the way with her finger, when her cousin overheard her mumbling and immediately rushed to her rescue, hitting the reptile repeatedly with a stick until it no longer proved to be a threat. Edith could still hear the whimpers of the snake afterwards and knew it was still alive. Carefully, she lifted the snake into her basket and ran back to the house making sure nobody could see what she was up to. She secretly took care of the animal, tending to its wounds with her previously acquired knowledge of healing concoctions, hoping that remedies that work for people would also work for reptiles. As soon as the small creature was strong enough to accept and hungrily consume a mouse offered by its owner, Edith named it Apep. She knew that keeping a snake as a pet would be disapproved of, so she only dared to visit Apep's lair at night to strike up conversations with the reptile. Despite her cautiousness, one night her aunt caught Edith strolling in the moonlit garden with the snake wrapped around her arm and she woke up the whole house by cursing up a storm. They all

started to whisper about a curse that the girl had brought upon them, about demons that would rot the fruit, dry up the wells and deteriorate their health. Edith knew that they were going to kill Apep and she would also have to suffer the consequences of her actions. She remembered what one of her older cousins had gone through when she was accused of witchcraft a few years back. Edith set off running; she could find her way in the moonlight better than anyone else. She hid in a nearby abandoned barn for a few days, keeping her ears and eyes open and winced at every sound she heard. She soon realized that in fact nobody from her large family was following or looking for her. Edith began her journey without any destination, but as soon as she saw someone suffering—be it any type of creature of the Earth—, she would not hesitate to utilize her ever-growing healing abilities to help those in need.



EUSTACE



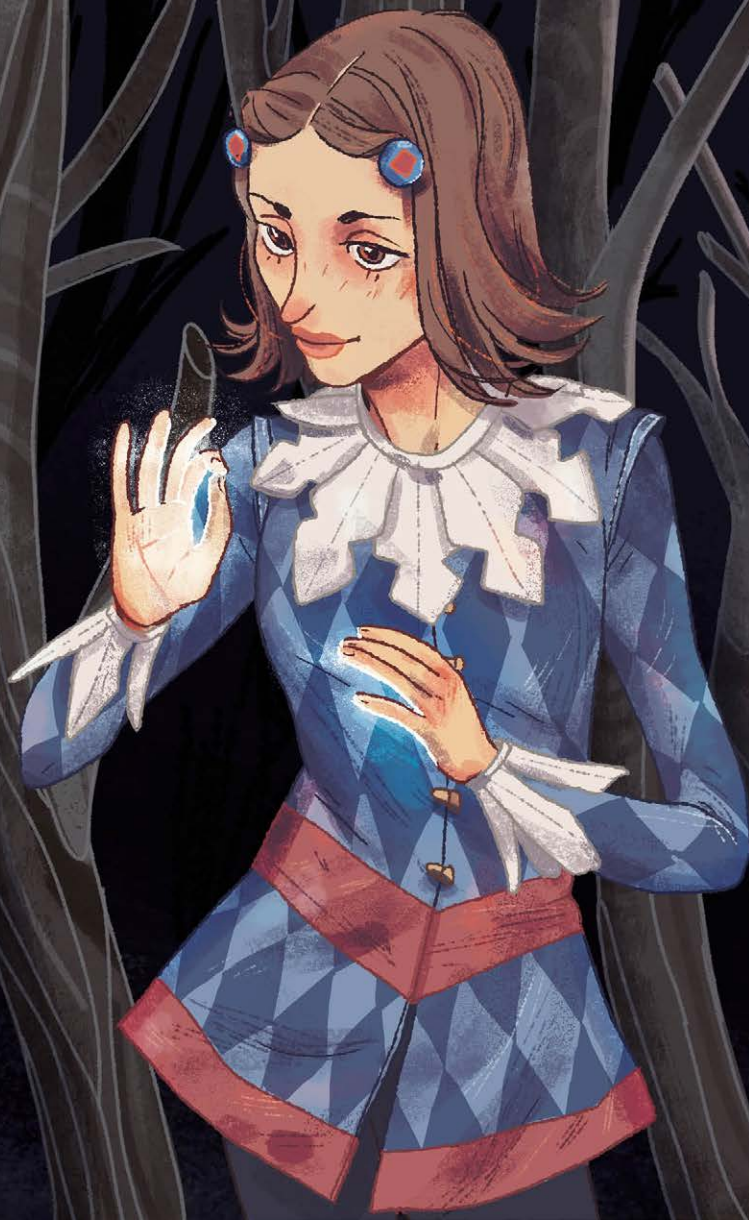


Eustace's parents were merchants, and to ensure a prosperous fate for their son, they had him apprenticed to priests. He was not particularly interested in theology but due to his studies, he had access to private libraries where he would educate himself on subjects such as astrology, mathematics, eastern medicine and anything else he would find. Following his confirmation, churchgoers idolized him because in his parables and personal appointments he gave advice and tips that greatly surpassed the teachings of the church. With his growing popularity also came jealousy, and some people started spreading rumors of him possessing demonic powers for luring in victims. These skeptics watched his every move until they could figure out a way to tarnish his reputation and cause his downfall within the church. Meanwhile, malicious rumors were circulating in the town about the baker's daughter in the neighboring village, who allegedly carved hexes onto the bottom of bread loaves. Everyone avoided her until the local

hooper fell in love with her, accepting the fact that his barrels would not sell as they used to. The priest in the village refused to officiate their marriage, so they sought out Eustace's help who, naturally, approved of their wedding. His foes acted immediately and accused him of promoting witchcraft. Eustace did not wait for his trial and punishment, instead he took sail on one of his parents' merchant ships. He threw his church badges into the sea—feeling a huge weight lift off his shoulders—and hung the key of the library around his neck, which symbolized accessible knowledge for all. Leaving his limitations behind, he immersed himself in studying magic, but the rumors were also blown about by the sea winds and soon forbidden lovers started to approach him when they noticed the key hanging from his neck, in hopes of being wed by Eustace before the eyes of God—whichever God they worshiped.



HAZEL





Hazel grew up in a peculiar family, one in which it was almost expected from her to be extraordinary too. Her father was a sword and fire swallower, her mother entertained the aristocrats in the city with juggling, among her siblings there was one who took pleasure in eating utensils, while others could lift unbelievably heavy weights. In a world before circuses these entertainers would travel in small groups, and they would not spend more than one night in any given place: as soon as they had collected all the money for their acts from their audience, they moved on. They did not like being thought of as anything more than a disappearing shadow on the planks set up on the main square. Hazel's dad often made a point of staying in motion, because those who settled down became a target for rumors, and that would be the equivalent of a death sentence for their kind. Hazel's two older sisters had incredibly flexible bodies, so they often performed as acrobats. They transported poles and divans in their carriage, from which they built a tower in the middle of the visited market square where they would perform their show. Hazel, lacking any interesting talents, would stand under the tower in her pretty diamond patterned clothes and go around with a hat in her hand to collect the money from audience members. One day, Hazel was in the middle of giving the signal for her sisters to start when she realized that Marietta had slipped as she was taking up her position and although Dominika tried to reach after her, their sister started to fall. A plank sticking out lower in the structure caught her: Hazel immediately knew that there was a big problem as Marietta fell

on her hand and it was obviously broken. Hazel felt useless and around her the crowd started to grumble: this was not what they paid for. She reached towards her sister involuntarily, even though she was meters away. Suddenly she felt as though her palm was touching something and she started to feel around, even though her fingers were only gripping the air. Out of nowhere she could feel Marietta's sweaty skin with her fingertips and as she was feeling around in the midst of sweat drops, she suddenly felt bone sticking out. She had no idea how, but her palm was all of a sudden getting warmer, and Marietta's bone, muscles, skin became liquified in her hands and as it all solidified again, her fingers were caressing her sister's unharmed skin. As she looked up, she could see Marietta collecting herself and looking baffled whilst touching her arm and in the midst of the ever louder whistles she finally began her routine. Not only did she survive the fall without any injuries, but the performance was also a hit. The story they told afterwards was that the 'accident' was a planned part of the act to fire up the crowd even more. Hazel's mother called her daughter to the side after the show; she was the only one that knew who they had to thank for Marietta's miraculous recovery. She knew that Hazel did not need to learn stretching exercises or juggling, instead she showed her daughter how she should make healing potions from the plants found next to the road. Soon enough everyone knew across the region that when the family of traveling performers arrived in their towns they would not only offer entertainment to the curious but also a solution for the ill.



JOHANNA



Johanna has been carrying tremendous responsibility on her shoulders ever since she was a young girl. She was seven when her mother succumbed to illness, and her father, the forest ranger, was always out keeping poachers away from the count's hunting grounds. Johanna did all the housework and took care of her father all by herself, and she spent the majority of her time alone as people like her were not welcome in the city. Occasionally, Johanna's father let her come along on his patrols where he taught her to read tracks and showed her how to spot and deactivate the evil traps of illegal hunters. Johanna often embarked on animal tracking adventures alone in the forest, which she kept secret from her father. When she came across the footprints of a boar or a deer, she placed her hand in the imprint and the images of the



animals appeared in her mind and she would see them running across the muddy path beforehand. One summer afternoon, while she was treating her father's tools with oil on the porch of their forest hut, three figures emerged from the bushes; she could tell from their uniforms they were guards from the city and they were looking for an escaped prisoner. The leader explained that they found a piece of fabric from the prisoner's clothes caught in a nearby rose bush, therefore they suspected he was closeby. Johanna took the bloodstained white piece of cloth in her hand. She had a strange vision of a man with a stubble hiding behind the thorny bush, peaking out carefully then reaching into his sack for a flask. He tried to drink, but the flask was bone dry. As he cursed and shook his fist in anger, his arm got caught on a thorny twig, drawing blood. Johanna returned the torn fabric to the leader of the city guards and without saying a word about what she had seen, she told the men to follow her. She led them straight to the river, where they indeed found the escaped prisoner. She knew that the completely parched man would be there, but she could not reveal her secret to the city guards, explaining instead that she used the tracking skills she had acquired from her father. The captain was impressed. He returned to the hut a few days later to offer Johanna a job as a city guard. Even though her father worried about her, Johanna proved to be more stubborn and he eventually let her go. She became the captain's assistant and was assigned a small room in the barracks. Initially, the city guards watched her every step with piercing eyes, but they were afraid to go against the captain's will. Johanna knew exactly how to conjure her visions without anyone noticing, how to examine the events of the past, resulting in her becoming the most successful member of the city guard. Soon enough her fellows accepted her

presence, but the situation was much different in the city: even though they feared the uniform, they often mocked the girl who "forgot where she belongs". She knew that her visions were not able to keep her safe forever, so she began her search, investigating the memories of objects. After countless attempts, she finally stumbled upon a witch's belongings in the storage room full of objects the city guards had confiscated, and dug deep into the past in order to master her new craft. But she saw only horrible memories from the witch: the commander had cooperated with the witch hunters to capture her. Johanna couldn't believe her eyes, but she instantly knew she couldn't find justice in her hometown anymore.



KATHERINA





Not all witches show signs of magic abilities at a young age. Katherina, for one, was well over forty when she started to demonstrate supernatural powers. When Katherina was not occupied with keeping her mischievous sons in line, she worked as an embroiderer in her husband's tailoring workshop. She had already given up on having a daughter when she learned that she was expecting a baby—at quite an advanced age, as many believed. Katherina dreamed of the most beautiful clothes for the baby, she worked on them until late at night in the workshop, thinking about the

little girl she was going to give birth to. Sewing diligently, she barely noticed as she threaded a moonbeam shining through her window into her needle and continued to embroider wonderful patterns using the beam of light. Everyone wanted to see the miraculously illuminated patterns, which later lulled her daughter to sleep. As the girl grew older, Katherina acquired more and more magical abilities: in a coat lined with the autumn sun, her husband never felt the cold; the captured essence of the summer downpour cleaned their home in the blink of an eye; the tailor's

advertisements arrived with the morning wind to the neighboring cities. But when her daughter fell ill, no supernatural force was enough to save her. Katherina ran away in a delirious state and disappeared into the winter night, having no idea where she was when she regained her consciousness. She turned to the icicles for help, pleading to be able to see through their lens. She found her way home in the end but the frost settled into one of her eyes permanently. From time to time she can still see vague silhouettes of future events in the bluish gloom.



LUKE





In the Winged Elephant pub, Luke was often told by his customers that what he was doing with drinks was magical. Hearing this, his face always became serious and he started to speak so quietly that his audience had to lean closer to hear him. He confessed that he got his powers from the Devil, but anyone who would learn this secret would instantly find themselves in a boiling cauldron down in the deepest pits of hell. Caught in the crossfire of nervous stares in the dead silence he closed his eyes meaningfully and as he opened them again, he burst out in an incredibly loud laugh that filled the entire joint. Luke knew what people wanted, he catered to their hearts' deepest desires with the right flavors and smells, ensuring they would return to his establishment in the future. He knew which of his customers enjoyed a little spice in their hot watery wine, he knew who needed aromas that ensured oblivion mixed in their beer and he was aware of customers who needed some crumbled up leaves in their soup bowls in order to resolve feuds that had been going on for decades. The Winged Elephant had become well-known across the region, but when the war broke out, most of the customers disappeared. Luke had to help customers overcome more and more sorrow everyday, but his reserves were running low and supply chains stalled. The basis of wartime cooking is substitution; Luke felt as though he was learning more about the ingredients than ever before. Where others would only see small dirt mounds, he suspected undiscovered mushrooms lurking underneath the ground, he replaced spices that used to be imported from far away lands with local plants, and he tasted everything that he managed to get his hands on. It started to become suspicious that even in the midst of starvation, the owner of the Winged Elephant was always able to fill the glasses and plates of his customers. A captain visited the pub one day and told Luke that he had heard about his talent in the kitchen and his ability to find the right solutions to all the problems at hand, and that the army wanted to enlist his aid. Luke shook his head, so

the man confronted him, telling him that he was aware of the type of magic being practiced behind the bar. The innkeeper laughed at the accusations, but the captain's face did not flinch; he was absolutely serious. The military man made it clear that if Luke decided to decline the offer and they had to look for someone else, he would only be able to utilize his talents in the prison cafeteria amongst his fellow inmates. Either way Luke had to say goodbye to the Winged Elephant, but he decided to try a third option. In the semi-darkness of dawn he stepped outside of his pub's door, lifted the small statue depicting a flying elephant off the wall and hid it in his rucksack as he set forth on his journey. He wandered aimlessly with his head hanging low and he swore that once the turbulence of the world around him settled, he would purchase a house where the Winged Elephant could open up again.



MARTHA



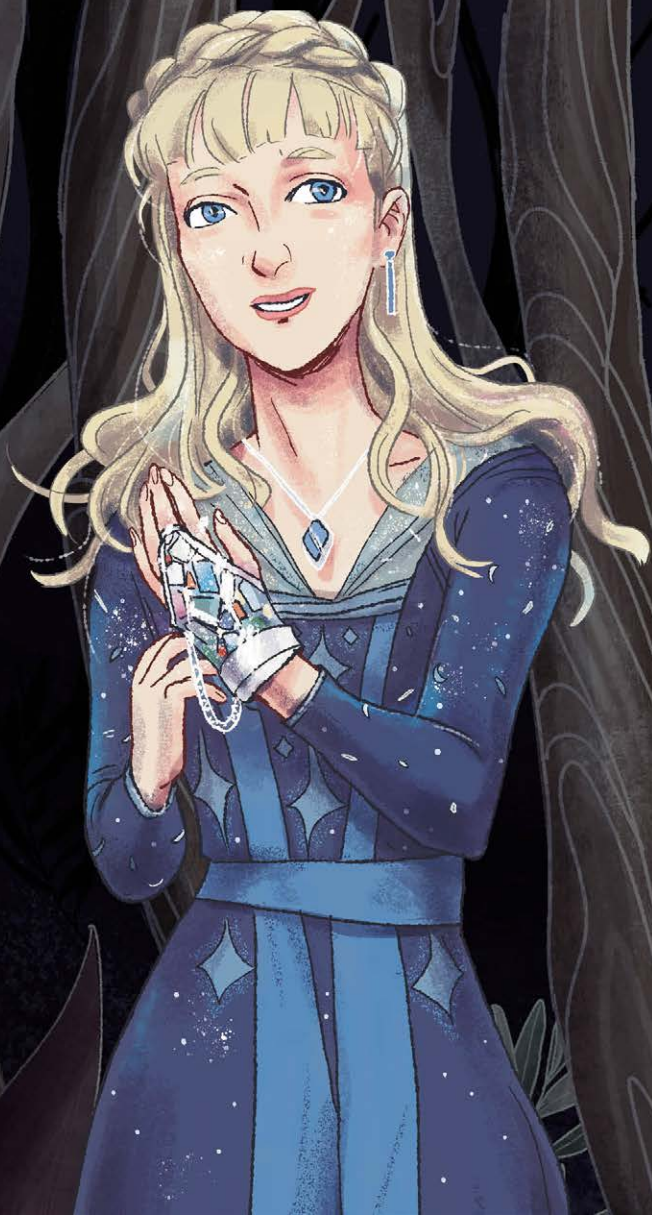


Martha had never left the town she was born in, yet she felt like she had a special connection with the entire world. She rarely saw her father because he was always out sailing the seas, but when he finally came back, wonderful gifts appeared from his ship's cargo hold. He mainly traded spices and as Martha inhaled the scents seeping through the spice sacks, she began to visualize the fabled remote islands her father told her many tales of. They had a tiny store with a large storage room near the main square where they processed and sold the most curious goods from faraway lands. Her mother always frowned as she watched her children idolize the reprobate sailor, who showered them with gifts and left for months again soon after. One time, Martha's father surprised her with the feather of a special bird, which she sharpened and started to use for writing letters. A few weeks later, her mother ordered her to tidy up one of the storage rooms. She angrily swept the floor, but when she peeked into the store she saw her mother gossiping with a customer about some tasteless local rumor, so she decided to rest a little on a sack of dried juniper berries. She took her sharpened feather and began to write a message, more precisely a love letter: her pen sizzled on the paper as she vigorously scribbled, crossed out and rewrote words and sentences. When her mother interrupted her and called her to the store, she tore the letter into little pieces and threw them

next to the crates of allspice in the corner. When she returned to the storage room, she was greeted with such a surprising sight that she had to cover her mouth to prevent herself from screaming. Standing straight in front of her was a figure 6 feet and 5 inches tall, his body built entirely of spices. Martha quickly shut the door behind her and moved closer to observe the mysterious motionless statue. The creature did not react to anything but the feather given to her by her father started to quiver as she got closer to him. Martha gathered the pieces of her letter only to realize that the piece that completes a sentence with the word 'live' was still missing. She scribbled 'talk' on a slip of paper and threw it into the creature's mouth, who coughed a few times and started to speak in a deep baritone voice. Martha later realized that she had created a golem with her enchanted feather: a magical creature called to life by a person with powers beyond the ordinary world, an entity that lives to serve their summoner. With the help of the golem it took half the time to clean up the storage room. Martha had no idea whether her father deliberately gifted her a helper after seeing that she was kept on such a tight leash by her mother, or this serendipitous surprise was handed to her by fate. Regardless, she knew she was destined to be much more than someone who mops and scours the floor in a store.



MATHILDA



Mathilda was born in the faraway north, but her fondest memories were from when she was a little girl living in a land where the air was filled with loud laughter and the scent of basil, the sun sparkled on the waves of the sea and mysterious creatures lived below the surface. Mathilda's mother, Sarah was an intelligent woman with dark skin, curly hair and a great sense of humor. Her father, Aldo—who managed a glass blowing workshop together with Sara—was a bulky man, known for his warm smile and confidence.

One day, Sarah and Aldo were busy preparing a large cargo when a mirror that was to be shipped to a distant province broke into millions of pieces with a loud crash. Amongst the shards stood a four year old girl, her skin sparkling as if she had just stepped out of a bright world behind the mirror. Aldo, who regained his composure



first after the initial dismay, approached the girl, crouched down next to her and greeted her with a smile. He assured the girl that everything was fine and Sarah offered the startled child some breakfast. When the girl finally calmed down, she ate the food with pleasure and a great appetite. Soon, she started speaking, but in a language that was foreign to Sarah and Aldo. Aldo had previously heard tales about communities that would exile anyone just for being different, and he also knew that blonde-haired children with pale complexions were considered to be witches and were left behind in the wilderness to become prey for animals. At night, when the child was put to bed, she pointed at herself and said the name "Mathilda". From then on, there was at least this one word that all three of them understood. To make Mathilda fall asleep, Sarah sang a lullaby to her, and as the child closed her eyes, her

lips curled into a smile and she started to gleam like the full moon.

From that moment on, Sarah and Aldo raised and taught Mathilda as their own daughter, frequently playing and traveling together, and soon the growing girl mastered both the language and the trade of her parents. The customers of the workshop would always look at the girl helping around the shop like she was some strange ornamental object herself, with her milky blonde hair and brilliantly white skin unlike anyone the people of this region had ever seen. Sarah and Aldo knew that their daughter was special and not only compared to the children her age, but because she also possessed some kind of power they had neither seen nor heard about anywhere before. Whenever Mathilda let her feelings get the best of her, she shone with a warm light, and if

she really liked a hand mirror, a perfume vial or a glass bowl, these objects lit up with her.

Her parents were people with common sense, and they were aware that not everyone was as accepting as them, so all three of them learned self-defense skills from the mercenaries who were responsible for protecting the tradeships. In addition, they made a piece of jewelry for Mathilda to wear on the back of her hand so it could collect her light and she could direct it into the eyes of potential attackers to blind them. She only had to use it once when a stranger in a hooded robe started chasing her, but this occasion alone was enough for her to understand that her abilities could not only make her a target, but they could also help her escape dangerous situations.



NICHOLAS





Nicholas has always felt as though he was born in the wrong place and at the wrong time. In the tales that his mother read to him, he learnt about grandiose feasts being served in royal courts, about adventurers cutting through balmy groves and flying over cities smelling of spices on their magic carpets. As he closed his eyes, he got a whiff of the scent of magnificent masquerades, but as he opened them again, all of the beauty disappeared and the reality of the pungent smell coming from the nearby slaughterhouse hit his nose. His father worked as a butcher, but Nicholas could not be of any help to him. He was too weak to stack the produce, to handle the butcher's knife and his stomach could not get used to meat processing. Instead he would sit in the front to handle payments and to politely chat with customers in the hopes of making use of his flowery, ornate way of speaking. One time a well-to-do lady entered the store, and Nicholas did not even know what to make of the presence of such a refined being. He closed his eyes and took a slow, deep breath of the wonderful fragrance that came in with the lady. As he looked up, he was startled by the owner of the scent as she was standing right in front of him. In his embarrassment, he gave a compliment on how well the orange flower, the cinnamon, and the aroma of ambergris complemented one another in the woman's perfume. The lady was surprised by the accuracy of the boy's description and offered him a visit to her husband's perfume shop in the city center. She thought they might be able to make

use of a nose like his. Nicholas took her up on the offer, and he passed his master exam later with flying colors. The customers put more and more faith into his expertise. He became more confident and as he started to familiarize himself with the ingredients, he began experimenting. He created a personalized perfume for a countess who was rather short, and by mixing a bit of porcini extract in the unique essential oils, the woman—to her great surprise—immediately grew a few centimeters. A local courtesan was complaining about the fact that she was losing clients because she was getting older, so Nicholas stirred a rare nectar into her perfume, which would smoothen out her wrinkles. She attracted men just like an eccentric tropical flower would lure in bees. A merchant confided in Nicholas, telling him about a prosperous academic job opportunity at the royal court that he wanted to obtain, but it was obvious that he did not have the qualifications for the position. After taking his time to collect all the right ingredients, Nicholas created the perfect mixture, in which the scents of leather from old parchments were combined with the sweet sulfuric fumes filling the laboratories and the smoky tartness of tallow candles. After a while, Nicholas realized he wanted more, he felt confined between the walls of the small perfume parlor. He convinced his master to let him go on a scavenging journey to acquire new ingredients and return with scents they had never experienced before.



NINA



Nina had admired the sea all her life, her gaze often getting lost between the millions of waves, but she never would have thought that there was something out there for her in the world that lay beyond the edge of the lands. The island where she lived was not particularly large: it only had one big harbor and a long dense grove that stretched across the land. There was also a fortress that marked the border of a long lost ruler's empire; the building had shed all the military defense equipment during the long years and now the portholes were planted with flowers, the gunpowder storage room was used to store cured meats hanging from the ceiling and the barracks were transformed into guest rooms. Ships with the most eclectic shapes and sails docked in the bay of the island so the passengers could rest and share their goods among each other and the islanders. Nina's foster parents were marvelous hosts and returning travelers knew that the price of goods should not be mentioned in their house, but rather they should leave something from their cargo as an exchange for their stay, and by doing so they would always be welcome back when the silhouettes of their ships would appear again on the horizon. Nina was allowed to roam around the island, and on one hot summer day, she was resting in the shadow of the trees in the grove and listening to the leaves rustling in the wind coming from the sea. When she opened her eyes, she realized that an old lady was towering above her, her skin so deeply wrinkled that she almost gave the impression of being an oak tree



without its roots. The old lady asked Nina what she was doing, to which she explained she was listening to the trees. The lady nodded, and asked what they were saying. Nina did not understand the question but she went with it. The two of them started eavesdropping on the trees together, listening to their rustling, the squirming, the snapping of branches, just like a strange orchestra. Nina moved her feet to the rhythm and started to sing, without even knowing where the melody had come from.

The old lady, nodding along, broke off a branch from one of the trees and she started carving it with a knife she had just conjured up. The sun had already circled around the sky when, from between her wood chip covered, wrinkled hands, a flute appeared. The woman said that this was her gift of appreciation in exchange for the beautiful concert Nina had performed with the trees. Nina was overjoyed with the gift, holding it close to her chest as she started running towards the fortress to show her parents. As she looked back, the old lady was nowhere to be seen, only the rugged trees remained in sight resting their heads on each other. Visitors of the fortress would marvel at the sound of the flute, wounds would heal faster, the sleepless would finally find rest due to the melodies and the traveling philosophers would jump on the table to share their great ideas with other guests, all inspired by the music. The island was not a desirable destination for marauders, since there were no riches, just

simple welfare within the walls of the fortress. One day however, a feared group of pirates docked their ship, searching purposefully. They turned the place upside down, until in one of the towers they found Nina as she was playing the flute. Nina was scared, but the pirates were surprisingly gentle. They took her to their captain on the ship, a man with a large beard and a turban, who was trembling with pain. "Although my men are holding the swords, I would still like to bow my head in front of you," he said and did just the same. "I am tortured by horrible demons that do not let me rest at night. The way I heard, there has not been a single soul whose suffering could not be cured by the sound of your flute". Nina started playing and her ballad filled the captain's room, the lights dimmed around them and a little girl's shape started to glimmer in the captain's lap. The man gave her a hug, whispered to her and gave kisses on her forehead while sobbing. As the song ended, the room became dark again and Nina slowly backed out. The pirates were truly relieved when they heard their leader snoring, and they told Nina that he had not been able to sleep since his daughter's death, as if he had to stay awake to wait for her, the one who left without a proper farewell. They rewarded Nina generously, and told her that they were willing to take her anywhere on the seven seas. She had never had ambitions of travelling overseas before, but she realized it was only because it had not been her time to leave yet.



OTTO





Otto was born into a noble family, second in the line of succession. He was always worried about his older brother's deteriorating health because he knew if his brother passed away, all the attention and responsibility would fall onto him. He was much more intrigued by war than his family obligations, the thrill of which he could replace by hunting in times of peace. One day, during a hunting trip he was chasing a shadow and got lost in the dense forest where he found himself standing face to face with an enormous boar. In the blink of an eye, he could feel tusks piercing through his flesh in between his ribs and suddenly a red mist descended over everything. He awakened in a hut as a middle-aged woman was tending to his wounds with ointments. The peculiar mumbling and hand gestures resulting in his wounds slowly closing up made it apparent that he was in the company of a witch. Every man's worst nightmare is to be in a trap like this, but as the gentle movements of her hands cured his aching body he couldn't help but to fall in love with the woman. His friends and family thought that he was becoming more and more obsessed with hunting but

in reality, he was spending most of his time with the witch. The woman revealed her magic to him and Otto was very susceptible to it—which was quite common amongst the offspring of noble families according to her. After a while, Otto grew sick of keeping his secret, he wanted to be open about the desires of his heart. His relatives could not imagine a greater dishonor, and his brother challenged him to a duel to defend the reputation of the family. Using his newly discovered powers, Otto was victorious but was still left with a scar stretching across his face from his brother's blade. His father declared that he would rather see their family bloodline end than to leave the fate of their noble heritage in the hands of a witch and therefore, he would spend all of his fortune on recruiting witch hunters to make sure that Otto could not tarnish the family's reputation further. The fleeing Otto did not find his lover in the hut, and they never saw each other again. He remained grateful to her until the end of his days for guiding him to the path where his hunter's instincts were leading him all along.



RANDELL



Randell once read in a book that people cannot desire what they do not know. Thinking back, he was perfectly happy as a child, but all his troubles began when his mother gave him binoculars as a gift. Until then, he couldn't see any further than the few rooms they lived in, and it had never occurred to him that there was life outside the tower where he spent his days. He only knew his mother, the count's cook, who lived in the next room which he was forbidden to enter. However, through the polished lenses he could see beyond the woods and he finally learnt that there were other people like him, many, many people who roamed the countryside on foot or on horseback.

He threw a tantrum and began to smash and toss everything around him in the tower room, his mother unable to calm him



down any other way but by finding a book and telling her son tales about horsemen.

In that moment, the blackmailing began: only books, more and more books, could keep Randell's peace. He learned to read quickly and there was less and less room to move around in his chamber, but Randell felt as if he could travel the whole world through the texts.

Besides helping him learn about the world, his books revealed the truth to him about why his father had locked his son in this room with shame in his heart, shame for which even a family as wealthy as his had no cure. With each day, Randell became more and more interested in science, but when his mother refused to buy him a book on alchemy of 'dubious reputation', he tore up a book as revenge, folded the pages

into paper gliders and scribed them with angry letters: THE COUNT IS HIDING HIS BASTARD SON IN THE TOWER.

Randell chuckled as he watched the servants desperately trying to collect the messages flying around the tower. After the incident, he was beaten so badly he was not able to read for a long time. But once he regained his sight, escaping was the only goal in front of him. He faked remorse to his mother, he flattered her, planned every sentence so that his requests would not cast the shadow of suspicion on him. It took him a year to acquire all the necessary ingredients for the ritual, for which he had found the instructions in the travel notes of a sailor believed to have been mad. It was midnight when he began to summon the Lord of the Winds, chanting the incantations aloud. He did not

care if anyone heard him, for if it didn't work, his life would be meaningless anyway.

But as the last word rolled off his tongue, a windstorm occurred, knocking over the candles and setting rolls of paper on fire. Randell felt the hot air raising him off the ground and bearing him towards his freedom. Later, he experienced the suspicion and the weird looks first hand when he told strangers the truth about his parents. He traveled far, made up an illustrious and exciting past for himself, and by only talking about his rich father and never mentioning his mother, he was able to convince aristocrats to allow him in their castles' libraries, where he knew he could gain the power to change the whole world.



REMUS





Remus could only see blurry snippets of his parents losing their lives in an accident, caught between the wheels of a horse-drawn carriage. The nearsighted boy suddenly found himself in the orphanage where all the other children steered clear of him. They found him to be an eccentric oddball for his way of making a tiny hole with his fist and trying to focus through it on the things that surrounded him. Counter to his sight, his hearing and memory were exceptional: he remembered every single object surrounding him, so at first glance, it seemed like there was nothing wrong with his eyes and when the caregivers were reading to the working children, he could recite what he had heard word for word. The orphanage rented out the empty beds to travelers in the hopes of some additional income, so it happened that a traveling merchant was peeling an apple on his bed when, in the heat of an argument, Remus recited one and a half pages from a psalm without missing a word. The man decided to take the talented boy with him with no objections from the orphanage as it meant one less mouth to feed. As they began their journey, it soon became apparent that the traveling merchant was no stranger to magic and needed

a quick-witted apprentice to perform rituals with him. The wizard was mainly interested in summoning lesser spirits and demons, however, the boy soon began to realize how much suffering these little creatures were going through as they were bound by magic to act as the wizard ordered. The boy buried his nose in the wizard's books to find a possible solution, an alternative way without causing suffering and he figured out the method: with the help of a peculiar crystal one could reach out to and enlist the aid of helpful spirits, achieving the same kind of cooperation as with the benevolent spirits, but without violence. However, the wizard insisted on his old methods.

To this day, Remus cannot quite recall whether he had left a gap on the chalk circle meant for protecting the wizard during the ritual by accident or on purpose, but his dreams are still haunted by the image of the wizard being devoured by unbridled spirits. Regardless, Remus is unafraid of the possibility of him suffering the same fate because of his pact with the helpful spirits aided by crystals, who are more than willing to help him along his journey.



SEN





Sen never knew what the words 'mother' and 'father' truly meant. She did not remember the day of her birth. In her earliest memories she was fastened to the back of one of her siblings while climbing rocks. When she looked down, the sight of the height made Sen laugh and her sibling laughed along with her. Later, as she was learning to walk, she was given spiked boots and she followed her brothers and sisters to the mountains, slowly but surely. They were nomads: the road was their home and they made a living from working odd jobs. Most of all they had their expertise in climbing, conquering mountain peaks to document and draw the landscape, descending into caves to collect special minerals and plants that they could later trade, but occasionally the siblings were also called to rescue pets that got stuck up on church towers. Sen only learned later on that the people she believed to be her brothers and sisters were not related to her by blood, but they all met and forged into a group in the mountains. They found Sen in a cave near the city as an infant. "You were nibbling on a piece of stalactite like a pacifier"—she was often told. One day, Sen was climbing a peak rising above a valley accompanied by one of her older sisters—a local farmer had hired them to chase away

a beast that nested between the rocks and kept slaughtering his livestock—when she slipped and fell into the abyss. Sen was anticipating an impact but instead everything went pitch black around her and she found herself in a space her body had never experienced before. She was surrounded by warmth, it felt like she was caught in a dense cloud at the end of her fall. It seemed as though she was walking around in a foggy city with strange silhouettes moving around her, some of them standing up to her with a glowing outline and some darker than the fog. One shadow was holding a dazzling red crystal, and Sen could not take her eyes off it—the only color in this gray world. She wandered around for hours in the fog when it finally began to clear up—almost like she was approaching the surface of water—and she slowly emerged between the rocks. She fumbled with the rocks as they solidified behind her. She was walking in the valley when she suddenly heard her sister shouting her name. She hugged Sen, interrogating her about what had happened and where she had been. Without saying a word, Sen took out the glowing red crystal from her pocket which was worth a thousand words.



SERENA



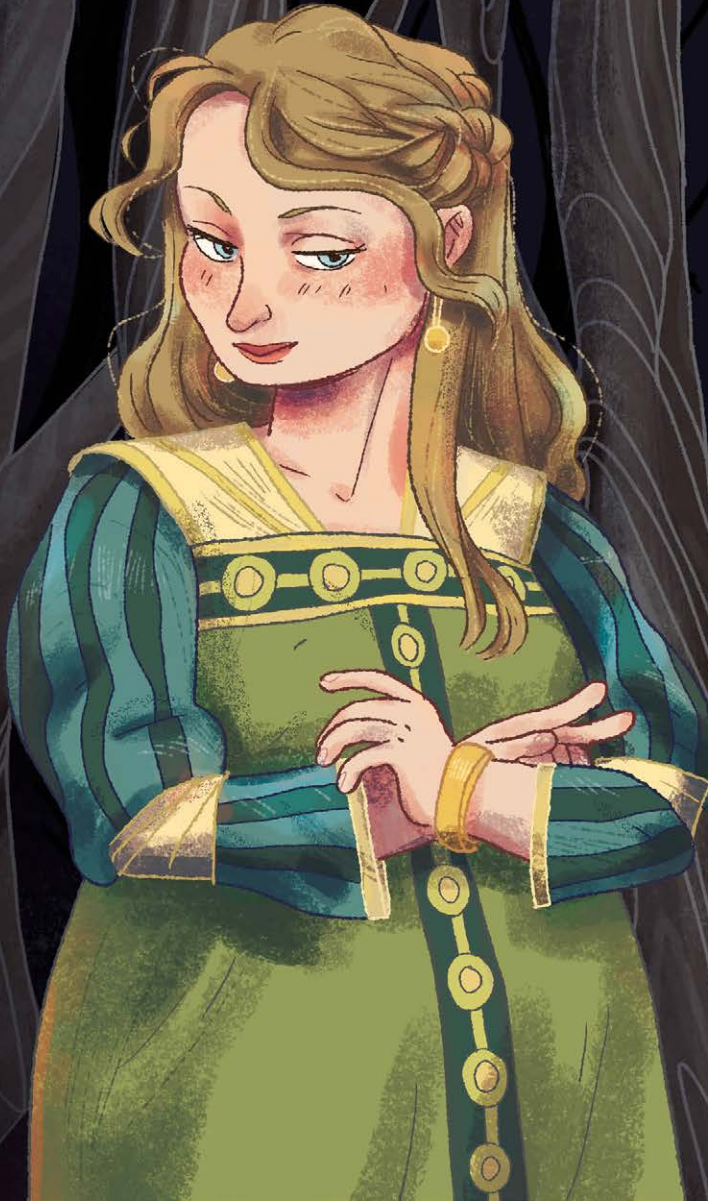


As the youngest sibling, Serena always fell behind her sisters. While they all dreamed of a family, children and winning the heart of a prince, Serena could never relate to these ambitions: she was different. As she was observing herself in the mirror, she saw that her features were just as delicate as those of the other female members of her family, and looking so much like her sisters made her inner wildness even more striking. On a scorching summer day, a messenger arrived in the town: the war had begun. Serena's father and brothers enlisted in the army, and the idea of staying at home with her sisters was unbearable for her, so she joined a traveling hospital as a helper. Serena spent the next few years of her life in military camps changing the bandages of wounded soldiers and brewing healing concoctions. Her clothes were always stained just like everyone else's around her—finally, she no longer stood out from her surroundings. When a dying messenger was brought into the hospital, she did her best to tend to his wounds but the messenger proved to be adamant: he made

her swear not to take care of him, but to deliver the message instead that was supposed to reach the addressee by sundown. Serena took the rolled-up letter, fastened her sandals and began her journey, running to the border fortress captaincy which was approximately one day away by foot. The sun was rapidly setting when she reached a hill from which she could see her destination, and she knew it was impossible to make it on time. But suddenly, as she was glancing at the clouds dancing in the evening wind, an unearthly feeling took hold of her and she started to rush down the hill, her feet barely touching the bumpy ground. Landing was the hardest part: a willow tree caught her like a butterfly net at the foot of the fortress. Finally, she arrived with purple-black bruises on her body and a proud look on her face. She could tell by the soldiers' astonished looks that they found her story impossible, but the message she had delivered convinced them. There were no further questions, the soldiers immediately entrusted their newly appointed messenger with another task.



SOPHIE



Sophie would constantly change her home tutors, as if she wanted a new one for every season to match the current trend in fashion.

The girl's parents hired more and more reputable teachers to educate their daughter, but Sophie repelled all the historical facts and mathematical calculations so effectively that the teachers could not stop wiping the sweat from their brows in the midst of their desperate attempts.

Some said this was further proof that there was no point in teaching science to girls, one old professor even left the castle sobbing, and according to some rumors, he gave up teaching for good.

When yet another teacher was hired, Sophie's mother paced nervously up and down in front of the library, flinching at every sound, waiting for another scandal to break out. Suddenly the door swung open and the young academic rushed out.



"Madam, your daughter is a true genius!" he shouted, "She can name all the emperors in chronological order, recite the classics in ancient languages, and she possesses such knowledge of arithmetic that she could perform in the royal court!"

Sophie's mother was perplexed. In the evening, when she tucked her daughter in, she gently asked where she had been hiding this extensive knowledge.

Sophie couldn't lie to her mum, so she confessed that she had been pulling the tutor's leg all along. She looked deep into his eyes and imagined what the world must be like from the tutor's point of view, then she stood in front of him, and like one of her know-it-all friends, she kept listing the names of the ships that were in the Trojan War.

She envisioned how people would look at her if she were clever, and suddenly she saw the tutor's eyes light up and he burst into joyful cheers. Her mother stroked Sophie's hair and whispered to her that she didn't have to bother with lessons anymore, but it would be nice if she stopped doing this mind-bending thing. Sophie was overjoyed at the sudden freedom and no longer wanted to see the world through other people's eyes, but soon realized that this strange ability was as much a part of her as speaking and breathing. Her friends began to do increasingly odd things at get-togethers in the castle: some suddenly thought it was a great idea to take a dip in the garden pond, others drew mustaches on their faces and put on trousers for a walk in the city. Even the shyest one of her friends decided to put on the child-

sized armor that was on display, and marched into the adults' reception wearing it. Years later, Sophie did not go easy on her suitors either, until one day she stared deep into the green eyes of a suitor and suddenly couldn't turn her head away.

She could feel the magic in him taking hold of her. His voice started to ring in her head, silky yet stern in tone. He warned her that she was in great danger, because word of her abilities had spread and a witch hunter was heading to the castle. She needed to flee as quickly as possible.

The man left and Sophie didn't know what to do. Later that evening she spotted a group of rough looking figures from her bedroom window, approaching the castle and carrying torches. She knew she had to leave and she rushed out through the back gate of the castle when all of a sudden the ground disappeared from below her feet. The green-eyed man grabbed her by her shoulders, her legs dangling in the air.

"I'm risking my own life, but I can't leave you here," he said. Sneaking behind the bushes, he led her to his carriage, then pointed at an empty chest for her to crawl into. They traveled in the cart for a day before it was safe for the chest to be opened again. The green-eyed man handed her a package and showed her the road she should continue her journey on. "There is a town over there, with a woman who will be able to help you. If you look into her eyes, you will immediately know which one I am referring to. Her name is "Septima".



TOMMY



Tommy was often the cause of headaches for the leaders of the orphanage. The boy was quiet and he mostly kept to himself, but as the sun set and the caretakers ordered the children to bed, they started to count down the minutes until chaos would eventually break loose around him. They believed the boy was suffering from nightmares: he often mumbled gibberish in his sleep, he marched back and forth in the corridors whilst only the whites of his eyes were showing and from time to time he got into mischief which would have been unthinkable behavior from the shy boy that he was in the daylight. A priest was called to talk to him and after a pleasant conversation, he declared that he did not detect the presence of harmful spirits and he reassured the orphanage leaders that Tommy would grow out of this 'strange phase'. Tommy lied to the priest about not being able to



remember his dreams, and he did not mention the Flame to him. He knew if he told the truth, he would risk being accused of talking to Satan (something he initially believed as well), the well-known figure from the murals in the church. However, the Flame did not resemble the Devil in any way. The entire body of the illuminating entity consisted of flames emanating a pleasant warmth and when Tommy held its hand, he was not burnt; instead, he was surrounded by a home-like feeling, one that he had never experienced before in the orphanage. The Flame was his secret friend; it told him tales of a strange, dreamy world and taught him methods to perform tricks that exceeded the mundane world. One time, while the other children were playing outside, Tommy stayed in his room with a girl of his age who he really liked. He wanted

to show her the wonders of the world that are hidden from the superficial observer. He began to levitate two chairs above his head, as if they were dancing a peculiar waltz in the air, when one of the other children walked in. The boy was startled at the sight and ran to the caregivers, explaining to them how he saw the girl dancing with a black goat and how the furniture was flying around because of black magic. Despite her objections, she was locked in a closet by the fearful caregivers for days. That night, Tommy went to bed upset, his mind occupied by the girl locked up in the closet. He could hardly wait to fall asleep and he was desperate to ask for the advice of his friend from another world. Most of the time, Tommy and the Flame met in a pleasant room, but that day, the Flame beckoned to him and led him into his workshop. The Flame created dream objects, for both

wonderful dreams and terrible nightmares, in this hall equipped with strange tools. It showed Tommy how an object could be crafted that would force the boy who told on them to speak honestly of what happened. Tommy knew that this would get him into trouble but he could not stand the idea of the innocent girl getting punished. After he woke up, he packed his personal belongings and snuck out of the orphanage. He found a hiding place in the nearby cemetery and fell asleep next to the graves to place the object into the dream of the boy so his nightmares would make him confess. He was awakened by horrifying screams coming from the orphanage and he could hear all hell breaking loose inside. Tommy knew that his attempt was successful. He began his journey, and he couldn't wait to craft more nightmares in the Flame's workshop.



WILMOT





Wilmot was the only daughter of a wealthy farmer and even though he tried to shield her from everything under the sun, she was restless and unable to stay inside the house. She played hide and seek in the bushes, she picked up and examined everything she found in nature and she often returned home with her dress torn by the shrubs. When she was grounded, she snuck out through the attic; finally, when her parents found her vast collection of feathers, roots and seeds under her bed, they decided to send her to stay with her grandmother in the nearby town, hoping that she would be able to turn Wilmot into a proper lady. Regardless, her freshly acquired good manners disappeared without a trace when she saw a butterfly outside the window or caught a glimpse of a bird with shiny feathers knocking on the window. Her grandmother had already given up on her when during a table etiquette lesson one of their guests—who was too impatient to wait for the girl to choose the correct utensil to use—suddenly dropped unconscious into his bowl of steaming stew: the mushrooms used for the stew were poisonous.

Wilmot ran outside to the garden and after a few minutes, she returned with some berries and herbs, which she quickly stuffed into the mouth of the unconscious guest who awakened a few moments after and left as if nothing had happened. After the incident, Wilmot explained to her grandmother that her hands were guided by an unknown force whilst mixing the antidote. Her grandmother knew right away that Wilmot possessed magical powers, so she not only began to help her with discovering her abilities, but also taught her ways of hiding them from others. Rituals with candles should be carried out in the bathroom, so that the smell of bath salts will mask the suspicious scents. Potions should only be brewed if there is a cauldron of boiling apple cider nearby (there is no better distraction). Finally, when foraging in the forest for magical ingredients she must always carry a mushroom basket: parasol mushrooms are perfect for covering any ingredient that might cause suspicion.







SEPTIMA





"It has been quite some time since I last heard these trees sing. It was such a beautiful song," a voice says suddenly from somewhere and as they turn, they see Septima approaching, her steps slow and measured. In silence their eyes follow her as she reaches the circle and stands before them leaning on her staff. Looking into the fire for a few seconds, she looks around the gathered group, taking in the many faces, a warm smile reaching her eyes. "Welcome. I'm happy to see you all here as I'm sure for many of you the journey was a long and arduous one."

Enchanting nearby roots to snake out of the ground, forming a chair, she continues: "For centuries this grove has been here, unchanged and guarded against the changing of the world. These willow trees you see before you stood here long before the city they now border was settled, stretching back to the very first of us who bore the mark you now carry on your palms, the wisest of their time chosen to be the High Witch who led all the covens of Anduin. Since that time, many have held this sacred role, serving as gatekeepers to our history, our rites and rituals of

magical knowledge and guardians of all the magic you sense now coursing through this place." Pausing to look up at the full moon, the brooch on her cape glinting in its light: "I have kept the covenant of the altar of the High Witch for many a moon, led many Sabbaths and now my time is soon ending, the call of my forebears summoning me ...onwards.

Although it is without doubt you have all faced many trials and tribulations - indeed magic is not looked upon fondly in these times - there lies another before you another journey that you must all embark on. A year from today, you must select one amongst your covens to be my successor and lead all the witches of Anduin. But be warned, the task will not be an easy one. It will test your magical knowledge and skill. You will be faced with challenges where the best path forward is not easy to discern and aid your brothers and sisters evade the threat of exile. Once the full circle of the seasons has come to pass, only upon the wisest of you shall my staff and the symbol and honour of the High Witch shall be bestowed. I wish you all well on this adventure."





**THE LEGENDARIUM
OF WITCHES**

