

You'd think knowing every chapter of Harry Potter by heart might help write some decent fan fiction, but this is dreck.

[Four letters]

Harry rushed through the train station as fast as he could, which was not all that speedy, given he was hauling his trunk and Hedwig in her cage. He was late again this year, and only had moments before the journey from Platform Nine and Three-Quarters to Hogwarts would begin.

He hardly wanted a repeat of his second year, when he arrived late and suffered the wrath of his least favorite teacher at Hogwarts, Professor Snape. Harry still didn't understand what Snape's grudge was...what was it that made the Potions instructor despise him so?

Harry plowed ahead, wondering what he'd do if he did miss the train. Go back to the Burrow, he supposed, as he ran headlong through the non-existent wall between Platforms Nine and Ten. Then he stopped and gasped. The familiar red engine of the Hogwarts Express was, indeed, not there, but that's not what made Harry freeze in his tracks. There was an engine there after all. But it wasn't red. It was blue.

"Hello, I'm Thomas! Get aboard, or there'll be confusion and delay!" said the giant face on the train engine facing him. Harry could read the writing on the wall. This was going to be a very, very strange year.

[Six letters]

"Harry!" said Ron. "I told you we shouldn't have gone into the Forbidden Forest this time! This is worse than the spiders!"

Harry supposed Ron was right. It wasn't as if he didn't remember Dobby's warning about what he'd find here. But now it was too late.

"Are they close?" Ron squeaked. Harry pulled out the Marauder's Map and looked.

There they were, the advance guard of Voldemort's minions. They were almost upon him.

"I won't give it to you!" Harry shouted as Lucius Malfoy's form appeared on the darkened path ahead. "I will never agree to Lord Voldemort's request!"

Harry searched his pockets for something that might save him, but there was nothing but miscellaneous Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes products. He didn't think a bit of Fever Fudge would get him out of this one. If only he had a Nosebleed Nougat.

[Two letters]

The zombie of Cornelius Fudge lurched forward, and slurred "It ith almosht twelfe. You musht come with me."

There was no avoiding it anymore. It was time for the midnight duel with Trevor, Neville's hideously reanimated toad.

[Five letters]

For Remus Lupin, it would not be the worst birthday ever. Not if James Potter had anything to do with it.

It wasn't that the four of them...Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs...wouldn't have had a grand time roaming the grounds of Hogwarts tonight. But it was Moony's *birthday*, and it just didn't seem fair that his monthly transformation into a werewolf had to happen on his special day. So James and Sirius had found an old bizarre recipe for a potion that was supposed to keep Remus from transforming.

It started well. They had found all the odd ingredients they needed, including the day-old elf toenail clippings and the purple newt tails and even the left wing of backwards-flying Snitch. And since, for some reason, the potion was supposed to be more effective stirred with the heaviest wand possible, they conducted the weighing of the wands and found the heaviest was Peter's. Remus downed the potion, and—at first—all looked fine.

Then it had all gone wrong. If the four friends had only consulted with the Potions Master at Hogwarts, they would have known: the potion did prevent Lupin from turning into his wolf-form...instead, he turned into a giant, mindless, rampaging insect.

As soon as Remus transformed, the bug turned straight for Hogwarts Castle itself. James, Sirius, and Peter knew that if they couldn't stop it, at best Remus (and maybe all of them) would be kicked out of Hogwarts. At worst, Remus was likely to be hurt or even killed before anyone realized the rampaging insect was, in fact, a student. So they tried to keep the beetle at bay, but it was no use. It reached the castle doors.

[Six letters]

The first task of the day is to find some poor sap and suck out its blood. God, I'm depressed.

You think you have it bad? I'm just doing what nature intends me to do, and suddenly every vigilante from the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures to the Order of the Phoenix to the Death-Bleedin'-Eaters is after me.

Went to a birthday celebration last week, ended up eating all the guests. *There* was a party with some birthday surprises, let me tell you. Nobody likes me.

Why should I be condemned for doing what I'm supposed to do? 'Snot my fault I'm a giant spider. Eh, never mind. Don't bother going through the trapdoor down into the muck of *that* philosophical argument. It will only bring you down.

Sigh. I mean, it's not like I'm delivering the Dementor's kiss, sucking out your soul or anything. I mean, everyone's got to die sometime, why should I feel guilty about doing it?

Did I mention I'm depressed? Nothing's been the same since my dad, Aragog, bit it. Bloody Hagrid.

[Four letters]

Step right up! Step right up, and see me, Magnifico, and My Marvelous Magical Market! I have just what you're looking for, young lad. Look at this sensational device: The Vanishing Glass (trademarked, all rights reserved, patent pending). Simply stare into it each morning and all that horrible acne you have there will disappear.

And you, Miss! Howz about this Wonder Elixir! One quaff and it will cure those hideous boils! Mixed it myself, guaranteed! Made with genuine Acromantula venom, got it from a professor from Hogwarts school just the other day...yes, I know Acromantula venom is rare, but this is the real deal, I can testify to that. Even know the dead bug's name: Aragog. Lived in that forest by Hogwarts itself for years, it did. Swish with it every night, and it will also cure that horrible case of halitosis you have, Miss.

Sir! Yes, you, the one who looks like a ninety-pound weakling that a pixie could crush by sitting on...you, yes you! How about some Super Stupendous Strengthening Salve, as seen in Gilderoy "*Magical Me*" Lockhart's new tome, *Dueling with Dragons*? Why just last week, I sold this item to a man even scrawnier than

you, and this week he's playing Beater for the Notlob Nagas in the Quidditch Final for the QA Cup.

Ma'am...Ma'am! I'm so sorry about your daughter here, clearly a Squib, if I've ever seen one, but I can help your idiot child, too! Just take my Positive Perception Pill once a day for three months, and by the time she's twelve, she'll be aboard the Hogwarts Express, no problem. No more worries there, Ma'am.

[Four letters]

For Hagrid, it was the worst birthday he had ever had. Heck, it may have been the worst day of any kind he had ever had.

Worse than when he was expelled. Worse than when his Da' passed on. Worse than when he lost Norbert the Norwegian Ridgeback.

No, worse than all those. It all started one spring day at the match: Gryffindor versus Ravenclaw.

He should have known it was going to be a bad day when he spilled his butterbeer on a bag of Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes merchandise that a student had left on the ground under his seats at the match. Do you have any idea what happens when you get a box of Puking Pastilles wet? It wasn't pretty.

[Six letters]

Harry woke before dawn on the day of the Quidditch Final with a sore throat, itchy eyes, and post-nasal drip. He couldn't sleep.

"Just great," he thought to himself, then started coughing like he was hacking up a lung. An excess of phlegm spattered on the floor.

Harry wobbled down to the common room, and found it deserted. It was clear that his fellow Gryffindors had been up the previous night though, as several homemade banners and signs were leaning against the walls, evidence of their late-night endeavors. Harry particularly liked one he suspected was Dean's work, with the Gryffindor Lion trouncing the Slytherin Serpent in its paw. Both the lion and the serpent were particularly lifelike, almost magical.

Harry smiled, then coughed again, sending spittle spraying everywhere, much like the letters from no one had spewed out from the Durley's fireplace.

"I've got to find a way to beat this cold, or it won't be Nick's deathday party I'll be attending, the deathday party will be mine," Harry muttered.

Harry had extra reasons to be nervous for the match. Students from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang would be returning to Hogwarts for the event. And if Harry was right about who was coming along with them, he'd be in for it if he wasn't in top form.

[Five letters]

Never had the journey from Platform Nine and Three-Quarters to Hogwarts taken so long. Harry just couldn't sit still. He couldn't believe it. For the ninth or tenth time he stood up and started pacing around the compartment, despite the lack of space.

"Harry, please sit down," Hermione said after Harry trod on her toes yet again. "I know that after getting the letter from Hagrid you're worried, we all are. But I'm not sure things are as bad as Hagrid's tale says they are. You know he's a bit prone to, you know...getting a bit excited about dragons..."

"You're overlooking the map." Harry said, whipping out the fabled parchment of Messrs Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs.

"Look, mate, I know what it looks like," said Ron, nervously. "I know it seems to be the writing on the wall, and everything, but maybe it's not what it seems. Maybe it's..."

"Look at it!" snapped Harry, annoyed. "Look at the dot! Look where it is! Look what it says! 'The Hungarian Horntail'...what else could it be?!?"

[Three letters]

Ginny slung the Kalashnikov over her shoulder, grabbed a couple of the grenades, and picked up the chainsaw for good measure as she headed off into the Forbidden Forest. Just because Arnold stole her wand didn't mean they were going to get *her* without a fight.

It wasn't long before she heard someone ahead, squealing like a little baby. It wasn't hard to figure out who it was: Cornelius Fudge.

As she ran around a bend in the Forest's path, she saw him, cowering against an old beech tree. And coming towards him was the Dementor, just like in her dream.

[Six letters]

"Jinkies!" said Luna, "Who would have thought that the Dark Mark was just painted on?"

"That's right," said Seamus. "It was just so lucky that the so-called ghost chased Percy and Padfoot into the Prefects' bathroom so that the Mark just washed right off!"

"And it wasn't a ghost member of the Slug Club at all, but Professor Snape!" added Lavender, as she pulled off the mask of the "ghost."

"Zoinks!" gasped Percy. "Professor Snape! I thought he was off sabotaging Harry's party! Didn't he say he'd make it the worst birthday ever?"

"I would have succeeded, too, if these meddling kids hadn't send that owl post again." spat Snape to no one in particular, rubber mask in is hand.

"Rut-roh, Rsnapey," Padfoot said to the potions master. "Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh. Paddy-paddy-fooo!"

[Seven letters]

The owl post came, as it always did, during breakfast. Hedwig landed on Harry's head, dropped a note with Hagrid's scrawl on it in Harry's lap, and gave Harry an affectionate nip on the ear.

"Look!" said Ron. "Hagrid sent you a note about the dragon! I *told* you that he had gotten ahold of the Hungarian Horntail!"

"But he made the Unbreakable Vow, Ron," replied Hermione, grumpily. "He *couldn't* have gotten the Horntail back. The magic of the Vow would kill him."

"Ugh, will you to stop it?" Harry snapped as he saw Ron about to retort. "If we want to get to the bottom of the life and lies of Albus Dumbledore, we need to know what Hagrid knows!"

"Just because you're 'the Boy Who Lived' doesn't mean you have to boss us around, you know," said Ron grumpily.

"Look, if we can just hear Hagrid's tale, you can be as annoyed as you want, but we need to do this!" returned Harry.

"Harry's right, Ron. If we can get Hagrid to tell us what happened, we won't have to use the Polyjuice Potion again...and we all know how relieved you'll be not to have to turn into Professor Sprout again!"

[Five letters]

"I've tracked his movements...there's no way they'll keep the beetle at bay this time!" Rita Skeeter cackled to her editor. "Listen to this!

"First, Potter met with Nicolas Flamel...the day before he died! No stone was going to save Flamel that time, be it Sorcerer or Philosopher!

"Second, he snuck into the Slytherin's Quidditch locker room just before Marcus Flint fell to his death! He made sure the Quidditch Final would be truly final for the Slytherin Captain!

"Third, he went back to the Burrow just in time to slip Percy Weasley that "funny" mushroom. Weasley's supposedly been in St. Mungo's ever since, but I know they've hushed it up: he's been turned into a slime mold!

"Finally, Potter was seen in conversation with the giant spider Aragog, who, as everyone who is in the know knows, is the kingpin of all underworld dealings in the magical creature community! It all adds up!"