

The Magician's Castle

The Magician's Castle - Background

The town of Littlegrub was a peaceful one. Set in the middle of Arcacia on the planet Far, Littlegrub was home to no more than a thousand people, mostly farmers, who were happy in their daily work. The overlord of this town was a man of the people, and a man of many powers. The great magician Rafel and his wife Hazel lived in a huge castle that towered over the town from atop a hill, and from there Rafel would send rain, sun, or snow as the people wished. He would feed those who couldn't feed themselves, and would shelter passing strangers who were lost, lonely or tired. But what Rafel enjoyed most of all was his weekly forays into the town to perform his magic act. Every Saturday he would set up a stall at the market and do his show, from the most basic of card tricks to the most extravagant illusions that astonished the townsfolk who would all come and watch every week. Young and old, fat and thin, tall and short, they would all come to watch the great Rafel.

One day following his show Rafel stayed behind to announce joyous news to the gathering. His wife Hazel was pregnant, the bearer of twins. In two hundred seventy nights upon Arcacia a grand party would be thrown to celebrate the night of his fatherhood. And so it was, and those days later Hazel gave birth to two sons, Gregor and Igor, and on that night Rafel threw the biggest party anyone in Littlegrub had ever seen. Bands were playing, fireworks shot into the night sky, everyone ate until they could eat no more and drank till they could drink no more. It was the most joyous of occasions.

Gregor and Igor grew up in true competitive spirit. Their father tried to teach them every trick he knew, so that when he was gone they would be able to takeover as overseers of Littlegrub. Both boys worked day and night to stay up with their Father's teachings, but only Gregor managed to do so. Igor became dismayed with the happy spells and started working on ways of using his powers to tease the other children at their school. As with many twins the two boys went separate ways as they grew, Gregor towards his father's ways, Igor in ways far more evil.

In a blink of an eye, or so it seemed, the two young sons became two young boys, and the two young boys became two young men, both learned and powerful in the ways of magic. But a storm was brewing between the two, as all could see but their doting parents who would answer their every whim. Then one night, on the eve of Rafel's ninetieth birthday, the two boys were summoned to their father's bedroom. There they were told of his imminent passing to the next dimension, he had been ill for a while and he could hear his calling. His wife, their mother, had passed away not long before, now it was time for him to join her. He had called for them to announce his heir.

After much musing, he declared, it was Gregor who should be his heir. He had studied the ways of his Father, he spent time with the people, enjoyed their company, performed his magic. Igor, on the other hand, had used his powers for a wicked use and for personal gain. He must be punished for this action. When, and if, he would join Gregor in running Littlegrub in a peaceful and playful manner, Igor could demand joint Lordship,

until that day Gregor would be the Lord. Igor was naturally upset, but waited until daybreak, after his father had passed away to contest this spoken will.

Dark clouds sat over Littlegrub that morn, the day seemed like night. Clouds swirled, thunder growled, lightning cracked. The townsfolk knew not what to make of it, but stayed indoors, safe from the elements outside. Up in the towering castle the two brothers sat in their respective rooms, Gregor preparing to announce his Fathers death to the town, Igor preparing to battle his brother for control of it.

Gregor sat in his room until Saturday came around. Then, as he did every week, he donned his magician's outfit and prepared for his show. He pulled on his white gloves, tied his cape around his neck, put on his shining shoes, his towering hat, grabbed his cane and wandered down the stone spiral staircase toward the town below. For three days the dark oppressive weather had not changed until, that is, Gregor walked out of the castle and began to make his way down to the town. With each step he took the clouds dispersed and the sun broke through. Flowers flattened by the rains raised their heads to the skies, and with all this the townspeople of Littlegrub slowly started to leave their homes and set up the market as they did every Saturday.

As Gregor arrived in the town people were quick to notice his solemn look and all began to crowd him, whispering to one another "what could be wrong, what could be wrong". Gregor took his place, his usual place, atop his makeshift stage, the same stage his Father had walked before him, his Grandfather before him. He pulled up a barrel that lay on one side of the stage, sat down and told all before him of his Father's passing. The bad weather, he explained, had been his way of mourning his Father passing. But that was then, and this was now. He vowed to continue to run the town as his father had, there would be no change in his time. The show would go on.

While Gregor announced his intentions to the town his brother, Igor stood at his window watching over his brothers' performance. He smiled to himself. This would not be a day the town would forget, and for no such goodwill as that his brother was spreading below. No, this day would live in their memory for a reason far more evil. Igor donned his outfit, grabbed his cane, and headed toward the town.

Step by step as Igor descended the mountain the clouds of before returned to the sky, the wind began to howl, thunder started to rumble. The townsfolk looked toward the mountain and saw Igor approaching. Slowly they turned to Gregor, and then back again. Gregor did, and said, nothing. The crowd began to back away. Igor arrived in front of his brother and laid down the challenge. A challenge to the death, a duel for their father's crown. "But Igor", said Gregor, "I have no need to duel, Father has already given me his realm. If you reform you too can join me. We are brothers why should we fight?". Gregors calm irritated Igor further. Swooping his cloak back he raised his arms and unleashed an almighty fireball toward Gregor, who merely raised his cloak and seemingly just absorbed the fire into himself. The crowd cheered. Again and again Igor fired spells at his brother, but to no avail.

“Igor”, Gregor explained, “while you were out being wicked, I trained, just as Father taught us. You cannot defeat me. Please join me instead.”

“Never. I will never join you. I would rather eat eels from my Father’s dead body.”

“Then I have no option but to banish you from Littlegrub, never to return unless you vow to give up your evil ways.”

Gregor raised his hands high above his head, closed his eyes and whispered some words. With a flash from the dark sky Igor was gone, never to be heard of again. Well not for some time at least.

Days in the land of Arcacia seemed to pass like shooting stars to Gregor, and he loved every single one of them. It was up to him and the town of Littlegrub what weather they would like, what crops they would grow, and what magic they would see. They all loved life, and they all love Gregor. Life couldn’t get any better. Then one day a stranger walked into town. As was custom the man was taken in by Gregor, fed food and water and introduced around the town. As with other strangers who passed through he was offered a room and a permanent place working the farmland. He accepted and stayed. But there was something very familiar about this stranger, though no one could put a finger on it.

For weeks the stranger went about his business, helping out in the fields, keeping himself to himself and watching, very closely, the movements of Gregor, Lord of the town. Then, one Saturday morn, the crowd gathered around as Gregor prepared this weeks magic show. The stranger stood at the back, next to a large crate. Gregor began his show, but something was wrong. None of his tricks were working, not even the simplest of his usual routine. The crowd gasped in awe. Had their Lord lost all his powers? Gregor frowned and got angrier and angrier as his tricks failed.

From the back of the crowd a smile giggle could be heard. The giggle became a snicker, the snicker became a laugh, and the laugh became a howl. The crowd hushed and turned as at the back the stranger stood alone on the crate, highly amused at the whole situation. His laughter calmed. His hood on his cloak removed. The crowd gasped, the stranger smiled.

“Brother”, he cried, “you don’t recognize me?” Gregor was stunned.

“Igor, is that you?”

“Aye Brother. I have returned. Repentant. If you’ll have me.” Gregor stared across the crowd at his brother for what seemed like eternity.

“If you truly mean it, if you truly intend to come back and make peace, then I will take you back unreservedly.”

And with that the brothers walked toward each other and embraced. The crowd around cheered, and long into the night the brothers and the townsfolk danced, drank, ate and were merry to celebrate the return of the long lost brother. The smile never left Igrors face

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Over the coming months the brothers spent little time together. Gregor continued his magic shows in the town which, away from the trickery of his brother, were now working perfectly. Igor spent most of his time at the top of the tallest tower in the castle working on what he would describe to his brother as “just an experiment.” Day and night the light in the tower window would shine. On occasion Gregor would sit with some of the townsfolk eating dinner looking up at the window, waiting for the dazzling lights that would occasionally leap out from within. Gregor wanted to pry but his good nature got the better of him and he left Igor alone to get on with his experiments.

Some time later Gregor was startled to wake one morning to see his brother standing in front of him, and evil grin spread across his face. Scared Gregor tried to get up, but to no avail. He looked around him. This wasn't his room. How did he get here? And what was he strapped to. To. To what? Gregor looked around him. He was lying back on a strange maze of wiring, copper piping, tubes too numerous to count. On either side of the table lay two huge steel vats. His brother turned away, pondered and flicked a few switches then turned back.

“Its' nice to see you this morning Gregor. You're looking well.”

“Likewise Igor. I assume this is the experiment you've been working on all these months.”

“Aye Brother, it is. I called it the Mashinator.”

“And what does it do?”

“It drains magical powers. Your magical powers, to be precise.” Gregor looked stunned. And very, very frightened.

“But, why Igor. What purpose does that serve. I thought you had come back for forgiveness. I thought we were brothers once more.”

“No brother. I went away to learn a darker side of magic, so that one day I could come back here and destroy you. After much studying it appeared that even with my knowledge and power I was still not strong enough to defeat the good in you. So, I decided to cheat. I studied physics, chemistry, math, every tome under the sun, until I devised this. This machine that draws every ounce of life out of you, starting with your magical powers. When I pull this lever you will feel pain the likes of no one before you. But you will not die, I will not allow that. Instead you will perform again for the crowds, and like you did unto me years ago, you will be shamed in combat. Say goodbye to your powers, brother.”

Igor walked over to the machine and pulled down on the lever. A scream, unlike any scream ever heard before, the most harrowing scream that ever bestowed Arcacia, echoed across the entire world. Even Igor could not bear the howls, he covered his ears and huddled in the corner of the room. Tied to the machine Gregor struggled and strained and screamed louder. The pain was unbearable. Gregor closed his eyes and felt the power draining. Amassing all of the reserves of power he had he clenched his fists and whispered some words. From out of his hands the most dazzling light, shooting through the skies, blinding light, engulfing the castle.

The people of Littlegrub stood down in the town cowering in terror, looking up at the castle and shielding their ears from the cries. They watched in awe as the light shot out from the tower window and fizzed through the air like a bullet from a gun, consuming everything it touched. Then, nothing. The world went silent, the light disappeared.

Up in the tower Igor raised himself to his feet and went to check on his brother. He held his frail hand and checked for signs of life. He was still breathing. Had it worked? He removed his brothers from the machine and lay him down on the floor. There was absolute silence, so much in contrast to just seconds ago. You could hear a pin drop. Downstairs, however, something was stirring. . . .

It seemed to start in the kitchen, the banging of the pots and pans, the open and closing of the doors, the chiming of the glasses as they bounced off one another. A broom shot from the cupboard through the door and into the hall where the knights' armor slashed at it with his sword. In the dining room the chairs started a merry dance around the table, free to walk at last on their own four feet. A coat of arms flew through the air, narrowly missing the piano that was taking itself for a spin. Something very strange was going on. The castle was coming to life.

In Gregors bedroom objects were beginning to stir too. Socks, hats, coats, and scarves, all flying around the room trying to avoid the bed that was chasing them. In one corner though, still as can be, sat a small chest. It wasn't a special chest, well not to look at anyway. Just a wooden chest with gold leaf markings and a silver lock on the front. With all the chaos around the place it was hard to hear the faint banging that came from inside, at first, but slowly and surely the other objects in the room stop their dashing around and began to hover, and listen. Tap, tap, tap. Tap, tap, tap. The lock rattled briefly. Tap, tap, tap. Tap, tap, tap. Another rattle, this time faster, and harder. Tap, tap, tap. Tap, tap, BANG! With that the lock released itself from the chest, flew across the room. The floating garments and furniture moved back in amazement as first as their master came to life. Or what was left of him. The clothes in which he performed his weekly shows broke free of the chest in which they were held. First the hat, from which so many tricks had been pulled. Then a pair of white cotton gloves, then a cane, then his polished black shoes and finally the cape in which so many of his powers were concealed. At first the garments lay on the floor, but slowly, as with the rest of the room they rose up and positioned themselves as if they were being worn. Indeed from behind it would be hard to notice that the master was not there himself. But he wasn't. He was in trouble and his most trusted possessions knew what they had to do