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Honors Thesis: Fantasy Writing
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Kristi Hager
Honors Thesis Author's Statement

Right after a writer is asked “How?” (How did you come up with that? How do you remember everything?), she is asked “Why?” (Why did this or that happen? Why did the story turn out this way?). Probably the most common question is “Why did/do you write what you do?” For most writers, the only answer to this question is: “I don’t know.” Often there is no way to predict what will end up on the page. Writers are often surprised themselves.

I was asked why I was writing a fantasy work for this project, and the only response I could come up with was “That’s what I needed to write. There was something that I needed to work out, and this is how I’ve started to deal with it, by writing about it in a fantastical setting.” I did not try to write anything specifically. I simply opened my mind to something running around in my brain and let it lead me to this work.

Alleen Pace Nilsen and Kenneth L. Donelson write in their text *Literature for Today's Young Adults* about the attraction of fantasy writing:

Fantasy allows us – or even forces us – to become greater than we are, greater than we could hope to be. It confronts us with the major ambiguities and dualities of life – good and evil, light and dark, innocence and guilt, reality and appearance, heroism and cowardice, hard work and indolence, determination and vacillation, and order and anarchy. Fantasy presents all these, and it provides the means through which readers can consider both the polarities and the many shadings in between. (211)

For so many people, the appeal of fantasy is perhaps its simplicity. Fantasy is an echo of the human need for a hero, wherever he or she may appear, and the need for good to eventually win out over evil. Ray Bradbury wrote that fantasy is vital and deep-seated. “The ability to “fantasize” is the ability to survive.... We survive by fantasizing. Take

that away from us and the whole damned human race goes down the drain” (qtd. in Nilsen 211). Fantasy is a genre that is well suited to humanity’s search for understanding, and our search for the unpredictable in life.

I have always loved fairy tales, and their inherent ability to change a character’s future. Obviously, I jumped at the chance to take a class discussing fairy tales as the origins of literature. We did a lot of debating about what the “ingredients” for a fairy tale were, and we came up with a formula or recipe. One of the more important is the removal of parents/loving guardians. This can be because of death, illness, misplacement, or because the main characters set off on their own, choosing to step away from the help and support of parents. A second important ingredient is the journey or quest. The character has to perform some task or reach a specific goal that would be difficult if not impossible with her parents or guardians present. This quest is a tool that enables the central figure(s) to grow, to complete a rite of passage. Additionally, many tales include magical helpers, whether these are animals, other people, or the ever-present “fairy godmother.” The helpers often assist in gathering or deciphering information. Fairy tales also end happily, or at least with the wicked punished and the good prevailing over all.

Unfortunately, all of the “fairy tales” I’ve read are very general in their descriptions of characters and setting. All you get is a basic idea of the plot and then follow the character(s) to the expected end. These stories seem very simple and easy reading, good for relaxing reading but not if you want a challenge. That is why I read and write fantasy. I think of fantasy as “real” fairy tales. Fantasy writings have all the needed ingredients of a fairy tale, but are much more complex. Fantasy writing is more

detailed, full of the specifics of real life; it is fleshed out. The characters face real life situations, decisions whether to follow the expected route or to forge their own new path. As well, characters have to deal with parents, siblings, friends, pets, school, and all of the problems and situations that arise from those interactions.

In a fantasy work, the characters often belong to a family, but because of circumstances, they distance themselves from their relatives. The main character in my work, Ivy, lost her parents at an early age, and recently lost the grandparents who had cared for her after that point. Fantasy characters also have some sort of quest to complete or journey to undergo, aided along the way by animals, other species, magically gifted people, or random happenstance that might not be so random. Ivy has many duties she feels compelled to complete, the least of which is solving the disappearance of the king, aided by the animals and magical creatures around her and by her own knowledge and intelligence. Fantastical characters always have flaws and foibles, making them very human and approachable to readers. Readers can imagine themselves walking with the characters as they struggle to determine their purpose. Ivy is no exception. She is stubborn to a fault, and too curious, but she can also be excessively cautious and emotional. These characteristics make her real and accessible to readers.

My degree is in Secondary Education. When I am working with students, whether during student teaching or in my own classroom, I am going to do all I can to create an atmosphere that fosters creativity and critical thinking. Students need to know that there is more than one perspective on issues. There is an old saying of journalists: *there is my side of the story, there is your side, and then there is the truth.* Human

memory and our perceptions color our understanding. Students need to know how to handle conflicting information and opinions, and how to come up with a decision about what they will accept and what will be denied. John Aquino writes, “fantasy literature involves universal, primitive truths essential to human development” (15). He also cites the pioneer in the research of child psychological development in relation to fantastical writing, Bruno Bettelheim, as a defense of this:

Fairy tales carry important messages to the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious mind, on whatever level each is functioning at the time. By dealing with universal human problems, particularly those which preoccupy the child’s mind, these stories speak to his [or her] budding ego and encourage its development, while at the same time relieving preconscious and unconscious pressures. (qtd. in Aquino 15)

There has been psychological research done on the benefits of fantasy in any format.

“Jerome Bruner wrote that fantasy/play is a precursor of adult competence, providing the basis for useful problem solving and for language development” (Aquino 11).

Fantasy/play does not simply stimulate the creative aspects of the mind, but also essential aspects of social interactions, like language and dealing with difficult situations.

C. S. Lewis actually praised fantasy literature for providing a healthy developmental impetus for the minds of children. A typical children’s story, Lewis wrote, offers the reader “wish fulfillment that is compensatory, ravenous, and unrequited; but a fairy tale stirs and troubles the child with a sense of something beyond his/her reach, and, rather than dulling or emptying the actual world, gives it a new dimension” (Aquino 16). Giving children this new dimension in their world is a fantastic way to create well-informed citizens and intelligent people. One method of implementation of this instruction is the use of fantasy and science fiction writing in all forms and at all levels of education, using the texts as models for human dilemmas, and allowing the

students to decide for themselves. Fantasy is a genre that makes the reader think, if for nothing else than to determine whether what is written is true for them. It allows readers to take charge of their own lives. “Fantasy, more than any other genre, is a literature of empowerment,” writes Tamora Pierce, a favorite fantasy writer of mine. She reminds us:

In the real world, kids have little say. This is a given; it is the nature of childhood. In fantasy, however short, fat, unbeautiful, weak, dreamy, or unlearned individuals may be, they find a realm in which those things are negated by strength. The catch – there is *always* a catch – is that empowerment brings trials. Good novels in this genre never revolve around heroes who, once they receive the “Spatula of Power,” call the rains to fill dry wells, end all war, and clear up all acne. Heroes and heroines contend as much with their granted wishes as readers do in normal life. (51)

Another old adage warns us to: *be careful what we wish for, because we just might get it.* Fantasy exemplifies this principle, but it also asks that we, as readers and human beings, never quit dreaming, for those dreams are what create life.

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Using Fantasy Literature to teach Perspective

SUBJECT AREA: Literature

GRADE LEVEL: 6-9

OBJECTIVE: Teaching perspective through different versions of the same story: teacher will provide guidance to class discussions of how a story is changed based upon the narrator. Example demonstrates difference of "opinion" in a story ("The Three Little Pigs") based upon the character telling the tale: pig or wolf

MATERIALS:

- One copy of *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* by Jon Scieszka
 - o About this book: "There has obviously been some kind of mistake," writes Alexander T. Wolf from the penitentiary where he's doing time for his alleged crimes of 10 years ago. Here is the "real" story of the three little pigs whose houses are huffed and puffed to smithereens... from the wolf's perspective. This poor, much maligned wolf has gotten a bad rap. He just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, with a sneezy cold, innocently trying to borrow a cup of sugar to make his granny a cake. Is it his fault those ham dinners-rather, pigs-build such flimsy homes?
- Copies for class of *The Magic Circle* by Donna Jo Napoli
 - o About this book: This book is a dark, deeply thoughtful novel whose gifted, driven, and wholly sympathetic protagonist is Hansel and Gretel's witch. The hunchback known only as "Ugly One" is a midwife who becomes a healer when she learns to draw a magic circle that cannot be invaded by the devil's minions; from safely within it, she can command them to leave their victims. But the demons eventually trick her with a ring she hopes to give her beloved daughter, now of an age to marry. The sorceress who has commanded devils becomes a witch subject to their demands; still, with great care, she avoids the potent temptation to devour a child, which would complete her damnation. She avoids others, keeping temptation at bay until the arrival of Hansel and Gretel at her home, turning her determined avoidance into a cruel test of her mettle.

PROCEDURE:

1. Ask students to recap the story of "The Three Little Pigs" and record outline on the board.
2. Read *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* to the class.
3. Discuss the differences between their outline and the text in regards to how the story is portrayed based on the perspective of the narrator, writing that on the board in a different color to differentiate.
4. Have students share any other fairy tales or stories they have read that tell a known tale from a different perspective.
5. Ask students to retell the story of "Hansel and Gretel" recording the outline on the board.
6. Distribute copies of *The Magic Circle*.
7. As students progress through book, include in discussion a focus on perspective.

Gaining Perspective of Other's Perception

SUBJECT AREA: Literature

GRADE LEVEL: 4-12

OBJECTIVE: Students will learn: the impact of color on our viewpoints; ways that visual representations provide a different perspective on a text;

MATERIALS: two automatic 35 mm cameras, black and white film

- Previous assignments: reading of *The Giver* by Lois Lowery
 - o About this book: In a world with no poverty, no crime, no sickness and no unemployment, and where every family is happy, 12-year-old Jonas is chosen to be the community's Receiver of Memories. Under the tutelage of the Elders and an old man known as the Giver, he discovers the disturbing truth about his utopian world and struggles against the weight of its hypocrisy. With echoes of *Brave New World*, in this 1994 Newbery Medal winner, Lowry examines the idea that people might freely choose to give up their humanity in order to create a more stable society. Gradually Jonas learns just how costly this ordered and pain-free society can be, and boldly decides he cannot pay the price.

DURATION: two class periods

PROCEDURE:

1. Have students read *The Giver*, including discussions of the evolution of Jonas' maturity and knowledge of the society in which he lives.
2. On the day when students complete the book, divide the class into two groups and have them create a list of things in Jonas' world such as a red apple, a shelf of books, blue eyes, red hair - anything visual that they can identify and locate.
3. The next day, take the students around the school armed with cameras with black and white film. This activity works especially well on a Friday, as students are able to be out of their seats and active, and provides the weekend for the film to be developed.
4. While awaiting the return of the film, have the students write an introduction to the project explaining the process and the reasoning behind it - as if they were introducing a magazine photo spread. Also, have the students write captions for the photos. Then have the students arrange the photos onto posters with their captions underneath them. Hang the posters and their introductions on the walls of the classroom or hallways to demonstrate their level of knowledge; another suggestion is to bring one or two posters to parent-teacher conferences for parents to see what their children are doing..

Suggested Fantasy Books for Teens and Pre-teens

Any of the *Oz* books by L. Frank Baum – specifically *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and *Ozma of Oz*. See also Ruth Plumly Thompson's *Oz* books

Ender's Game by Orson Scott Card

Alice in Wonderland (aka *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*) and *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll

Coraline by Neil Gaiman

The Secret of Platform 13 by Eva Ibbotson. See also *Which Witch?*

Arrows of the Queen by Mercedes Lackey

A Wizard of Earthsea by Ursula K. Le Guin. See also *The Tombs of Atuan* and *The Farthest Shore*

The Unicorn Trio: *Black Unicorn*, *Gold Unicorn*, *Red Unicorn* from Tanith Lee. See also *Dark Castle*, *White Horse*.

The Two Princesses of Bamarre by Gail Carson Levine

The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe by C. S. Lewis

Hidden Talents by David Lubar

Beauty by Robin McKinley. See also *Rose Daughter*.

Winnie-the-Pooh and *The House at Pooh Corner* by A. A. Milne

A Riddle of Roses from Caryl Cude Mullin

The Magic Circle by Donna Jo Napoli

Sabriel by Garth Nix

Haunted Waters by Mary Pope Osborne

The Golden Compass by Philip Pullman. See also the two sequels, *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass*.

The Woods Out Back from R. A. Salvatore

The Mary Poppins Books: *Mary Poppins*, *Mary Poppins Comes Back*, *Mary Poppins Opens the Door*, *Mary Poppins in the Park* from P. L. Travers

Never Trust a Dead Man from Vivian Vande Velde. See also *The Rumpelstiltskin Problem*

Stuart Little by E. B. White.

The Once and Future King Quintet: *The Sword in the Stone*, *The Queen of Air and Darkness*, *The Ill-Made Knight*, *The Candle in the Wind* from T. H. White. There is also a sort of late postscript – *The Book of Merlyn*

Complete Fairy Tales by Oscar Wilde.

Snow White and Rose Red by Patricia C. Wrede. See also *Book of Enchantments* and The Enchanted Forest Quartet: *Dealing with Dragons* (aka *Dragonsbane*), *Searching for Dragons* (aka *Dragon Search*), *Calling on Dragons*, *Talking to Dragons*

Dancing Flames

Halfway to school – that was when things got weird. In one step, Ivy went from trotting along the cracked sidewalk in her black boots to stepping with four long legs across a field of long grass interlaced with a variety of wildflowers. She realized right away that the reason she had pulled back to Calmcil had to be important, very important. Once she got her bearings, Ivy turned northward and raced to the castle of her friend and mentor, Amidel. As a wizard, he would know why she had been brought back, and what was needed of her. He had been the one who had explained what was happening to the frightened young girl who had suddenly appeared, literally, in front of him the year before, completely shocked by the transformation of the landscape and herself. Although he had never known a unicorn shapeshifter before (odd for an elf of his advanced years – Ivy guessed he was somewhere around 800, but with elves it's hard to tell), he had heard about them and done some study. He was therefore completely prepared to explain what had just happened to the girl in front of him, once she had calmed down. He had taught her how to control her changes, and the benefits she gained from each of her forms.

Ivy had been only twenty, going about her own life. She was in college, living on her own, and doing ok. She brought out the figurine collection she'd had since before she had memories – all 40 statues were of unicorns. On a Friday in May, she had found a beautiful glass shelf that would hold all of them, and so she had taken them out of their storage locations and arranged them in her bedroom. The next morning, thankfully a Saturday (at least for her sanity), was the first time she had been brought to Calmcil. Walking around in her house, doing a little bit of cleaning, suddenly she wasn't in her place, but in the middle of a forest, and she wasn't carrying the dishes she had been, and

didn't even have *hands*, only four legs with hooves. Imagine her shock when Ivy realized that, not only did she have four legs, but she also had a tail, a long neck, and a horn on her head. Definitely not what she had expected to happen that day.

Immediately after she had noticed the change and attempted to remain sane, there was a voice from off to her left. It was male, and sounded like an English professor she'd had the previous semester – distinguished, intelligent, middle-aged or so, and somewhat British. “Excuse me.” She whipped her head around and all she managed to do was make herself dizzy, not being accustomed to the mechanics and scale of this new body. Ivy stumbled for half a second as she tried to regain her equilibrium, and this gentleman stepped forward and set his hand on her shoulder. The caring touch steadied her, and she was able to see what he looked like: tall, probably six foot four or taller; long white hair, tied back and reaching far down his back; over deep green robes; piercing green eyes, almost the color of his robes; lightly tanned skin; a staff in one hand nearly as tall as he, and – she had to peer at them to make sure – yep, pointy ears. Ivy thought to herself - *Pointed ears? I'm definitely not at home. Definitely not in Kansas anymore...too bad I can't smile in this body – do horses, well unicorns, smile or laugh? Not sure where I am, but this is nothing I've seen or even thought about before... I wonder if they help him hear better.* He laughed, and Ivy looked at him, startled. She hadn't said anything, and he had no reason to laugh at her, being as she had just dropped into this place for no reason. The man smiled at her, and asked, “Don't you know unicorns communicate through telepathy?”

If Ivy had had hands, she would have hid her now burning face as she tried to think of some way to recapture her previous thought. Something that would be polite,

kind, helpful maybe ... not snotty and rude about this unusual creature she knew nothing about. But her companion only smiled at her, and said, “Yes, I do have exceptional hearing skills, but with you it doesn’t matter when you’re in this form. You won’t be a unicorn all the time. You *can* change back into a human.”

What? Really?

“Yes, really. You simply need to close your eyes, and imagine yourself morphing back into a human form.” Since all Ivy did was stare at him skeptically, he responded, “Just try it, and see what happens.”

OK. I’ll give it a shot, since I don’t have anything to lose.

Ivy took a deep breath, closed her eyes, and tried to picture what she looked like in a unicorn body – the same fuzzy hazel colored eyes, copper hair that was now fur across her body, and black hooves. Slowly, she tried to turn that image into a picture of herself as a human, dressed in her clothes and standing next to this weird man. Ivy felt something strange happening in her body, a tingling in her skin, a stretching in her muscles and bones. It wasn’t painful, just – odd.

After a moment, she opened her eyes, and what she had seen in her mind’s image was reality – she was in human form. Releasing a sigh of relief, Ivy turned to the strange man standing next to her. “Apparently you know what is happening to me, so I would appreciate it if you would tell me, *what the hell is going on?*”

The older man chuckled at the fear in her voice, and answered, “Apparently you aren’t from around here. All beings in Calmcil know about shapeshifters.”

“If everyone knows, apparently they’re common here, huh?”

“No, actually, shapeshifters are rare. The reason everyone knows is because the king is one, though he’s not a unicorn, but a wolf. And he shifts quite rarely – not too good for the fate of the country if the king is running around chasing chickens, is it?” He smiled and politely offered his arm. “My name is Amidel. If you haven’t guessed, I’m a wizard. If you like, I’ll take you to my home. There you can get something to eat, rest a little, and I can tell you what you need to know about your gift.”

Ivy raised one eyebrow at his arm, and then realized that he was the only creature aside from a few bugs that she had seen since her arrival in this strange place, Calmsomething. He seemed harmless enough. She carefully placed her hand on his arm and walked with him to the north, for about an hour. While they were walking, he started speaking to her about the land they were in, explaining the creatures that lived there and the way that the people lived. She learned about the different kingdoms, the various flora that they were walking past, and quite a bit about the gift of shapeshifting. That discussion also brought up the king again, and Ivy learned that his name was Oliver Telrunya, that he was half-elven, half-human, and that he was the only male child in a family of five. She also learned all that Amidel knew of the particulars of the king’s shifting ability. Once they reached his castle, he gave her a bed, some food, and several texts to read so she could learn what her gift entailed.

All this flashed through Ivy’s mind now as she raced on four legs to Amidel’s home. She knew that he would be able to tell her why she had been brought back, and what she needed to do to go home. Last year, she had been called to remove a corrupt wizard and his supporters from the positions of power he had gained for them. The reason for this journey would probably be much more difficult for her small group of

helpers. In addition to Amidel, Ivy had found a few others that were willing to help her when she appeared in Calmcil. There was Finway, a bookish dwarf who had trained as a fighter that lived in the northern forests, and Prisca, an intelligent green dragon, heir to the throne of the kingdom to the west of that ruled by Oliver Telrunya.

With these three companions, Ivy had succeeded in chasing the corrupt and wicked wizard from his station in Oliver's court. Racing to the north, she knew that he couldn't be back, but that this was somehow connected to why she was back in Calmcil. She knew that Oliver was somehow involved, but until she spoke with Amidel, there was no way of knowing exactly how, and what needed to be done to "save the day" and return her to regular life.

* * *

"You're early. I didn't think you'd get here for another hour or so." Smiling, Amidel himself was the one who met Ivy at the gate. "I am glad you are early though. There's a lot to do, and we have little time. Oliver has been kidnapped, and there are just a few clues to his location and about those who took him. Come in, and have something to eat – I know you're hungry after that run. As you eat, I'll fill you in on what I know. Finway is already here, and Prisca should arrive shortly. They will be glad to know that you are here to help as well."

Ivy stepped through the gate and into the stable, with Amidel following. Even though it had been a year since she first discovered her shapeshifting ability, Ivy was still uncomfortable with people watching her as she changed. Last year Amidel and Finway had designed a room for her use in the stable, and she was pleased to find it still as clean and orderly as she had left it at the end of her last visit. Inside the cozy room, she stepped

behind the screen, shifted into human form again, and exchanged her street clothes for a dress made for this world. Although Ivy enjoyed wearing dresses and skirts, there were many moments when she would prefer the freedom of movement offered by pants, and she had convinced the tailor last year to make her a few pairs of leggings and pants. The first time she had walked into town wearing those pants there was quite a stir, but they were now accustomed to seeing Ivy in her leather pants, and several women in the castle and the town had taken to wearing breeches while they were working. Nevertheless, for now, since Ivy had no idea what would be required of her and if she would be traveling or not, it was easier to wear a dress and if need be, change later.

After greeting the others, Amidel shared what he knew about the situation with all of them over a fast but filling meal of fruits, bread, cheese and nuts. There wasn't much to tell. Oliver had known that something was going to happen to him, and had made sure that he had everything in order another member of his family to take over. "What we do know is that he was ready for it, whatever it was. He had written letters to his family and his advisors, telling them what he wanted to be done in the kingdom while he was away, and what he wanted done to make sure of his return. What is known about his disappearance is that he went into his bedchamber two nights ago at the regular time, and the next morning his bed hadn't been slept in. His advisors asked his mother what they should do, and she was the one who held the letters. They were supposed to continue their jobs until his return, and his mother would be acting as ruler until that time."

"Doesn't that seem a little suspicious? His mother has the letters, and she's supposed to take over for him until his return. He disappeared during the night, from the castle. Had he changed his routine, or would it be easy to find him alone?" Ivy was

asking the questions as fast as they appeared in her mind as she processed the facts she was learning and what little she had known about the king from her last visit.

Amidel shook his head and replied, "His mother was unaware that she had these letters. Oliver's advisors had a sealed note from him that they were to take to his mother in the instance of his disappearance. The note directed his mother to a secret panel in a chest in her room that she was unaware of, where the letters were hidden."

"OK." One question answered.

"So why are we here?" Finway asked, looking slightly confused but ready to do what was necessary, whatever it was. His axe lay on the table in ready reach as he ate. "Why did you call us here, and what are *we* supposed to do about the information we have?"

Prisca replied with a shake of her scaled head, "Isn't it obvious? We are to find the king. We are the rescue party, the cavalry, riding in to save him, but we have nothing to go on right now other than a few sparse facts and a bunch of rumors. We need more." The last comment was directed to Amidel, who nodded.

"Yeah, I've got a lot of questions. I'd like to talk to his mother and the advisors, and see his room. Maybe there are some clues that were missed," Ivy added.

Amidel smiled at the three. "That can be arranged."

* * *

Later that morning, the four of them rode into the main city of Ataraxis: the elven wizard, the dragon, the dwarf, and the shapeshifter. With Amidel in the front, they were an impressive troop, and immediately conducted to the gates of the castle. He simply passed a piece of paper to the gatekeeper, a man roughly the size of Finway but also

twice his height. The gatekeeper scanned the note, then simply nodded and pulled a lever inside the gatehouse behind him. The portcullis silently disappeared into the pale grey stone walls, and the troop rode in. At the entrance to the castle, Oliver's valet, Thomas, met them. He seemed very agitated and glad that they'd arrived. He waited, bouncing his weight back and forth, until the stable hands had taken the reins of the horses and had led them away. Then he silently motioned the four to follow him into the castle. Amidel and Ivy exchanged a glance, because Thomas was known for his effusive discussions with anyone about everything. No matter how hard you tried, you could *not* get him to stop talking... this was odd.

Once inside, the travelers learned why Thomas was so silent. He paused until the door was closed, then took a deep breath, and opened his mouth. No sound emerged, and all that could be seen was an empty space where his tongue had been removed. Ivy reached out to him in sympathy, but he stopped her hand and shook his head. He moved his hands in gestures that made Ivy curious, because it seemed that the reason his tongue was missing was because he knew something about the king's disappearance, almost like he had seen or heard something during the night Oliver disappeared. Unfortunately, without a tongue, there was no way to get the information from him, since Thomas didn't read or write.

Amidel was looking around, his eyes searching the rafters and corners like he was looking for something. Ivy thought he looked like a dog that had caught a scent, but would never tell him that because it would probably hurt his feelings. She watched him for a moment, and he simply shook his head, not even looking at her. She shrugged, since he would tell her later what he was looking for. Finway and Prisca were also acting

a bit strange. Prisca was acting very uncomfortable, and Finway was studying Thomas as though they had never met before. Ivy was very confused, but knew that she'd be told what was going on eventually, once the others figured out what was bothering them. She turned back to Thomas, who was looking very nervous, and said, "Thomas, you know why we're here. I'd like to see the king's chamber. I think there might be some information about his disappearance in his rooms that might have been missed."

Thomas shook his head and wrinkled his nose. Ivy simply looked at him, and raised her eyebrows. He knew that look: it had gotten him into a lot of trouble the last time she was here. He shrugged his shoulders, rolled his eyes, and started walking across the main room to the stairs. Ivy smiled – 'the look' had worked again – and trotted after Thomas. The other three group members took one last look around the entranceway, then cautiously followed.

At the door to the king's bedchamber, Thomas stopped and motioned Ivy to him. He made more gestures, which she understood to mean that only she and Amidel could enter the room. "Guys, there's something set up on the door – only humans and elves can get in," she said, watching Thomas to make sure she had gotten the information correct. He nodded, and made another gesture, at the top of his head in the shape of the conic hat worn by the court wizard. "Your wizards put it up to guard the room, right?" Ivy asked. Thomas nodded, excited that Ivy was able to understand him.

"That's alright," Prisca answered. "Finway and I can go speak to the castle guards and servants, since they probably know more than anyone else in the castle."

"Good idea." Ivy and Amidel eased into the room, with her whispering something about janitors and secretaries that ran things. Amidel wasn't sure what a

janitor was, but he did know about secretaries, and was curious as to why Ivy was talking about them. He decided to ask her later.