

BARTHOLEMEW

Barth might not be the most intelligent lion around, but what he lacks in smarts, he makes up for in shoulder width, bicep diameter, and the heart of a much larger cat. Deep down, the big lug has a fondness for wildflowers and cooking, and enjoys a simple life. Macaroni and Cheese is his favorite meal to both eat and cook.

Bartholemew's parents had big dreams for their little lion cub, They hoped that their son would one day take up a position as a castle guard, or become a decorated soldier. After all, he was built like a battering ram and always a little slow on the uptake. However, Barth had dreams of becoming a chef like his father, and dreamed of working in the royal kitchens to cook for the king and queen, despite his lack of finesse and poor memory for recipes.

Barth's parents tried desperately to hone his interests in the opposite direction. They gave him punching bags and soldier toys, wooden swords and shields, but the only tool Barth wanted to have in his meaty little paws was a spatula, and subtly nuanced discouragement wasn't nearly enough to prove to him that becoming a chef wasn't exactly what his parents wanted for him.

Bartholemew approached the owner of The Jealous Harpy, a local tavern, begging to be given a chance to prove his amazing kitchen skills and be put to work. The tavern owner, Ninette, gave him a chance... and Barth "proved" himself by preparing the most vile tasting bowl of mac'n'cheese she had ever had the misfortune to sample in her life. In the end, Barth's strength and insistence won him a job at The Jealous Harpy anyway... with the big-sounding but small-at-heart title of "Dining Supervisor," putting Barth right in the middle of the tavern's main dining room to "supervise eating and going ons."

Although he primarily works as a bouncer for The Jealous Harpy, escorting rowdy patrons out and checking coats at the door, Ninette lets Barth wear the chef uniform and arrange food onto plates, and he is proud of his job as Dining Supervisor, taking the title very seriously. He has even grown close to some of the locals, and Ninette's younger sister Giselle, who is just as scatterbrained as he is, although less gifted in the musculature department.

KING ETIENNE

When he was born, Etienne was third in line for the throne, sharing this rank with his sister, behind the Duke and his firstborn son, a blond boy named Aurelien only a few months his senior. He and his sister, although they would likely never truly be royal, were well-beloved in court. It was through tragedy that the pair were even considered for the position. A terrible fire ravaged the Duke's home, engulfing father and mother, and rendering the eldest child unfit for rule. This truly terrible incident lead to the upheaval of the kingdom, and Gwenwyn and Etienne stepped forward to bring the fearful beast back to heel, with only their humble educations and pragmatic demeanor to help them.

Tragedy struck again shortly after, devastating the family once more. Gwenwyn was ravaged by a beast, and left a shell of her former self. Although she survived the encounter, it was just

barely, and with the help of a neighboring queen who loved her well, Gwenwyn was given new life... although now, much like the former prince, she was hardly fit to rule.

It was Etienne who brought the kingdom together in a time of grief. By his power, the beast which killed his sister was captured and enslaved for the sake of the kingdom, and the people rejoiced to at least have a place to push their blame. Etienne, the sole remaining heir, was crowned King after bringing the people a brief moment of hope.

Although well loved by his people, King Etienne is never safe, as there are still those who would desire his life as well. There are rumors circulating that a skull-faced monster is in pursuit of the young king's life, and will stop at nothing to kill him. The King keeps his guards close to him for this reason, and never strays far from his castle, paranoid. Even darker rumors suggest that there is no such beast chasing after the king, and it is a delusion of his mind- a manifestation of his fears after seeing so many around him die.

CASPIAN

As the royal stablemaster, Caspian has learned to keep his mouth shut and obey what the royal family tells him to do, no matter how distasteful. There's no point pussyfooting around when you've got the king and his guards riding your tail all day and all night with some new complaint or request for a profitable beast every season.

Frankly, it doesn't matter whose buttocks sits atop the throne. They're all the same to someone of middle or low class. Gossip about political intrigue gets you nowhere in the grand scheme of things, and Caspian is just so tired of it all. He keeps to himself and does his job, raising poor animals to be the new court plaything or tomorrow's dinner- whatever the current crowned bastard asks for. It's a thankless, often dirty job, but it grants Caspian invitations to nearly every party... where he plays a proper wallflower and drinks alone.

He'd be a handsome fellow too, if he wasn't so gloomy. Coming from good, fine lineage, there's nothing wrong with his face except for that ugly, bored expression. He's also in good shape from nights spent dragging hay and wrestling Wuffs or chasing Wabbits through the snow. Despite the grimy nature of his job, he's always well dressed. It's too bad, the court ladies whisper, that he's so stoic and always smells like a Catbat.

On the rare occasion, Caspian is asked to perform some task greater than training Pumpkitties to "sit" or "shake." In fact, Caspian is considered a master of all manner of beasts, even those that aren't fit as animal companions. After the gruesome murder of the King's sister, a certain beast was kept locked in the greenhouse. On full moons, it is Caspian's duty to make sure it doesn't escape. This is perhaps his most disliked duty.

Caspian isn't the talkative sort, but you'd be surprised what gossip one overhears when the higher court treats you just like one of the animals you raise. Some wine might get him to crack a smile.

PROFESSOR HOSTA

Disclaimer: If any of Professor Hosta's students (or dropouts) have caused you any significant distress, he is truly sorry, but you will have to issue an official complaint with higher management. Letters of official complaint may be addressed directly to the garbage pail.

Poor, overworked Professor Hosta. Teachers really don't get the respect they deserve, for all they have to go through. Children, truly, are incessantly *inharmonious*, and the one thing the Professor hates more than over-steeped tea is inharmonious magical energy. Really, no one knows how he got roped into the gig, seeing how much he clearly dislikes children.

But, a man must make do. Hosta tries his best to set the little fools on the right path, and to be fair, some of them have turned out *average* at the very least. The truth is, what students tend to lack most of all- is *motivation*.

When Hosta was young, not just any little kit or cub could pick up a wand, start swinging it around, and call themselves a witch or a potions master. It was those who had desperation that made it the farthest and achieved actual skill. Those students with a reason for being, a reason to create magic, will always be the most prized in Hosta's eyes. After all, deep down, Hosta is a kindly sort of person. He enjoys sitting down for tea and having long discussions about magical theory... but when you spend your days surrounded by young things who think they know better than you, no amount of honey in your tea can make teaching taste sweet again.

Hosta's lessons are difficult, to be sure. He won't go easy on anyone, and has brought more than one student to tears with silent disapproval. Most would-be-wizards and would-be-witches never make the cut. But, his praise, though hard won, earns one of the top regarded magical educations of the century.