

Tap. Tap. Tap. His heel bounced against the floor, not in any real nervousness but in anticipation. Ivar paced not far from him while Solen was sitting on a bench opposite him twirling her wand between her fingers. He didn't pay it much mind, but his French competitor was watching him. It wasn't the first time, and not something he was unused to, but it'd become significantly more intent since the Weighing of the Wands the day before. At dinner the previous night, he caught her more than once.

He could guess at the sudden interest, but he didn't much care either way. To say nothing of his relationship with Fleur, she was competition. He was going to beat her, it was that simple. *Not that I don't have a little bit of extra incentive.*

The wait stretched on, the three of them just sitting there in silence. Then the door finally opened and in stepped the five judges. Madame Maxime had to duck her head to get in under the door, though not by much. They'd at least tried to make the stadium with her in mind. Harry and Solen stood, while Ivar ceased his pacing.

Ludo wore a big smile as he asked them, "Right, everyone ready?" None of them were in the mood for his boisterousness, and he coughed as they all stared at him expectantly, "Good, good, the moment has finally arrived."

"Yes, your first task is simple enough." Crouch cut in, as weary of Ludo as the champions were, "Reach the center of the arena as quickly as possible. Your times will be recorded."

"Nothing else?" Ivar asked, "No other rules?"

Crouch turned to him with a frown, "If you'd let me finish. There is one quite important rule. You may not permanently harm any of your competitors. Keep in mind that you still fall under the laws of Wizarding Britain. Bear that in mind as it will fall to the judges' discretion to penalize you."

All three nodded and Ludo clapped his hands, "Excellent. We'll leave you with your heads and Professor McGonagall will retrieve you once they've joined us in the judges' box." With that Ludo and Barty left the room.

Maxime and Mila moved their students away while Dumbledore stepped over to Harry with a soft smile, "How are you feeling, my boy?"

"Ready to go find out what the task is."

The headmaster chuckled at that, "Ever a young man of action." He reached up and patted him on the shoulder, "Keep on your toes, and don't overlook the little things. Just trust yourself, and you'll do brilliantly."

"That's the plan."

Dumbledore chuckled, "Very good, Harry, very good." He gave him one last pat on the shoulder and headed out the door. The other two heads followed close behind and it was just the three of them in the room.

Harry looked between his two competitors. Solen took a deep breath, seemingly to calm her own nerves while Ivar was staring intently at the door. Deciding it was only right to show a bit of good sportsmanship, he told them, "Best of luck."

Ivar looked to him, and offered a firm nod, "To you, too. May the best of us win."

"Yes," Solen agreed with a little smile, "I intend to."

Professor McGonagall opened the door then, "We're ready for you."

Harry shared a look with Ivar as Solen pushed past them to be the first out the door. *Merlin, somebody should really tell her there's a fine line between confidence and arrogance. And she has a knack for overstepping it like it's not even there.*

The Durmstrang champion followed her out, and Harry went next. They followed the Transfiguration Professor down the tunnel. The noise grew louder and louder with every step. Considering there were far fewer competitors in this competition than in the dueling or the quidditch, he half expected the crowd to be smaller.

He was woefully wrong in that expectation. As they stepped out into the stadium, he could see that it was packed. And that was despite the fact that he couldn't see the whole of the stadium. There were banners bearing the crests of each of the three schools hanging down. There were students and parents, and a great many people who were just there for the spectacle. *I suppose selling tickets is part of how they're paying for all those winners prizes.*

But that wasn't what caught any of the champions' attention. Instead, they were focused on the six meter high wall that had been erected since the last time they were in the stadium. It was perfectly circular, and they could just about make out a single obelisk in the middle that jutted out over the top.

They could see a single set of stairs. In the stone of the wall next to those stairs was etched the two golden wands, and the three stars of Beauxbatons. McGonagall gestured to Solen, "Miss LeClaire." The dark-haired witch headed up as his Head of House gestured to the left, "That way Mr. Rasmussen. Head up when you find your own set of stairs." A cheer went up in that moment as Solen reached the top of the wall.

"**Tak.**" With his nerves he fell into his native Danish and headed away.

"To the right for you, Mr. Potter." McGonagall gave him a small smile, "And best of luck."

"Thank you, Professor." He walked around the edge of the wall, and knew when Ivar must have reached the top of the wall because another cheer went up. As he reached his own set of stairs, he climbed. The roar that went up as he reached the top was easily the loudest, deafeningly ringing through the stadium. It was a cloudy English afternoon above them. There was a light drizzle coming down from the clouds, that never reached the arena below thanks to a bit of magic.

But Harry didn't care about the cheers, he was preoccupied with something else. What lay before him looked quite simple. A long, narrow, segmented stone bridge ran in a single line to the center of the arena from his starting platform. The arena was filled with clear water that swirled of its own volition. Looking across the ring wall, he could see his competitors spaced evenly away from him with stone bridges of their own.

"Yes, yes! Welcome at last to the first round of the European Tournament of Magic for our youngest competitors!" Ludo's voice boomed over the top of the cheers, "For Beauxbatons we have Solen LeClaire." The French witch waved to the crowd, clearly enjoying the spectacle of the moment, "For

Durmstrang, Ivar Rasmussen.” The Dane stood there stoically, looking at the bridge, clearly trying to imagine what came next, “And from Hogwarts, Harry Potter!” There was something to be said for being the home favorite and a national hero to boot. The crowd roared to life as his name was announced. Absently and a bit awkwardly, he waved, but like Ivar, he was much more interested in the bridge.

“The goal is simple, reach the center of the arena.” With that the bridges shifted to life each of the segments breaking into more segments that arranged themselves, sometimes as winding paths and others as floating platforms that levitated up and down or circled. The waters below bubbled as pillars rose from the depths, some at the sides of the paths and platforms, others in between them. *Bloody hell, this must have taken some serious effort to set up.*

“But while the goal is simple, the task is far from it!” Ludo sounded giddy, “Should any of our competitors find themselves in the drink... they’ll need to make their way to the ladder and try... try again!” Some of the pillars came to life then, throwing what looked like stone fists at incredible speeds back and forth between themselves. *Well at least we know what some of them do, but what about the others?*

“Best of luck to all three champions! And with that, begin!” On the last word, nearly every person in the stadium cheered. The first bit of the bridge was still as it had been. Tentatively, Harry took a step. *There’s no guarantee that everything is as it appears.*

“And they’re off!” Ludo commented, but Harry just tried to tune it all out. The first bit of bridge was innocuous, but it was only a moment before he reached the end. Standing on the precipice, the water was a good three meters below. The next platform was a jump to the right, and between him and it was the first of the pillars. They were throwing four fists back and forth. They came from indents on one only to be caught on the other and thrown back.

Aiming at the one on his left, he fired off an Impediment Jinx in the hopes that it would slow the constant flow of stone fists. The spell bounced away harmlessly off a strong shield. The pillar glowed with runes at the assault and it actually grew faster.

“And each of them has come to the first hurdle! How will they overcome it?” Ludo boomed.

Thinking quickly, Harry looked down at the water below. He weaved his wand, and it started crawling up the pillar in tendrils. It quickly rose and rose along the smooth white stone, until it reached the openings where the projectiles were leaving and entering the pillar. That alone was enough to slow the onslaught, but then the water froze on the pillar. One of the stone fists sped across and bounced off the ice to fall harmlessly into the water below.

Just because he’d frozen it didn’t mean that the stones had stopped their struggle though. Without hesitation, he jumped over to the next platform. As he steadied himself, he heard the cracking of ice and loud shattering as they broke free. He didn’t get much of a chance to give it any thought though as another pillar in front of him fired a large circular disk in his direction.

A quick reductor shattered it into nothing more than tiny pebbles, some of them as small as grains of sand. He could hear it getting ready to fire another one. With a quick upward flick of his wrist, the far end of the platform he was on shot upward on a steep slope. The next disk came shooting out of the

pillar only for it to bounce off the bottom of the platform. It went soaring off toward the crowd before bouncing off a protective barrier around the outside ring of the arena.

A purple spell came flashing from his left then, but Harry managed to pull up a shield before it reached him. It fizzled out harmlessly, but he was already looking for another. Ludo chuckled loudly, "Oh, look here ladies and gentlemen. It seems that our competitors are going to be attacking each other as well as the task ahead of them."

The spell came from Solen, and she wasn't content with just attacking him either. He saw another spell scream toward his right. Ivar didn't see the spell coming his way, he was too preoccupied with getting past the first hurdle. He was sent tumbling into the water, a big splash sending ripples across the surface. A ladder shot down from the starting platform, and he struggled his way over to it as the waters swirled.

Looking over to the Beauxbatons champion, he saw that she was about to jump to the third platform, just a slight bit ahead of him. He didn't take aim for her but for her landing spot. His spell hit her landing spot and sent it juddering. Solen dropped flat on her face right onto the platform as another pillar started an attack on her. There was an audible groan from the crowd as the impact resonated through the stadium.

Satisfied that she was preoccupied with her own ordeal for the time being, he took stock of his own situation. The bit of platform he'd manipulated in front of him was still deflecting away the discs that were coming his way. There were two options for him, one forward and to the left, the other to his right. He chose the left where three platforms were rotating at a fair speed around a single pillar in the middle. He landed and the platform shuddered for a split second before he heard something opening along the central pillar.

There was a noise, and he could see blue light emanating from within. It was pointing right at him, and he guessed what was coming before it had a chance to touch him. It belched a puff of hot orange fire that was met by a Flame-Freezing Spell before it could reach him. The fires licked against his skin but felt like nothing more than a tickle. He hopped across the next of the rotating platforms and over to his right to another single straight platform.

The second his feet hit the stone, it started falling apart beneath him. The pillar in front of him unleashed a large slab of rock, bigger than his torso at a great speed toward him. Again, he turned it to little more than gravel. The next one suffered the same fate as he ran away from the crumbling platform. All of that was bad enough, but to top it all off, he couldn't see anywhere else to go. Hurrying along the platform. There was only one option in to him at that point.

"Brilliant! Reckless! Or a bit of both!" Ludo thundered, excited by his little maneuver, "Potter's thrown himself on top of one of the pillars!" The only problem with his enthusiasm was it told his competitors he was a sitting duck. It was barely out of his mouth before spells came from both his left and right. He hadn't really expected it from Ivar, but when he looked over it was obvious that the Dane was quite far behind, so it made some sense.

With his vantage point, they couldn't take him off guard in the slightest. They washed against his shield, but they weren't so easily deterred. Solen had the bright idea to summon one of the disks from the larger pillars, and sent it hurtling toward him. What she probably wasn't expecting was for him to send it back toward her twice as fast with a well-placed Banishing Charm. It exploded right behind the French

witch. The shrapnel cut small gashes in her light blue outfit and the platform she was on nearly broke in half from the force of the impact. *That might have been a bit much.* Another spell came his way from Ivar, but it went wide and just fizzled out harmlessly against the barrier at the edge of the arena.

With the brief reprieve he'd won himself, he looked around the pillar. *I might be able to make that jump, but I don't like my chances.* The nearest platform he could see was ahead and to his left... and a good seven meters away. Even from a height, he doubted he could make that sort of jump, "Well... fuck."

But that was when he saw it, the ever-so-slight distortion of something moving much closer. Another spell came toward him from a furious Solen. Unwilling to remain such an open target, he took a leap of faith. Harry threw himself into the air toward what he hoped was another platform, casting a finite as he dropped.

The hidden platform was smaller than the others, no bigger than half a meter. With a heavy impact, He caught it, arms outstretched over its length, feet dangling over the edge. It knocked the air from his lungs and left him stinging. Pulling hard, he managed to drag his body up as it floated over to the next stretch of the task.

What came next was three separate, winding paths. It was hard enough to tell which would take him where he wanted to go just looking at it, but it only became harder when the second his foot hit where the paths split, he found himself upside down. It was disorienting to say the least, and he could feel the blood rushing to his head. Yet when he tested a jump, he didn't fall off. *Well, that's bloody nauseating!*

Taking the lefthand path, he quickly came to a broken bit of it where it was turned into nothing more than separate stepping stones. There were three pillars jutting up at that part of the path, one to his right, another in front, and the last behind him, but they didn't do anything until he reached the first steppingstone. At first it just looked like another projectile coming his way, and he thought to destroy it with a reductor, but the spell just washed over it without any harm. It quickly got closer to him, and expanded into a large net.

Before it could wrap around him, he set it alight with blue bell flames. The ash that was left behind fell to the water above his head. As the net broke apart, a stone hand came rocketing from in front. His hesitation with the net left him vulnerable, and it hit him violently on the left shoulder. He thought he heard a slight crack as it sent him off-balance. He had to catch himself on another of the steppingstones. His shoulder lit up like it was on fire but with a grunt he just ignored the pain and pushed himself up.

He dodged another of the projectiles, and jumped to the next stone as the third pillar shot low at his feet. He hopped his way across the steppingstones without any more problems and ended up on the other side. Following the path along, he cast a quick spell to knit together his broken clavicle before he came to its end, "Great... dead end... where to next?" The center path was above his head to his right. Kneeling down, he grabbed the edge of the path and pulled himself to the other side.

He was the right way up again, but felt weightless, as the gravity was still switched. But, more importantly, the other path was now below him instead of above him. Conjuring a rope, Harry put a Sticking Charm on one end and shot it toward the path. It stuck to the surface as gravity tried to push him toward the sky. With that he pulled himself across the rope, when he was dangling over the water. No longer on the platform, the gravity reversed and he found himself dangling on the rope above the water.

A spell came his way from Ivar then, a stunner that would have seen him drop into the water below. He held himself on the rope with one arm momentarily, and managed to deflect it away. Unfortunately it meant putting more strain on his magically repaired shoulder and he had to stop himself from screaming out in pain.

Hurrying across the rope, he made across to the other path before another spell arrived. As he stepped onto it, he looked over toward Solen.

“Potter really is quick on his feet ladies and gentlemen! And what’s this it looks like LeClaire’s found herself in a spot of trouble.” The French witch struggled with a net while dangling upside down. Seeing an easy opportunity. Harry cast a Banishing Charm in her direction. Unable to avoid the spell, it hit her square in the chest and sent her off the edge. For a brief moment, she floated upward toward the sky before gravity took hold again and she tumbled head first into the water.

Taking stock of his progress, Harry was bolstered when he saw he was nearly finished. *Just one more.* The last stretch of the task lay ahead of him with the center column on the other side. What laid between him and it was more platforms floating over the water, some back and forth, some up and down, and some side to side, all of them interspersed with more pillars.

Quickly as he could, he tried to map it in his mind and made his way onto the first of the platforms. As he’d come to expect, the pillars came alive at that point. Between the torrents of flame and the ridiculously fast projectiles, it made the area look like a bit of a death trap. *Or at least a bit of a maiming trap.*

And then, as Harry stood there, the platform beneath his feet shook violently and started plummeting down to the water below. He hopped to the next platform that was floating up and down... and took him right into the path of one of the stone fists. He made to duck beneath it, but it grazed against the side of his head.

“Oh and somehow, he’s managed to stay on!” Wobbling from the impact, he could feel a trickle of blood. He didn’t have time to worry about it, because he wasn’t going to wait around long enough to find out if the new platform would falter as well.

Dipping and diving and dodging... he made his way forward, ever closer to the center of the arena. And every platform he touched in his journey splashed into the waters below before returning upward where it began.

He tiptoed across one long, thin stretch of stone and nearly found himself knocked off balance as a torrent of water shot across his feet from another of the pillars. *Seems a little late to be adding something new... bastards.*

Little by little he made his way forward, his body fatigued and sweat dripping from his brow. Finally, he landed on the final platform, made of black stone instead of white. He walked to the center and touched the obelisk, as he did it the roar of the crowd finally reached him.

“And he’s done it! Harry Potter has completed the first task of the tournament!” The commentary was nearly drowned out by the crowd, “And in just over twenty minutes.” Harry felt the euphoria of a job well-done wash over him, and it was quickly followed by a lightheadedness.

He brought his hand to his temple and felt the wet blood there, "Nothing Poppy can't fix."

He found himself looking at the obelisk. There were runes written in lines, in different languages. None of it seemed to have anything to do with powering the magic of the task, "Something about ice and snow..." Without a second thought, he decided to take it with him. A couple of severing charms cut through the rock, and he levitated it off and shrunk it down, big enough that it would fit in his pocket. *Who knows, could be a clue for the next task.*

Behind him, the bridge reformed itself into a single line and the pillars descended back down into the water. There was a painful throb from his shoulder, as he made his way across the bridge. He looked to his fellow champions. Solen was just starting the final stretch while Ivar was walking upside down along the path further back. Satisfied with his victory, he waved at the Hogwarts student section as he made his way down the stairs.

Professor McGonagall was waiting for him at the bottom of the stairs, "Well done, Mr. Potter." She wore a usually stern expression, but even he could see that she was quite proud of him, "Now if you'll follow me, I'll show you to Madam Pomphrey."

"Thank you... Professor." His speech was slurred. Head wounds had a propensity to bleed profusely, and it was catching up with him.

They headed into the tunnel, and into a room he hadn't been in before. It was a medical room, though not quite as well stocked as the school's infirmary. Poppy Pomphrey scoffed when she saw the state of him, "You know, Mr. Potter, I'm quite impressed. This is the first time I've had to treat you this year. It must be a record for you." She muttered the last to herself, but he heard anyway, "Heavens know I've seen enough of you over the years."

"You say that like you don't enjoy my company, Poppy." He gave her a smile, but only managed it a moment before wincing.

She just clicked her tongue and gestured him over to one of the beds as she waved her wand over him, "Not a bad bit of healing considering the circumstances, but I'm going to have to rebreak it to fix it properly. And a concussion to go along with it, how lovely."

The wound on his head knit itself up easily enough, but that did nothing to get rid of the lightheadedness. The matron summoned a vial from the cabinet, "Lost a good bit of blood it would seem. Take this."

The taste was unpleasant but the Blood-Replenishing Potion did its job. He sat there as she went to work. Rebreaking the bone hurt like hell, worse than it did in the actual event without the adrenaline, but it dissipated quickly once Poppy healed the damage, "It really says something that this isn't in your top three worst visits with me."

"I have a gift." he said cheekily.

"That's one way of putting." She said with a roll of her eyes, "Now, the concussion isn't quite as simple. Afraid you're going to have to stay here until I know there's no adverse side effects. If you fall asleep, it's fine, I can check on it with a spell so no problems there."

“I’m always happy for your company.” Harry told her as the door opened again and Solen came in. She was waterlogged, limping quite heavily, and her arm was burned slightly, no worse than first degree though. Then there were the cuts on her back from the disc he’d hurled at her. When she saw him, she only frowned, whether it was in thought or frustration he didn’t know.

“Over there, dear.” Poppy told her. As the matron got to work on his French competitor, the concussion caught up with him as the last of his adrenaline bled away. Harry felt his eyes drifting shut and he was asleep a few moments later.