

Tales of the Vale

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Tale the First (2025-01-31)

We first meet our would be heroes¹, Class Two at the Cathedral School in the foothills north of Bear Vale.

The Cathedral School has two classes. One class caters to six to eleven year olds and the other to twelve to fifteen year olds. The two classes are prosaically named class one and two and more imaginatively called kidlings and eldlings.²

Transitioning from class one to two is a big deal in the minds of the students. In class two the students start seriously studying the art of war and making plans for adulthood. Play is over for the most part. Hermont the Elder takes a bigger role in the student's education and the kids have decided for the most part what role they will play in the future of the valley.

Students spend months here at a time, after sowing and before harvest and then a few weeks after harvest before the snow and ice starts accumulating. They are expected to participate in all aspects of looking after the school, cleaning, cooking, washing, etc. on top of their lessons and are also expected to work on lessons during the long winter.

Class One

The teachers:

Teacher – a nature spirit of fluid gender who has been teaching at the Cathedral School for generations. They are affectionate and very knowledgeable about the invisible and visible worlds. They also teach class two occasionally.

Annabelle – a bear.

Gertrude – a badger.

¹ Bud Bellflower too even though he insists that he is just an ordinary kid.

² Or more rudely snotty nosed brats and the cool kids.

The students:

1. Tam Eagle-eyes age six
2. Otto Ipswich age ten
3. Sally Strivings age nine
4. Nimble Nan age seven
5. Carl Druthers age six
6. Carly Druthers age six³
7. Scaly Scarf age

Class Two

The Teachers:

Hermont the Elder – a powerful sorcerer⁴. He⁵ appears as a vortex of mirror shards. They spin around a common axis and reflect many things some present, some elsewhere and some which are hopefully imaginary. He can adopt many guises but never appears as a human. He was once described as “mean, cruel, petty and a bully” but these things are no longer true if they ever were. He is one of the oldest and most powerful beings in the valley and a very adept teacher.

Ingrid – a bearkin. Ingrid is the tallest and strongest woman in the vale and unlike the bulk of her kin is affable and genial. She is also beautiful and scar free. She loves to teach and trains the shield wall and heavy weapons among more scholarly subjects. She transforms into a giant white bear.

Old Man Gruitt – he is a veteran of the shadow scouts and has just started at the school. He is Ingrid’s polar opposite. Shadows that seem to have no obvious source cling to him

The students:

1. Tuck O’Plenty (Owen) age 12
2. Pretty Percy (Jeff) age 14
3. Allan (Darryl) age 14
4. Brandon the Nimble (Gary) age 15

³ And five minutes older.

⁴ At the very least.

⁵ Well his voice is masculine so that’s the assumption people make. Hermont has not corrected this assumption.

5. Bud Bellflower (Craig) age eight⁶ aka Voleboy.
6. Mean Cass age fourteen
7. Hetty Longshanks age fifteen⁷
8. Trudy Half There, Half Not age seven and a half⁸
9. Gwen Good Shoes⁹ age thirteen.
10. Witch Hazel Bellflower age twelve¹⁰.
11. Just Janet age thirteen.
12. Trilby the Truthful age fourteen.¹¹

Our cast of heroes include:

Young Bud Bellflower (age 8). When he was but a toddler his older sister Witch Hazel turned him into a vole. Months later she miraculously turned him back into a human. This has left him with a special attachment to voles, especially the latest in a long line of Victors. Bud loves plants and can create special mixtures that soothe, heal and send people to their rewards.

Tuck O'Plenty (age 12). A rather small, round boy, meek and clumsy, but undeniably lucky.

Allan (age 14). Another meek and hesitant lad, who is curious, somewhat hesitant, and may yet prove to be a worthy warrior.

Pretty Percy (age 14). Percy is very handsome, curious and mouthy. He likes to think he's a ladies man but the ladies don't seem so sure about that. He loves music.

Brandon the Nimble (age 15). He seems to be destined to join the Shadow Scouts. He loves his bow and hunting.

Old Man Gruitt (age old). A veteran of the Shadow Scouts who is a gifted alchemist and scout and has recently joined the Cathedral School staff. He's in charge of the boys in class two.

Class Two sits and waits for their teacher Old Hermont. The boys, except Percy are lounging at their desks waiting. Percy slips in looking perfect as always just beating the girls into the class. Once all the girls, except Hetty are present, a loud disturbance is heard coming from the girl's

⁶ He's a prodigy.

⁷ The best runner in the entire Valley.

⁸ Trudy is literally the left half of a person. Perfectly bifurcated somehow. It's unknown how this happened and where the other half of is. It's assumed the other half is also seven and a half which together adds up to fifteen.

⁹ She is from a long line of cobblers and always has the best shoes at the Cathedral School. Currently she favours spiked combat boots which she is not allowed to wear inside without padded slip on's.

¹⁰ She transformed her brother Bud into a vole at age 18 months. She shouldn't have been able to do that at 5 ½ and she definitely shouldn't have been able to turn him back. She promises to continue growing into an ever more formidable witch.

¹¹ Trilby cannot lie.

dorm. It's Hetty yelling, and birds and assorted rodents chirping. Hetty stumbles into the room waving her arms around and yelling at the birds and rodents, "I'm not getting married until next year! Stop dressing me!" In a scene worthy of Disney, a group of birds and small rodents are trying to dress her in wedding finery. Her hair is full of twigs and flowers and she's got swatches and snatches of fabric wrapped around her shoulders and arms. She shoos the last of the would-be tiny seamstresses and tailors out a handy window. Pulling the scraps, twigs and flowers from her hair and body and glaring at anyone to dare comment she takes her seat. "It's next year for bear's sake. Are they going to bother me for a whole year?"

One minute Hermont is not there, the next he is. With a clearing of an invisible throat the class goes silent. "Today class we are going on a hike. Please get your gear." Some of the less active students groan sotto voce but they all get their gear.

Hermont leads them along a trail further up into the hills. He discusses the nature sights seen along the way. Suddenly there is a complete failure of an ambush on the part of a small, old man who stumbles out of his hiding place into plain view. More alarming is the huge white predator that rises out its extremely successful hiding place. It's a monstrous, white bear. It rears to its full impressive height and roars! The girls all squeal and charge the white beast tackling it to the ground and rolling around with it like puppies. The bear changes into a tall nude woman and the girls all scream "Ingrid!" It is Ingrid their war teacher.

The small old man is introduced as Gruitt, a former shadow scout who is to train the boys in the ways of war. Old Hermont tells the students that he has business with Old Bear and is leaving Ingrid and Gruitt in charge. He states that he will be back in a few days. He changes into a hawk and soars into the sky. Once he is far enough away not to soil or wet any pants he changes into a mighty dragon and flies off to the East. Ingrid takes the girls under her literal and figurative arms and they head off to train while Gruitt takes charge of the boys for the training he's prepared for them.

Gruitt put them through vigorous paces. He has them venture deeper into the hills looking for bandits. The bandits turned out to be their older siblings and some other relatives. They encountered three groups in turn:

- Bud's oldest brother and his least favorite aunt, Ben Bellflower and Emma Longpants.
- One of Old Crow's¹² grandsons, Carrion Crow.
- Percy's cousin, Stella Highvoice.

¹² Former leader of the Shadow Scouts and brewmaster.

- Tuck's older sister, Patsy O'Plenty.

The second group encountered consisted of:

- Mean Cass's older half-brother – Motherkiller Wainwright.¹³
- Allan's 2nd cousin – Honeychild Meadows.
- Brandon's stepsister – Beatrice Bearbaiter.
- Percy's uncle – Max the Silent¹⁴.
- Another of Old Crow's grandsons – Beer Wagon (strong like mule, smart like wagon).

The final opponent was Tuck's grandfather - Chuck Northman – who is even bigger than Ingrid despite not being a bearkin.



The boys acquitted themselves well. The girls and Ingrid are met and they seem to have had more fun and accumulated fewer bruises and scrapes than the boys. Everyone heads back to the school for the evening meal.

That night as they sleep something awakes them. Looking out the window they see what appears to be a giant, shiny golden dragonfly with glowing eyes. It lands on a ridge near the school and a group of small men¹⁵ apparently made of metal descend from the dragonfly collecting a ladder and a large sheet of rolled paper. They start heading towards the school. Gruitt takes charge and gets the boys ready to flee.

The younger students of Class One and its teachers leave first. Checking for the girls and Ingrid they find them missing! Getting away from the school they circle around for a look. They find the girls and Ingrid in the hills having a singalong and a campfire. Once brought up to speed Ingrid becomes all business. From some distance they spy on the little metal

men who use their ladder to post a message on the door of the school.

The little men, job finished grab their ladder and return to the dragonfly. It ascends and flies off into the darkness. Approaching cautiously they find that the little men have posted a message on the door.

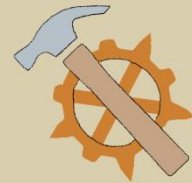
¹³ His mother died in childbirth.

¹⁴ Rumored to have gifted Percy his words, which is why Percy uses so many.

¹⁵ Roughly 18 inches in height.

CALLING ALL HEROES!
THE CLOCKWORK EMPRESS
NEEDS HEROES.

GREAT REWARDS AWAIT
ANYONE WILLING TO PLEDGE
THEIR LOYALTY AND THEIR
LIVES TO THE EMPRESS!
JOIN THE WINNING SIDE.
THE EMPRESS WILL PREVAIL!
ACCEPT NO LESSER
IDEOLOGIES!



RECRUITERS ARE TRAVELLING THE LANES
AND BY-WAYS. YOU SHALL KNOW THEM BY
THEIR EXCELLENCE AND THIS MARK!

THIS MESSAGE HAS BEEN APPROVED BY HER EXCELLENCY GERTRUDE THE 33RD, EMPRESS OF THE GLORIOUS CLOCKWORK EMPIRE. ALL HAIL THE EMPRESS!

Last Updated February 23, 2025

Tale the Second (2025-02-28)

A year has passed since the little metal men's visit. The students spent a lot of time combing through the books in the library but could not find any references to any clockwork empire. Hermont the Elder has consulted every contact he has as well and come up blank. He draws the line at visiting the library at Maripose, the City of Wizards. There has been no sign of any little metal men since.

Hermont the Elder has left on sorcerer's business once again leaving Ingrid the Bearkin and Old Man Gruitt in charge. Ingrid is taking charge of class two today. She is dressed in a spotless snug white tank top and tight leather pants. "Let's talk about our future plans shall we? Hetty what do you want to be when you grow up?" Hetty stands to answer and this causes snickering and gentle gibes. She's 16 going on 17 and is almost ready to leave the School and go out into the adult world. Cass snorts derisively. "Problem Cass?" asks Ingrid.

He stands and huffs, "You always favour them," he nods vaguely in the girls' direction. Ingrid nods. "You're right, resume your seat Hetty. Okay Cass you have the stage. What do you want to be when you grow up?" Cass' mouth opens and shuts a few times and his face scrunches up a bit in effort. He mutters, "Err, come back to me." And he resumes his seat to much catcalls and not so good natured jeering.

Our heroes are each asked what they want to be when they grow up and answer thusly:

- Young Bud wants to continue learning herbal lore and brew lots of potions.
- Pretty Percy seems to be too mesmerized by the spectacle of Ingrid's torso to come up with a coherent answer.
- Allan wants to join the Shadow Scouts.
- Brandon the Nimble wants to leave the Valley and explore the wide world. This comment is greeted by much derision as everyone knows you can't leave the Valley. He scowls and resumes his seat. "You just wait," he says, "I'll manage it."
- Tuck O'Plenty says he wants to become a chef. This is greeted with puzzlement as there are no restaurants in the Vale. Brandon says, "You stick with me, we'll find somewhere out there where we can achieve our dreams!"

Ingrid is just getting ready to call on Cass again when Gertrude the Badger, teacher of class one rushes in, "A Barge, a Barge has been sighted."

By tradition school is always out for the day when a Barge is sighted so everyone rushes outside.

Carly Druthers age seven asks, “How will we get to the Bear Track?” Her brother Carl age seven turns scornfully to her and says, “Don’t you ever listen?” He points and proclaims, “That’s how.”

A herd of fey horses stand there impatiently waiting. Carl shrieks and yells, “Mount up racers!”

Everyone jumps on a horse to be whisked away to the Bear Track that runs the length of the valley. All the students mount up. Poor Bud barely manages to scramble up and ends up slung over the horse’s barrel, much to the horse’s amusement. Mean Cass who the horses know well ends up riding backwards with his face right above the horse’s rectum. As soon as the rider is astride their horse the beast is off like a shot! The ride is equal parts terrifying and exhilarating. The horses are supernaturally fast and agile. Up seemingly vertical cliffs in some form of horsey parkour. Being slung across the barrel of the horse makes this even scarier! Whooping and hollering makes the ride all that much more fun! The riders try and encourage more speed out of their steed and some succeed in getting them to run even faster. Poor Bud tries to get his horse to let him sit astride but fails.

At the end of the run just east of the Knee villagers are gathered. Children who do not attend the Cathedral School are lined up waiting to race and everyone is craning their necks and looking to the west for the first sight of the Barge. The smallest children are sitting on their parents shoulders complaining about not being allowed to race. When they reach the Knee, the nearest village they dismount. Mean Cass of course is dumped on his ass and barely misses a steamy pile of fresh fey horse dung. Witch Hazel gives her horse a thank you kiss and she shakes her head in approval. Tuck O’Plenty also yells thank you. Everyone lines up with the

local racers and turns their heads to the west to catch the first sight of the Barge. The adults watch for sneaky behaviour with Mean Cass getting especial attention.

The race has been a tradition in the Vale for generations. During the summer months magical golden Barges float through the sky. They first appear far off in the Sea of Grass and make a



beeline for the Vale. They float slowly over the valley and the strange beings on board throw candies and strange magical prizes¹⁶ at the children of the Valley who race after the Barge. If any adult dares to try for the candy or prizes the Barge passengers immediately stop throwing them.

The children stood there, almost trembling with pent up energy waiting for the Barge to appear and for the race to start. Finally Allan spots it, “The Barge, the Barge is coming!” Once spotted the Barge seems to speed up. Soon it majestically passes directly overhead. The racers all tense up. “Go!” yells the Headwoman of the Knee, Mildred Beater¹⁷. Shrieking exuberantly they all set off!

Poor Witch Hazel trips over her own feet and her brother Bud Bellflower and Pretty Percy stop to help her. Allan and Brandon are at the front of the pack but Hetty Longshanks lives up to her name, taking the lead. Everyone manages to grab some of the candies being tossed from the Barge and Hetty grabs the first prize!¹⁸

Prize the First - The Curious Clock. An intriguing ornate ormolu mantel timepiece that tells perfect time for somewhere else and cannot be set or wound. Its chiming ranges from one to 37 strikes.

All the children¹⁹ manage to resist the temptation to eat the candies²⁰ during the race.

1. Blue Bouncer – if you eat this you swell up into a blue balloon for d20 rounds. You are indestructible but have zero control over your motion. Fun for others.
2. Yellow pucker drop. So sour your mouth seals shut and you cannot eat for d4 days.
3. Striped pastille – super tasty but with a faint aftertaste of disappointment.
4. Green zipadeedoo – adds 4 to the eater’s PACE and changes their running die to a d20! This effect only lasts 5 rounds. While under the influence the eater can only move at full speed.
5. Red heart²¹. This candy makes you very angry but you go totally limp for d6 rounds. Has a very strong aftertaste that makes everything you ever eat afterwards taste vaguely of cinnamon.

¹⁶ Parachutes are attached to these prizes so they can survive the descent.

¹⁷ Named so because of her expertise at beating flax straw to make paper.

¹⁸ The race is abstracted as being five stages, five prizes and one grand prize!

¹⁹ Well almost all of them.

²⁰ No one has ever died from eating a Barge candy. Not permanently anyway.

²¹ Shaped like an actual human heart, not the Valentine kind.

6. Black briquette. A completely black candy that has an extremely strong licorice taste. It also serves as a month's supply of coal for a blacksmith.

Besides what at a distance looks like humans, i.e. the crew, the following beings can be seen on the Barge.

- A beautiful naked blue haired woman with a pixie cut who has beautiful gauzy butterfly wings on her back.²²
- A giant insect man with lots of spikes.
- A bouncy blue rubber ball the size of a prize winning pumpkin.
- A giant corgi.
- A sad old man dressed in rusty armour accompanied by a donkey.
- A barrel of monkeys. They are dressed in sharp suits made out of paper currency²³.
- An energy being made up of connected spheres of various iridescent colours.
- A very tall hairy man.

During the second stage of the race Mean Cass found himself next to Tuck O'Plenty and took the opportunity to trip him! Witch Hazel, Bud and Percy rejoined the race. Hetty was still in the lead but she shied from grabbing the second prize, a sheath less knife dangling from a parachute. Brandon hot on her heels grabbed the knife and discovered how sharp it was when he easily sliced the threads of the parachute!

Prize the Second - The Mercy of Infinite Sharpness. This slim blade is impossibly sharp and cannot be sheathed. It is incredibly dangerous and can only be laid flat. If it's stuck into something it will slowly sink into it and keep sinking until it falls out the bottom of the world. The blade causes d12 damage on a successful hit but any critical failures while wielding the blade cause the wielder to strike themselves for STR + d12 + d6. Anyone unaware of its nature has to make a Fighting or Agility roll to safely grab it. A Critical Fumble means you cut yourself for full damage.²⁴

During the third stage Mean Cass tries to trip Allan but Allan's quick reflexes means he trips Cass! Hetty is still holding a narrow lead but misses her grab at the next prize so Brandon grabs the next prize...

²² Sadly non functional.

²³ None of it legal tender anywhere. Nor is it collectible.

²⁴ That's a lot of damage for a weapon in Savage Worlds!

Prize the Third - A Perfect Stick. It's a stick yet anyone who looks at it agrees that it's perfect somehow. Yet it has absolutely no function and somehow is too short or too long for any purpose you intend.

Running with the stick in one hand and the Misericord in the other Brandon manages to pass Hetty. Mean Cass grabs and eats one of the red hearts. He is filled with rage but immediately goes limp! Brandon grabs the fourth prize.

Prize the Fourth - The Mysterious Book. A beautiful illustrated book written in some indecipherable language and containing bizarre, seemingly meaningless illustrations. It gives you the sense that it's an instruction manual for something. Something you really don't want to know about. It has a small piece of paper glued to the inside cover that features a scowling demon face whose lips seem to be moving. Thank goodness you have no idea what it's saying.

During the last stage Brandon and Hetty are tied. With an extra push he manages to pass her. He ignores the last minor prize but swings the Misericord at the parachute of the final prize! He rolls a critical fumble and the Misericord turns on him causing two wounds! Hetty and Trilby the Truthful ignore the two prizes and try to help him. They manage to heal one of the wounds. He dropped the Misericord and it slowly sinks into the ground disappearing.

Allan passes them all and grabs the last two prizes.

Prize the Fifth - The Perfect Lily. A cut flower that never dies.

The Grand Prize - A tiny blue cut glass bottle that contains a faint, beautiful smell.²⁵

Brandon is fixed up with a magical potion and everyone returns to the Knee for the traditional postrace feast. After the feast the fey horses return to take the children back to the School. The horses refuse to let Cass ride, they saw his mean tricks and he has to ride Ingrid's bear form back.

It's a beautiful moonlit night moon that lights up the night. After they reached the School and the horses leave them a loud boom rocks the night. In the sky above the school the Golden Barge that had passed overhead earlier that day can be seen²⁶. It is listing badly and anyone who makes a notice roll sees that something is sticking out of the side. A screeching sound as of metal being torn is emitted by it and observers can tell that it is going to crash. It brushes

²⁵ Bud the Herbalist says it smells like his aunt.

²⁶ Barges never return the same day.

the mountain side with a sickening crack and the thing sticking off the side is torn off. It tumbles to the ground ejecting small figures as it falls.

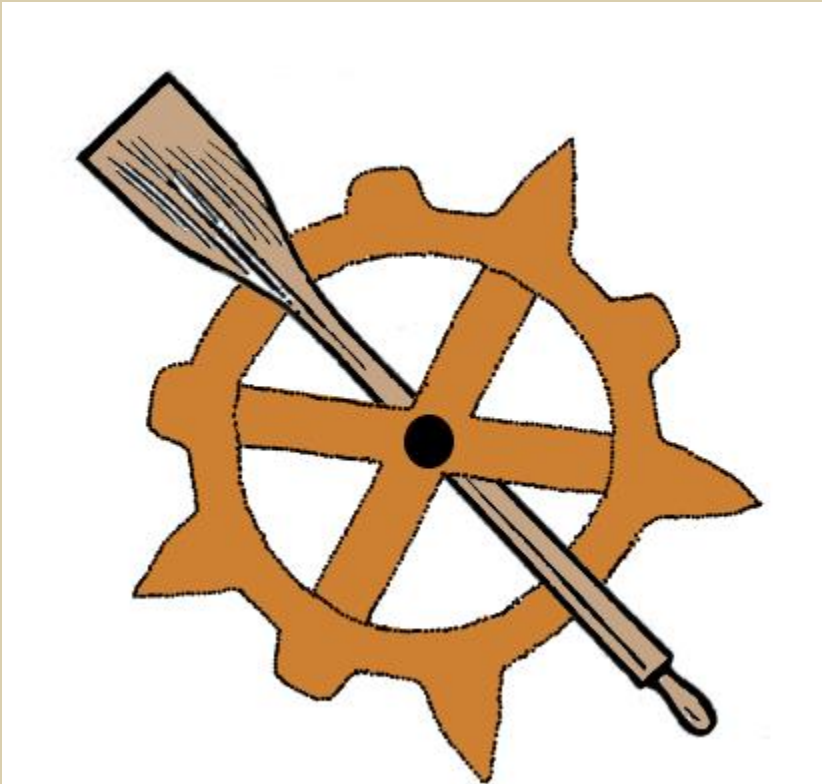
The barge tries to right itself and steer away from its doom but it is too late. A fire of unnatural hue starts and spreads. Figures can be seen emerging on deck. This includes all the beings seen earlier.

- The beautiful naked blue haired woman with the beautiful gauzy butterfly wings on her back climbs over the railing and is silhouetted by the full moon. She spreads her wings and drops over the side. As she descends she brushes her wings against the burning hull which sets them afire. They burn instantly and she drops from sight.
- The giant insect, man with lots of spikes spreads tiny wings and seem to be successfully descending to the ground.
- The bouncy blue rubber ball the size of a prize winning pumpkin jump off the deck and disappears from sight.
- The giant corgi howls in despair and leaps over the side.
- The sad old man dressed in rusty armour rides his donkey across the deck and the pair leap to their doom.
- The barrel of monkeys rolls out a doorway and across the deck. It rolls over the side and disappears.
- The energy being made up of connected spheres of various iridescent colours flies off into the distance and disappears.
- The very tall hairy man covered in flames comes out of the cabin and leaps like a hairy comet into the night.

The barge descends striking the insect man and crushing him into the ground. The crew, captain and all stay with their ship.

Gruitt and Ingrid lead the students to try and rescue any survivors. They find two crash sites, the one for the strange thing that was sticking out of the Barge, and the Barge itself.

Various bodies are found in the wreckage of the other craft. It is made of blackened bronze and is marked with an odd symbol. There are no survivors. They all appear human and wear flared pants, striped shirts and short jackets with round hats.



The craft is a long cylinder about 80 feet long and 12 feet across.

It had a crew of six and the rear part is full of twisted metal gears.

No magic is detected and it does not seem to have any weaponry.

The bodies are quite badly damaged but all of them bear a tattoo like the image at the left.

The vessel itself also makes heavy use of the symbol.

No paper survives the crash.

A single small club sized ranged weapon of some sort has survived the crash undamaged. There are four other badly damaged examples and two larger weapons, also damaged.

The Barge

The barge burns for a day and a half. The bodies of most of the passengers are found other than the energy being and the giant insect man crushed beneath the barge itself.

Pretty much everything on the barge is destroyed by the crash and the fire. The barge seems to have been made of wood covered with gold which melts off and covers the debris field. It can be salvaged but it doesn't seem to have any special properties.

The bodies that are recovered are buried in a small cemetery at the site of the crash. Anything suspicious looking is gathered together and taken off for examination.

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