

A Matter of Merit

by Somigliana

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Chapter 1 of 1

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"I assure you that there is nothing wrong with the Merit Monitor!"

"There has to be something wrong with the charm, Rowena," Salazar Slytherin insisted. His voice travelled sinuously down the stone-walled passage and slithered under the door of the staff room.

Feminine fury was evident in the increased click of heels on the stone floor and the icy silence that added another layer of frost to the air.

"They're arguing again," Helga noted with no small amount of exasperation, glancing up from her needlework.

"Did they ever stop?" Godric asked, chuckling softly. He pointed his wand at the fireplace; a cast-iron poker began to stoke the embers vigorously. Winter sucked hungrily at the flames that were born, drawing them up the chimney in long, crackling tongues of orange.

Rowena flung the door open—her long, black hair like midnight around her stark, angry, beautiful face—and the fire sputtered and danced wildly. "I'll have you know that my spell-work on that device was impeccable!" She strode over to a chest and opened the doors forcefully.

Salazar lifted a hand to stop the door from closing on his face. His long face bore a superior smirk. "I'm sure you tried your—"

"Close the door, Salazar," Helga said, drawing her woollen cloak more tightly around her shoulders as an icy draft nipped at her neck.

The door shut with a snap. "Another area where the castle's charms could be vastly improved," Salazar said superciliously, slanting a smirk at Rowena.

"Sal," Godric growled.

Rowena ignored Salazar's remark, and she began to examine the device that was stored in the chest, running a blur of diagnostic charms.

"What is wrong with the Merit Monitor?" Godric asked.

"I really hate that system," Helga remarked. She didn't see the point of measuring the performance of each of their Houses with points and demerits; it created an atmosphere of hostile competitiveness that she didn't enjoy at all. She had not granted or removed points using the new system, which the other three had collectively imagined and implemented.

"You would," Salazar said with a sneer. He turned to Godric, and Helga huffed and went back to her stitching.

"The Gryffindor glass is almost full—"

"Ah, excellent!" Godric grinned.

"Your lot only had three hundred points yesterday, and I took fifty last night for that noisy birthday celebration and—"

"I gave them permission," Godric complained.

"Half of Hogsmeade owed," Sal said pointedly.

Helga—although she hated to agree with Salazar Slytherin, the bastard—had to concur; Godric's lot really could have been a little more subtle and used a Dampening Charm or such. She bit off a piece of cotton with her teeth and nodded.

"The Gryffindor glass should not be full; therefore the logical conclusion is that the Merit Monitor is not working properly." Salazar spread his hands, his black eyebrows raised in mocking fashion.

Rowena straightened up. "All the sensors are in working order," she snapped. "I'm going to do a register; that will sort this out, once and for all." She pointed her wand at the hedgehog-like instrument with its sensors bristling in all directions. "*Áwritan Nambóc*." The instrument glowed with a softly pulsing blue light, and a roll of parchment inscribed in dense *futhorc* disgorged from a slot.

Salazar oozed over to his chair right next to the fire and sat bonelessly, steeping his fingers under his chin. "Well?" he drawled expectantly.

Rowena's alabaster brow wrinkled as she read the list. "Well, there it is: fifty points removed from Gryffindor House as a whole by Salazar Slytherin at half-past ten last night. Cumulative total for Gryffindor: two hundred and fifty."

Helga gave her friend a confused look. "How did they end up with a full glass?"

Rowena's eyes scanned down to the next entry. "One thousand points awarded to Godric Gryffindor by Helga Hufflepuff at eleven o' clock last night... What on earth?"

Helga's round cheeks were suddenly blazing hot and red like firm, shiny apples. She glanced down, suddenly intent on making the next stitch perfect.

Godric's deep, amused laughter filled the room. "Well merited, indeed," he said, winking at Helga.

"Perhaps you had better adjust the Merit Monitor, Rowena," Salazar said, looking slightly green, "so that only students might earn points... for academic matters."

Rowena raised a slim eyebrow at her dearest friend, and then she turned to Godric, who looked rather smug. "One thousand points from Gryffindor," she said archly, and she turned to modify the Merit Monitor.

Author's Notes:

Hogwarts was founded "about 1,000 years before" the events in *Chamber of Secrets*. Therefore, Hogwarts was likely founded sometime in the late 10th or early 11th century, before the Norman Conquest. Old English was the language spoken in England until after the Norman Conquest of 1066 when, under the influence of the Anglo-Norman language spoken by the Norman ruling class, it changed into Middle English roughly between 1150–1500. Before literacy in the vernacular Old English or Latin became widespread, the Runic alphabet, called the *futhorc*, was used for inscriptions.

The Charm that Rowena uses is in Old English:

áwritan = to write

nambóc = a register of names

Thank you to Gelsey for proof-reading!

This was written for Romancing Wizard's *Bring Out Your Dead* Challenge.