

Tales of Minz

A
Librarian's
Tale

BY ALEX BROWN

TALES OF MINZ

A Cobbler's Tale
A Lamplighter's Tale
A Librarian's Tale

THE TALE OF ROSE & ED

A House Named Haven
The Storytellers

SHORT STORIES

Collected Short Stories: Volume One

Tales of Minz

A
Librarian's
Tale

Alex Brown

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this book are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

A LIBRARIAN'S TALE

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*For Lynda—who found worth where others did not
think to look.*

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~ AUTHOR'S NOTE ~

Stories are often well-polished, carefully worded works of art.

They almost have to be. In a competitive market, oversaturated with content, it's difficult for less-than excellent stories to garner much notice or respect. The problem is, spectacular stories set lofty expectations in readers' minds for all stories—and those expectations can be challenging for aspiring creatives to meet, much less exceed.

The story you're about to read is not well-polished, nor is it a carefully worded work of art. *Not entirely.* But that isn't its intent. Please—don't have high expectations for this book. You'll only end up disappointed, and I don't want that for you. If you keep your expectations low (or get rid of them entirely), I promise—you'll be much better off.

This story is part of the *Tales of Minz* series, told in the voice of a young (and rather overconfident) storyteller named Vern, who hails from the strange and magical world in which these stories take place. His editor, an old (and more experienced) storyteller named Barnabas E. Wooldridge, seeks to guide his young protégé and help him grow at the craft of storytelling.

As the *Tales of Minz* series grows throughout the years, you'll see growth in the storyteller as well. These

will not be perfect stories. They will have flaws and problems with them. But beauty can still be found in the imperfection of things—if you take the time to look for it.

So take off your shoes, get comfy, and remember to leave your expectations by the door. Welcome, Dear Reader, to the whimsical world of Minz, where just about anything can happen—and often does. Oh, look—a Kreveling* just stole your shoes. You'll have to stay a while. Or you can walk home barefoot. You can do that too, I guess. *The choice is yours.*

* * *

* Krevelings, Dear Reader, are strange, bipedal, rat-like creatures found throughout Minz. Traditionally scavengers, they're known to steal just about anything that isn't nailed down. And if something *is* nailed down, they'll pry it loose and steal the nails too.

Praise for the Storyteller Vern and the *Tales of Minz*

“With this tale, The Storyteller Vern continues his search for interesting and engaging stories forgotten by the history books. The result is nothing short of extraordinary. This is a story you won't want to miss.”

—Oliver Riley,
Founder of *The Bookfinder's Shoppe*

“Heartwarming, inspiring, and wonderful. *A Librarian's Tale* has everything I look for in a story and more. I couldn't put it down!”

—Lilya Kaufman,
Collector for the Library of Reldare

“As a newspaper, we occasionally feel the need to retract something we've written. We regret nothing we've published about this series thus far. But if The Storyteller Vern continues writing stories like this one . . . who knows? Maybe he's learned a thing or two about journalism and storytelling after all.”

—*Minz Times*

“The love that both the author and editor have for stories and their importance in our society is crystal clear from the very first page. The Librarians of Reldare are proud to add this fine tale to our collection.”

—Blair MacCallum,
319th Head Librarian of the Library of Reldare

~ EDITOR'S PREFACE ~

Dear Reader, perhaps a brief, explanatory word or two are necessary before you read this, the third book in the *Tales of Minz*.

Whether you've read the previous installments in this series,* there are some rather important things that you should know about the story you now hold in your hands.

After publishing the second book in the series, Vern and I sat on my back porch one cool evening in the month of Andon. We had a good, long discussion about what we wanted to accomplish with this series. It was odd to be having such a conversation—I believe it was the first time we spoke openly about the *Tales of Minz* being an equal partnership; a shared venture between us. But that is what it is: a *partnership*. And I am so thankful to be involved in it.

Vern assured me that his desire was still the same as when we first started out on this strange, storytelling endeavor. He wanted to find stories scattered throughout Minz about common, ordinary people who found themselves in uncommon, unordinary situations and circumstances. He wanted to share their stories with the

* * *

* The previous books in the *Tales of Minz* are *A Cobbler's Tale* and *A Lamp-lighter's Tale*. Both are “standalone” novels—though I *highly* suggest that you read them in the order that they were first published. That will help you understand what Vern is trying to accomplish with this series.

world because they deserved to be told just as much, if not more so, than stories about heroes of old.

Vern did just that with *A Cobbler's Tale* and *A Lamplighter's Tale*. He took stories about a middle-aged cobbler and a young lamplighter and did something with them that was nothing short of beautiful.

His stories shone the proverbial spotlight on people throughout the history of Minz who would otherwise be overlooked and unseen. The accounts were inspiring (at least, they were to me) but they were not *perfect* stories. They were still flawed. That is not to say that they were *bad* stories. Far from it.

To be sure, as the Editor in Chief for the *Tales of Minz*, it's my job to make sure that stories we publish have more that is good in them than bad. I am merely highlighting the fact that Vern has room to grow as a storyteller.

Thankfully, he is well aware of that, which is why this particular book exists.

How does someone grow in their craft? *By continuing to practice their craft*. Storytellers hone their skills over time, little by little, by telling more and more stories. Some of them will be good; others will be better. The point is to keep telling them. They have to be told. That's all there is to it.

Dear Reader, I am pleased to say that *A Librarian's Tale* is one of those stories. *It had to be told*.

It's filled with friendship and bravery and perseverance. It's filled with other things as well—including the writing style that you've undoubtedly come to associate with the *Tales of Minz*.

Like all of Vern's stories, it doesn't go the way you might expect. But that is not a bad thing. Not a bad thing at all.

Enjoy.

Respectfully,

Barnabas E. Wooldridge

Barnabas E. Wooldridge
Editor in Chief of the *Tales of Minz*

~ FOREWORD ~

This is not the story I set out to write after putting my final touches on *A Lamplighter's Tale* and handing that manuscript over to my good friend and editor, Barnabas E. Wooldridge.

It's not the second, the third—or even the *fourth* story I set out to write. I'm quite honestly not sure *what* story it is. I've lost count of all the times my pen hovered over the white, blank page—all the times I was at a lost for what to write next. That had never happened to me before.

Don't get me wrong, I still had fragments of stories from different times and places throughout Minz's history. I've *always* had another story in mind to tell. I've even mentioned those possible stories in past books. I have *countless* stories to choose from, but whenever I sat down and tried to write, the words never felt *right*. I couldn't finish any of those stories because for some ineffable reason, they weren't right. They didn't fit.

Maybe that's a hard thing to understand, Dear Reader. After all, by the time you read a book (unless you're an early review reader checking a manuscript for typos and inconsistencies), it's been written. *It's done*. Or perhaps it isn't so difficult to understand. Have you ever read a story that captured your interest and held you spellbound until you reached the final page?

(And I'm not talking about a bewitched book, a sorcerer's story, or anything like that.) Have you ever read a story that made your heart ache, in some small way, because it was over and done when you reached the last sentence—the last word?

That sort of story feels *right*, like a boot perfectly formed to your foot or a glove to your hand. That sort of story feels like a name that sounds just right. You know the sort of name I'm talking about. You meet someone and they introduce themselves, and you think to yourself, *That's exactly the sort of name I thought someone who looked like you would have. It fits.*

I'm not exactly sure how else to describe the feeling. But that sort of story—the one that felt *right*—was the one I was chasing after. It was the one I intended to tell. I thought I could find it easily enough, but it proved frustratingly elusive.

I'd get several sentences, paragraphs, pages—even chapters—into a story before I lost the feel, the rhythm, the *rightness* of it all. The story just felt *wrong*, and I lost heart. And so, I crumpled up those unfinished tales, scrapping entire projects in fits of frustrations and—if I'm being honest, and I am—a sense of growing *panic*.

I had promised Barnabas I'd give him another story for the *Tales of Minz*. I promised *you* that very same thing, Dear Reader. I promised to tell stories about people whose stories deserved to be told because they were so oft-forgotten.

In the days, weeks, and *months* after publishing *A Lamplighter's Tale*, I feared I wouldn't be able to deliver on any of my promises. My self-esteem prevented me from just writing down whatever came to mind and

hoping it wasn't absolute garbage. I didn't know what to do. So, I did the only thing that seemed right.

Swallowing what little pride I had left (and if you've read my first book, *A Cobbler's Tale*, you know I had plenty at one time), I went to the only place I could. I went to the place where I *should* have gone right when I started spiraling. But I was afraid—afraid of losing what I had worked so hard to accomplish. And in my pride and arrogance, I thought that I had to figure out my problem all on my own.

Funny, how we can forget those closest to us in our darkest moments, even if they've been beside us the whole time.

Late one night in the month of Delin, I went over to my good friend and editor's house. Standing on his doorstep, I told Barnabas everything. *And he listened.* He wasn't mad at me. He wasn't upset. He didn't end our partnership with the *Tales of Minz*. I should have realized he would understand. I should have realized that he'd been where I was before.

Learn from my mistakes, Dear Reader. If you've got a problem, don't think you have to solve it on your own. Go to your friends; your family. If you've got someone who is half the friend that Barnabas is to me, well then, you're rather fortunate.

Barnabas sat me down on his back porch, and we watched the sunset for a time while my friend gathered his thoughts. I'll never forget that sunset. It was simply beautiful. Finally, Barnabas told me quite bluntly that I was trying too hard. I was putting unnecessary pressure on myself, trying to force myself to tell a story that didn't exist. I was searching for an elusive story that was

perfect in every way and would make everyone happy—including me—and I was never going to find it.

Barnabas knew. He had tried finding that story himself and had only learned through painful, firsthand experience that it didn't exist. The *right* story doesn't exist. Not at first. Sometimes, a writer just has to keep writing—even if the story doesn't feel “right.” The work still has to get done. Even if it's painful, even if it's frustrating—even if it's incredibly difficult to push through the wrongness one word at a time. Sometimes, it's only after the last word gets put on the page that the story starts to feel right.

Barnabas's advice—which I've taken—was to forget about chasing after the story that felt right. Instead, I needed to do what I promised to do all along: focus on a story that needed to be told. A story that might feel right and it might feel wrong, but I shouldn't care twocopper either way, because it needed to be told. *Because it mattered.*

“Write *that* story, dear boy,” he said to me. “Write it and don't look back until it's done.”

So. Here's the deal: The story you're about to read is not *the* story. But it is *a* story. And it's important. It matters. You may or may not like it. That's quite all right. I myself didn't like it several times whilst writing it. (I even almost abandoned it six pages in. And then again when I was eighty-six pages in.) But I kept writing until it was done. Afterwards, well, then I felt . . . *differently* about it. Perhaps you will too.

This story deserves to be told, and I'll tell it as best I can so other stories can be told as well. So I can write a fourth book in the *Tales of Minz*—and hopefully a fifth and sixth, however many Barnabas is willing to let me

write. I honestly don't know, maybe I have a lifetime contract with Wooldridge Publishing House. I'd like that.*

This is a story about perseverance, despite frustration, roadblocks, obstacles, and pain. It's a story about a young woman who once searched for something that many people believed could not be found. It's a story about an impossible *quest*—like a knight tasked with some daring search-and-rescue mission.

Oh, except the protagonist of this story isn't a knight. Granted, there is *a* knight who appears in this tale, but *he* isn't the hero. There's also a semi-sentient chicken, but he isn't the hero, either. Not in this story. Others, certainly, but not this one. No, the knight and the chicken merely happened to help our hero along her way.

This is a story that can only take place in a world such as Minz. And, if I may be so bold, it's a story that can only be told by *me*. (That's not arrogance, it's the truth. I have exclusive rights to telling this story, but I'll get to that later.)

This is the story of a young librarian (yes, you read that right) who was given the impossible task of finding an elusive story, lost to the Ages. A story that was free of all errors and typos and loved by all. If you read *A Lamplighter's Tale*, you might recall that I mentioned that story there. I'll tell you right now—the young librarian doesn't find it.

* * *

* I'd like that too, Vern. I'm not sure I've ever heard of a "lifetime contract" as far as book agreements go between authors and publishers, but I don't see why we can't draft one up. Three stories in and I'm having more fun with these *Tales of Minz* than I've had in a long time. I feel like a young man again.

Knowing that doesn't spoil this tale. Rather, it gives it room to grow into something more. Something larger; something better and more beautiful. Something wild and free. Because it's not *the* story, it can be whatever it needs to be. It's exactly the sort of story I needed to write. Perhaps it's exactly the sort of story you need to read.

Dear Reader, this is *A Librarian's Tale*. Welcome back to the *Tales of Minz*.

~ 1 ~

WELCOME TO THE LIBRARY OF RELDARE, DON'T FORGET TO VISIT THE GIFT SHOP.

Our story will take us all over the land of Minz—as vast and confusing as it is small and understandable. Yet, it does not begin on the “mainland,” so to speak. Nor does it begin upon any of the seas of Minz, which is a good thing for our protagonist, seeing as she got seasick rather easily—just by looking at the ocean. You could say that she got *see-sick*. (Sorry, Barnabas. I had to do it.)* No, our story finds its beginning on the nearby island of *Reldare*, home to the largest and greatest library in Minz.

Countless tomes of cultural importance, philosophical ramblings, histories, autobiographies, indexes, farmer’s almanacs, self-published books, shopping lists, stories, spell books, grammaries, and grimoires—anything of significance eventually finds its ways to the Library of Reldare. But who deems such things significant? Well, the Librarians of Reldare, of course. The

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* Did you, though? Impulse control is important, Vern. Especially when deciding what to write—and what *not* to write.

Curators, Collectors, and Caretakers of knowledge and information since the Dawning of the First Age. Hundreds—if not thousands—of librarians call Reldare “home.”

It’s also the home of our protagonist, a young librarian by the name of Lynda. We’ll focus our attention on her. *In just a moment*. Allow me to do this properly and set the scene first. After all, we’re about to go to a far-off, fantastical place that many people in Minz—to this day—have never before seen nor stepped foot in: *the Library of Reldare*.

The reason is not because the Librarians of Reldare jealously guard the many books and countless writings they’ve painstakingly collected throughout the land and refuse to let any outsiders step foot on their island. No, their doors are always open. Metaphorically speaking, of course, because the library contains books and scrolls from the early days of the First Age that would *immediately* crumble to dust if exposed to even the smallest amount of air. Not to mention the fact that open doors might let in the elements. (Rain water and storm winds do *not* treat books with respect, oddly enough. Maybe it’s because they can’t read.)

Perhaps it is better to say that the doors to the Library of Reldare are always *unlocked*. The librarians are rather firm on their “No food or drink” policy, though, and have been known to deal with perpetrators quite severely. Stealing is also frowned upon (as it is in most places), and the librarians are not kind to those who attempt to do so. Some would go so far as to call them rather *inhospitable* to thieves.

That being said, anyone in Minz is welcome to visit, day or night—provided that they follow the library’s

rules. Knowledge is freely shared and freely given within the Library of Reldare's walls. I myself have spent countless hours haunting the stacks like a bibliophilic ghost. (I even stumbled through one of those—friendly fellow.) There is no better place on Minz to do research of any kind. I believe my good friend and editor has been there as well, haven't you, Barnabas?*

You might be asking yourself right now: so, if the Library of Reldare is such an amazing place, filled with free knowledge and pretty cool (and reasonably priced) t-shirts from their gift shop, that literally anyone can visit, why do so few of Minz's citizens make use of it?

That's not a bad question.

Several possibilities must be considered in answering it. For one thing, the Island of Reldare is far-off for most people. (Unless you find yourself living in the small harbor town of Elmer's Port, just north of the island by a few hundred yards or so. Then it's quite close.) As I said before, Minz is *vast*. How vast, I cannot say, but it can take several years to get from one side to the other corner of the map—even more so if you're walking slowly or traveling on turtle-back.†

But distance really is a poor excuse—especially nowadays, when we have carts and wagons, and the Old

* * *

* That's correct. Dear Reader, aside from being the Editor in Chief for the *Tales of Minz*, I've also written extensively on the histories of Minz's various Ages. I mentioned in a previous book that part of my reason for wanting to partner with Vern in this series was to learn about people not written about in the popular history books, though their stories still deserve to be told. I haven't been disappointed yet.

† Aside from the ludicrous image of anyone other than the smallest of Minz's inhabitants traveling by turtle-back, Vern's assessment is rather accurate. You can walk the mainland of Minz at a leisurely pace from East to West in just under two years.

Road is meticulously maintained as never before, not since it was first laid down. More than that, we even have relatively inexpensive magic portals which can take you from one place to another in the blink of an eye. (*I won't use them, I'll walk or ride a wagon, thank you very much.*) Travel has never been easier!

So if it's not the distance, then what? Perhaps it's the lack of *interest*. People have so many other things to fill their time that they might feel they simply don't have enough hours in a day to wander the library's stacks and browse through the tomes upon tomes of books. Other things seem far more important; more pressing than reading. Or perhaps such people have never cared for reading nor understood the joy it brings.

That's possible.

But I think not. There are more than just *written* works collected in the Library of Reldare. If the only things the librarians collected were the written stories, histories, autobiographies, and what-have-you, then *much* would be *lost*. Some societies and peoples throughout Minz's Ages did not write their stories down. Instead, they passed down their culture and history from one generation to the next through the spoken word.

All of those—as many as they could find—were listened to and memorized by the librarians so they could share those stories with other people in their original form. Classically trained librarians also sing songs and perform poetry as they were intended to be delivered. You'll never hear more beautiful music nor verse than on the Island of Reldare.

I've found that most people love *listening* to stories—even if they don't enjoy *reading* them all that much. Just

go down to a pub or tavern and listen for a while. You'll be flooded with stories. Overwhelmed even. And you'll see that same sense of captivation in the eyes of other patrons and tavern-goers as they listen as well—drawn in by the tale.

If not the lack of interest, then *what?* (Barnabas, if you're wondering what I'm doing, I'm presenting the false conclusions here and systematically rejecting them by process of elimination, but I also realize I've drawn this out long enough.)*

Dear Reader, I personally believe that the reason is this: *the Library of Reldare is free.*

"But Vern," you might say, "that's ridiculous—people *love* free things!"

To a certain extent, I agree with you. However, just because something is free does not automatically make it *desirable*. Not everything free has worth or value ascribed to it by society. And people are generally wary of free things—especially when they think those things should really come at a cost. There's always a small whispered echo in their mind of, *What's the catch?* (The exception to this is *food*. People will usually accept free food without question unless it's from a shady character or they don't care for whatever is being offered.)

What often makes us want free things is the limited, time-sensitive nature of those things being free—and the fear-inducing realization that we'll be missing out if

* * *

* I know what you're doing, my boy, but thank you for explaining yourself. Dear Reader, Vern and I have a little agreement where he gets to keep *a few* of his mistakes and anecdotal asides in the published version of whatever story in the *Tales of Minz* we happen to be on. This is so that you can see Vern's growth and development as a storyteller as the series goes on.

we don't take advantage of those things being free *right now*. Otherwise, they might not be free later, and then we'll have to pay for them.

The problem with the Library of Reldare is that the information, the knowledge it offers—as valuable as that knowledge is, with priceless, immeasurable worth—is *always* free. There's no expiration date in sight. It isn't a limited-time offer, it's always there and readily available for personal growth, learning, and betterment of self. Because of that, many people either consider the contents of the library to be worthless, useless information without value of any kind, or they think that because the Library of Reldare is always open and always free, they'll get around to making use of it later.

Dear Reader, *they rarely do*.

Which, as aforementioned, is a shame, because the Library of Reldare is breathtakingly beautiful. Historians say it was designed by the Great Malronti himself—an architect, painter, inventor, philosopher, writer, and prolific hopscotch player savant.* Every conceivable genre of writing and literature has its own dedicated row, shelf, stack, and even *room*—however much space it needs. No matter how large or small the genre, it can be found within those hallowed walls.

The Library of Reldare is meticulously organized and maintained by a group of librarians known as the *Curators*. They make up one of the three factions within the Librarians of Reldare. They are also the largest of

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* Vern, was that last piece of information really necessary? I mean, I didn't realize that the Great Malronti was a hopscotch player, so that was interesting, but was it relevant to the story? Keep asking yourself those questions as you go along . . .

the three groups. (It makes sense when you think about it—they've got quite a library to organize.) The other two factions are the *Caretakers* and the *Collectors*. Their names are pretty self-explanatory, but indulge me if you'd be so kind. It's not every day I get to write a story about the Librarians of Reldare.

Those who join the Caretakers dedicate themselves to preserving the knowledge and secrets found within the Library of Reldare. Knowledge, after all, is power—and *dangerous* power in the wrong hands at that. That's especially true when you consider the many magical tomes, grimoires, and spell books found in the library's vast collection. Many a thief, evil wizard, or would-be villain could wreak terrible havoc upon the world if the Caretakers did not stand vigilant guard. They are trained in various forms of combat—magical and otherwise—and are *not* to be trifled with. Only fools or the incredibly talented try to steal from the Library of Reldare. (Especially since most books can be checked out for two-to-three weeks on end and you can renew them for up to one week after that as well.)

The third and final faction are the Collectors. These brave individuals venture forth into the world in search of stories new and familiar to add to the stacks in the Library of Reldare. They're the smallest faction and always looking for new recruits. Why? Well, for one reason, theirs is considered a dangerous job—perhaps even more so than the Caretakers'—because the search for stories often takes them to places that aren't exactly the *friendliest*.

And often, the *best* stories are found in rather dangerous places. I should know—I've traveled to such

places in my search throughout Minz for stories to share with you.

Now, why the different factions among the Librarians of Reldare? Well, like any self-respecting society in Minz, there must be some semblance of structure and order—or else everything will devolve into chaos. There must be established rules for the good of all. (Even anarchists follow a rule, when you think about it. Their rule is that there are no rules.)

Structure and order is found among the Librarians of Reldare by appointed “Heads” who represent their collective members. Thus, there is a Head Curator, a Head Caretaker, and a Head Collector—who is not to be confused with a *head* collector. (Though I can see how you might think they would do that, seeing as stories are things which we make up in our minds . . .) These three representatives all report to the Head Librarian—who does not belong to any one faction, but must remain impartial and factionless as a rule, and governs all the Librarians of Reldare.

How does the Head Librarian remain impartial and not show favor to any one faction over another? (Aside from taking the oath of office in which the Head Librarian promises to be *completely* impartial in their dealings with the librarians?) I honestly have no idea. How does any politician or government representative do it? After all, *they* take oaths to serve the people for the good of all, regardless of whether or not people voted for them. Maybe they practice deep-breathing exercises. Or perhaps they’re all just really good at lying—even to themselves. Who knows? I’m going to naively assume the best and say that unlike politicians of other governments in Minz, the Head Librarian

actually *is* impartial and seeks to serve for the good of all librarians.

That being said, the three factions all vie for the Head Librarian's attention, funding, and favor, and are not always the best at working together. Sometimes they're downright nasty toward one another. Because they're usually only looking out for the best interests of their factions. As you can imagine, that makes getting things done rather difficult, and some Head Librarians have done a better job at managing the factions than others throughout the history of the Library of Reldare.

Ah, I could write volumes upon volumes about the culture and society that make up the Library of Reldare, explaining their history and complicated politics, but that really isn't the main point of this tale. (And I've probably spent far too long on this introduction already.) But I've written as much as I have because it's all *background knowledge* for our story's beginning.

And background knowledge is needed for our protagonist to go off on a seemingly impossible quest. (That, and *conflict*.) Otherwise, she'll never leave where we first find her: in a cozy corner of the library reading a book. The background, in part, helps provide the conflict that sparks this whole, grand adventure. You see, our protagonist—Lynda—is a member of the Collectors. She's also the daughter of Amara, the Head Librarian.

It's also important to note that at the time of our story, the Head Librarian was dealing with some rather strained relationships between the different factions. Strained is putting it *lightly*. Librarians are generally mild-mannered folk. Current relations between the factions had devolved to something reminiscent of a

less civilized Age of the library's history—a time similar to the Dark Overdue Days of 987-993 of the Second Age, the days when there was no Head Librarian, and the three factions all did as they saw fit. Barnabas, would you care to comment on that grim period of time in the footnotes? I know you wrote a dissertation or two on the matter.*

The conflict that Head Librarian Amara was forced to deal with all started when the Head Curator made a rather incendiary remark about the Head Collector (for reasons unknown still to this very day). She called him, and I quote, “A simple-minded fool who thinks picture books are the only stories worth collecting.” Naturally, the Head Collector responded by insulting her way of organizing a bookshelf, saying that “the library looks like it’s arranged by an illiterate, dyslexic, alphabetically-challenged toddler.”

If that insult sounds difficult to say in the heat of the moment, it might help to know that the Head Collector

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* I’m surprised—I didn’t know you knew that, Vern. Dear Reader, the Dark Overdue Days refers to a period of time in the Library of Reldare’s history when they were still figuring out how to deal with books that had been checked out but not yet returned to the library’s safekeeping. The Head Curator felt the matter needed to be dealt with, but wasn’t quite sure how to enforce the due date policy—perhaps through a heavy monetary fine. The Head Caretaker felt that perpetrators should be strung up and left hanging from the walls as an example to other would-be rule-breakers. And the Head Collector was a reformed thief who suggested that it’d be a simple matter to track down the people who had overdue books, break into their homes, and steal the books back without them ever being the wiser. Needless to say, the three factions could not decide upon a single course of action, so they did all three. For seven years chaos reigned, until a wise, old librarian suggested that they appoint a *Head Librarian* to mediate between the three factions and lead them all to better and brighter (and less anarchical) days.

had written it down ahead of time. The Head Curator often treated him poorly (again, for reasons still unknown), and he thought it high time he had a comeback of equally scathing quality. That particular insult took him the better part of three days to write and four days to rehearse. I'm told he nailed the delivery perfectly.

Librarians. They know just where to drive the knife in an insult fight. Then they twist it to do more damage. I should know. Just check out their review of my first book, *A Cobbler's Tale*:

"As librarians, we're dedicated to the preservation of all works of literature. However, we'd have no problem if this book—and all copies of it—were to spontaneously combust."

They actually wrote that. I thought they were just being funny, but no, they were quite serious. To be fair, they left a kinder review for my second book, *A Lamplighter's Tale*:

"Bringing light to the darkness is a noble trade . . . In this book, The Storyteller Vern weaves together a powerful narrative unlike any other and reminds us that it is no small thing to hold on to what we believe—no matter what anyone else might say."

And I think they still felt bad about their first scornful review because they gave me *exclusive rights* to telling this particular story. So I won't complain.

Anyway, that whole mudslinging exchange between the Head Curator and the Head Collector apparently caused a fistfight to break out between two of their

more zealous subordinates, leaping to defend their honor. To make matters worse, the fistfight took place right under the nose of the Head Caretaker, and he couldn't stand for that because people were *not* supposed to be fighting in the Library of Reldare—least of all *librarians*. So, what else was there for him to do but join in . . . along with several of his fellow Caretakers—all in the name of putting a stop to the fighting, of course.

Truthfully, it was more than a little likely that the Caretakers joined in because they hadn't had a good scrap for a number of years. This was the most excitement they'd seen since a thieving crew tried breaking in and stealing a magical tome from the Library's Arcane Section, which happened to be right next to the Head Curator's office. If you've read, *A Cobbler's Tale*, you'd recognize the name of the thieving crew's leader: *Lucy*.*

Anyway, the following brawl was quite disruptive. It only lasted three minutes, but three minutes is a long time when it comes to a fistfight. Four bookshelves were knocked completely over like dominoes, two full sets of teeth were knocked out (relax, they were dentures), and several bones were broken. The bones belonged to a display skeleton, but still. What a day in the Library of Reldare that must have been! Imagine if that

* * *

* Dear Reader, Vern referred to this "Lucy" throughout the course of *A Cobbler's Tale*. Without giving anything about that novel's plot away, Lucy hailed from Harbor's Port. She was described as a kleptomaniac in her youth—and her later years as well. I believe Vern mentioned that he'd tell her story eventually. I should really go through Vern's past books and compile a list of all the stories he mentioned offhand that he'd tell one day. That might be helpful.

were the day you decided to visit its hallowed halls for the first (and quite possibly last) time. Would *you* go back?

Needless to say, the Head Librarian had her hands full, trying to ease tensions between the Heads of the factions and put out the metaphorical fires. (Can you imagine the devastation the Library would experience if they were *real* fires?) Sometimes, governing a body of thousands of librarians was rather enjoyable. Other times, it felt quite challenging (much like it would for any one person to be governing a large group of people). But that was what Amara had been elected to do. Like it or not, she had to deal with the situation before it escalated any further. *Swiftly* and *harshly*.

For that reason, as our story progresses, you'll see her send her daughter, Lynda, on an impossible (and possibly quite *dangerous*) mission, all to prove that the Head Librarian does not show partiality, nor favor, to any one member of the Librarians of Reldare. Least of all to her own flesh and blood. Who just happened to throw the first punch. And the second.

I'm told that Lynda had a pretty savage one-two combo.

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~ ABOUT THE AUTHOR ~

The Storyteller Vern was born and raised near the city of Breckenweld and educated at the University of Marglegruff. He studied Mathematics before abandoning that in pursuit of a more sensible major. Due to extenuating circumstances, he dropped out and did odd jobs here and there to make ends meet. After a brief stint in journalism, he turned his attention to gathering stories from around the world of Minz. Several years later, he entered a partnership with world-renowned author and editor, Barnabas E. Wooldridge, to produce the *Tales of Minz*. *A Librarian's Tale* is his third published work.

~ ABOUT THE EDITOR ~

Also born and raised near the city of Breckenweld and educated at the University of Marglegruff, Barnabas E. Wooldridge double majored in History and Literature. He graduated with highest honors. His first published work, *A History of Minz's High Kings*, was lauded as a *Minz Times* instant bestseller. Since then, Wooldridge has authored other notable historical works and founded a publishing house, which has produced numerous, critically acclaimed titles. Despite interest in Minz's history waning in recent years, Wooldridge is determined to revitalize the populace's curiosity in their past. He hopes he has found the means to do that with the *Tales of Minz*.

~ ABOUT THE AUTHOR ~

Alex Brown is the son of two teachers who impressed upon him from a young age a love for reading books of many different sizes, shapes, and genres. Along with that love came the love of telling stories and writing about fantastical lands and people.

He lives in Wisconsin with his lovely family and is most likely writing various works of fiction and drinking lots of coffee right now. *Lots.*

You can keep up-to-date on his writing projects by visiting his website: **alexbrown.blog**. There, you'll also find free short stories, whimsical blog posts, and more.

~ TALES OF MINZ ~

Often irreverent, nonsensical, and uproariously funny, the *Tales of Minz* series is set in a magical and mysterious world where anything can happen (and usually does).

The stories, which can be read in any order, are told by a young, rather overconfident storyteller named Vern. He is joined in this strange narration by an old, experienced storyteller named Barnabas E.

Wooldridge, who sees what the series could become and agrees to serve as an editor for the *Tales of Minz*. However, Vern doesn't take all of Barnabas' suggestions to improve his writing . . . as such, helpful and humorous footnotes are provided by the editor where needed.

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