

Spirits

—Paul Fijn

Having spent your whole afternoon at a market research study, your wallet feels incredibly rejuvenated at the expense of many brain cells. Your newfound wealth also leaves you feeling a little like you are no longer a real student, and you decide that the best way to uphold your reputation is to spend enough of it on alcohol so as to not remember spending anything on alcohol.

Remembering that you didn't have enough money for more than a generic student meal last time, you decide give that Irish pub another shot. Besides, as the cleaner said, the scientists seem to enjoy going there, so perhaps you'll get a chance to find out more about what's going on—up until now, you'd completely forgotten that you were supposed to be helping out Charles. Without hesitation, you push open the door and step inside.

As you expected, you find the place crammed full of lab coats, glowing all sorts of fluorescent colours under the dim light, each of them hunched over a table so as to block your view of the exotic experiments they are undoubtedly carrying out despite being in a place of drinking. You saunter over to the bar and order your favourite cocktail.

Your vague uneasiness turns to devastation when you are told that not only is your order unavailable, but they are completely out of any sort of alcoholic beverage whatsoever. Realisation dawns upon you, and you begin to feel a little silly for ever thinking that the scientists came here to drink; they must all be taking some time to touch up their alchemy skills in preparation for the ultimate experiments each of them intends to carry out on the Ashes.

Disappointment accentuates your hunger, and with your student instincts overriding your newfound cash, you attempt to order the same meal you had last time, only to be informed that it is also not available, the pub having brought in a new menu with all the extra revenue generated by being filled to the brink every night. Glancing over it, you cannot help but get the feeling that you have not been handed a menu at all; it seems to be nothing more than a nonsensical series of pictures. Looking over it again just to make sure, the pictures seem to stare at you with unseen eyes, and you are suddenly hit by an inexplicable feeling of horror as if you were haunted by ghostly apparitions. Shadows cast by hunched backs seem to creep onto you with outstretched tendrils, and as quickly as you can, you burst back out into the street.

Everything seems calmer here; the deathly visions appear to have subsided. Trying to ease your nerves, you seat yourself on the deserted sidewalk, still holding the menu in your hand.

	
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