

VORTAK: Evil Wizard

Vortak was an evil wizard. He had a tower at the edge of the black forest in Mortissia, and twenty minions to guard it. He had fifteen magic items in his treasury at the top of the tower, and a princess from Elandar locked in the dungeons below. He was on the verge of defeating Duke Laminar of Brightmoor, when a party of hired adventurers broke into his tower and set upon his minions. The princess was rescued, there were deaths on both sides, and Vortak was forced to quickly open and flee through a magic portal. The spell didn't go as planned. A fumbled casting when he really didn't need one, and Vortak was transported to an unknown world and without the means to open a new portal. Trapped! But he had survived. Now he lives in a one bedroom flat in Brighton, England, and earns his keep in the only way he can... Vortak The Incredible: Wizard For Hire. Degrading himself at music festivals and children's parties in the Sussex area.

Three months in his new life; a life of gas and electricity bills, buying bread and milk from the local shop, and making small talk with his homosexual neighbour, Graham.

Graham knocked on Vortak's door, beamed a big smile, and held it fixed ready for when Vortak answered. He waited. A minute passed and his jaws began to ache. He dropped the smile and reached up to knock again as the door opened. Graham quickly smiled again as Vortak stepped into the doorway and lifted a lantern to illuminate the area. Deep blue eyes under a heavy frown, pale skin, jet black hair, and robes to match. Vortak stared at

Graham... fake tan, brilliantly white teeth, skinny and weak looking; Vortak considered how easily he could crush him. Graham held up a plate of freshly cooked homemade brownies.

“I thought you might like some homemade brownies. Fresh out the oven.” Graham continued to beam his exaggerated smile.

Vortak looked at the brownies and then back at Graham, thinking for a moment. “I accept,” Vortak said, took the brownies with his free hand and slammed the door shut with his foot. Graham waited for two minutes, but Vortak didn’t return.

Vortak walked into his living room. All the modern furnishings yet lit by several lanterns and dozens of candles. He placed the lantern on a small table, and sat in a comfortable chair with brownies on lap. He picked up the first brownie, and a vibrating buzz sounded from under him. He jumped, startled, and dropped the plate of brownies on the floor.

“Son of a witch!” he yelled and instinctively unleashed flames from his hands at the scattered brownies. He quickly calmed himself as the buzz sounded again, and reached under his robes to pull a mobile phone from his trousers pocket.

Vortak placed the phone to his ear whilst stamping out the small carpet fire near his feet. “Who calls me at this hour?” Vortak spoke with an intimidating tone.

He listened. “Yes. Next Saturday at one clock. Let me check my diary.” Vortak paused, leaned forward and picked up a non-charred brownie. “I am available. What age will your daughter be, and how many infants should I expect?”

Vortak took a bite of the brownie, nodding as he listened to the information.

“Send an electronic message to this device after the conversation has ended, and specify your address. I shall be there on time. I accept cash and cash only!” he ended the call.

Vortak got up and walked across his living room, taking another bite of the brownie and making a noise of appreciation as he entered his kitchen. He lifted a Brighton Pier fridge magnet, and pulled a sheet of paper free from his fridge door. A thermometer style goal chart, with four thousand as the objective and just under one hundred coloured in. A long way to go. Vortak mused over the words at the top of the page – *Minions required to conquer the lands of East Sussex.*

Vortak shook his head, disappointed. “Eight-year-olds. Damn them and their weak bodies! Oh how I despise children and their...” his phone buzzed and vibrated again, causing him to drop the sheet of paper and last of his brownie.

“Damn this cursed communication device!” he yelled as he pulled the phone from his pocket and checked a text message. His rage calmed.

“Oh good, that’s just around the corner.”

An eighth birthday party for Maisie. 'Hire a wizard' Muriel's friend had advised, and that's what she did. Hopefully it would be a party her daughter would remember. Ten children sat on the living room floor, staring up at the black robed individual before them.

“Who knows what a Necromancer is?” asked Vortak. Three hands went up.

“Ugly child at the front.” Vortak pointed at a spotty child. Half of the children were shocked by Vortak’s comment, and the other half sniggered, covering their mouths to stop themselves from laughing out loud. The spotty child was understandably embarrassed.

“Someone who can summon skeletons,” the spotty child said, worried he might get ridiculed again.

Muriel had been making sandwiches in the kitchen, and unsure of what she had just heard, moved to the living room doorway to keep an eye on things.

“Sort of,” said Vortak. “It is someone who can animate the dead. Zombies, ghouls, even wraiths if the Necromancer is powerful enough. Now, does anyone have a dead pet with them?”

Muriel frowned and crossed her arms, edging into the room a little to let Vortak see she was there and watching him. Seeing where this was going. None of the children raised a hand, and all looked understandably confused.

“Never mind,” said Vortak, thinking for a moment. “Any live pets? I can still make it work.”

Maisie’s hand went up. “Spoiled girl.” Vortak pointed at Maisie.

“My cat died. Jemima. She is buried at the bottom of the garden,” Maisie was unsure of herself.

“Excellent!” said Vortak, and waved a hand through the air. “Shovel.” and a shovel appeared in his hand. The children gawped and gasped in amazement. Vortak passed the shovel to Maisie, who gave a grin of importance and put it on the carpet beside her. It was too big to keep hold of.

Vortak rubbed his chin, thinking. “The ground is a bit hard this time of year. Pickaxe,” he said, and a pickaxe appeared in his hand. The children all clapped.

“You’ll need to choose a friend to help you.” Vortak passed the pickaxe to Maisie, who placed it with the shovel. She looked back to see all nine of her friends looking at her, with their hands up, and desperately trying to get her to attention. Pick me!

“No. Sorry... can we move away from this please?” Muriel interjected.

Vortak nodded. “Maybe you’d like to help me. I need an assistant for my next trick.”

As Muriel made her way around the gathering of infants, Vortak rummaged in his holdall bag of props and produced a fist-sized rock. A rough and uncut gemstone that glistened with shades of gold and purple. Muriel stepped up beside Vortak as he pulled a

coffee table closer to him and placed the gemstone on top. All ten children gazed at the stone in wonder.

Muriel leaned in close to whisper so only Vortak could hear her. “This is a child’s party. If you want to get paid...” Vortak cut her sentence short...

“Paralyse,” Vortak said, and waved his hand in front of Muriel’s face. She collapsed to the floor, stiff as a board and unable to move. Vortak turned his attention back to his mesmerised audience.

“This is the shard of suggestion,” Vortak said. “You will hear my words and remember them, for they are important to you.” The children continued to stare at the shard of suggestion. Muriel continued to lie paralysed on the carpet by Vortak’s feet.

Vortak returned to his holdall bag as he spoke, rummaging through it, looking for something, “You will take these purple sashes and... Oh crap! I’ve forgotten the bloody sashes.” Vortak stopped looking and thought for a moment.

“The next time you get the opportunity to do some craft activities with friends or your parents, you will make a purple sash. Then you shall put it in a safe place and await the trigger words.” The children remained under Vortak’s spell, staring at the shard of suggestion. “You will hear them on the radio, or on the television. Or someone might read them in the newspaper. And you will hear my name, ‘Vortak’. And you will hear of magic and death. When you hear these three words together, you will don your purple sashes, arm yourselves and rise up. You will come to me. Seek me out, and kill anyone who gets in your way. Joining with other purple sashes along the way. Minions of Vortak, do you understand?”

“Yes, Vortak. We understand.” the children spoke in unison and without emotion.

“Now repeat the trigger words back to me,” Vortak commanded.

“Vortak! Magic! Death!” the children spoke the words loud and clear.

“Good,” said Vortak in an upbeat manner, and picked up the shard of suggestion. “Now then. None of you will remember this spell. Including you, Mum. You will all think I was an excellent wizard and tell your friends they want to hire me. And you’re back!” Vortak clicked his fingers and everyone became themselves once again. Including Muriel.

“Took a bit of a tumble there, Mrs Barker.” Vortak helped Muriel to her feet. “That will be one hundred pounds please.” Vortak held out his hand. The children burst into applause and whooped cheers of appreciation.

Muriel smiled. “Let me get my handbag.”

Six years later.

Vortak stood in the lantern light of his kitchen, leaning over the worktop and colouring in the top of his thermometer chart. Four thousand minions, ready and waiting to be activated.

“It is time! Time to venture forth and make myself known. Time to strike!” Vortak bellowed a sinister laugh... “Muahahahaha!” There was a knock at his door.

Graham waited, with lamb hotpot in hand and a smile on his face, as Vortak opened his door. “Lamb hotpot,” Graham said cheerfully.

“Really Graham? It’s been six years. You don’t need to keep doing this.” Vortak studied the Pyrex dish and inhaled the aroma. It looked and smelt good.

“Just making sure you get a hot meal once in a while. And not one from a microwave,” Graham said. “You look happy today, Vortak. Something good to report?”

Vortak smiled. “Yes. This afternoon I achieved an important goal. A task which has taken six years to complete.” He thought for a second and then nodded a confirmation of his decision. “In fact, I can think of nobody better to be my first.”

“Ooh,” said Graham, excited. His dazzling white smile widened.

Vortak waved his hand in front of Graham's face. "It is time for you to get your purple sash, Graham. Vortak! Magic! Death!"

Graham's smile dropped, but he didn't move. Both men stared at each other. Vortak frowned, unsure how Graham was unaffected by the spell.

"It's true. You are the one," Graham whispered.

Realising the potential threat facing him, Vortak quickly waved a hand before Graham, and began uttering magic incantations, but was stopped as Graham threw the contents of the Pyrex dish into Vortak's face. Vortak screamed!

Graham dropped the dish as Vortak wiped lamb hotpot from his eyes.

"Aargh! It burns!" Vortak cried.

The door to number twenty, opposite, opened and old Mrs Crabtree appeared in the doorway. The nosy neighbour listened to many a corridor conversation behind her closed door, but this one needed to be seen.

"The Shadow! Archmage Hemlock said you would come." Graham quickly moved aside as Vortak cast a spell.

"Disintegrate!" Vortak bellowed, and waved his hand at Graham. Due to his blurred vision, Vortak missed his target. A pile of ash fell onto the welcome mat where Mrs Crabtree had been standing.

Graham lunged forward and slammed the palm of his hand against Vortak's chest. "Death!" Graham yelled, and Vortak fell. Lifeless. Killed by a powerful counter-spell. The wizards' duel was over in a matter of seconds.

Graham pulled out his mobile phone and quickly made a call. "Put me through to the Sussex Wizards and Warlocks Guild. Archmage Hemlock." Graham picked up his Pyrex dish as he listened. He rubbed his fingerprints from it, and threw it down beside Vortak's

body. “Then give him a vital message. Extremely important. Tell him Master Mage Graham Goldcrest has confirmed his suspicions, and The Shadow is no more.”

Graham ended the call, closed Vortak’s and Mrs Crabtree’s doors, and headed back to his flat.

Graham cracked an egg and added it to the bowl of flour, sugar and raisins. He picked up a spoon and started mixing the contents. His attention was drawn away from his recipe as he heard something of interest from his television in the next room. He left the kitchen, stirring the bowl of ingredients as he walked into his living room. Graham always had the news on, and Robert and Jill were sat side by side as always keeping him up to date with recent events. Young, attractive, fashionable... a great double act who timed their alternate lines to perfection.

Robert’s piece had caught Graham’s ear. “And in local news, the people of Sussex were shocked at the sudden death of much-loved wizard, Vortak The Incredible, who died on Thursday. He suffered a heart attack whilst at his flat in Brighton. His magic will be greatly missed.” Robert paused and looked at Jill. It was her turn, yet she stared ahead blankly.

Somewhat thrown by the unexpected mistake, Robert continued where Jill should have taken over, “The funeral will be held tomorrow at Saint Bartholomew’s...” Robert was distracted by Jill, who had put her handbag on the news desk and was removing a long piece of purple cloth from within.

Robert gave an uncomfortable laugh and looked off camera for help.

Standing up, Jill placed the purple sash over her shoulder and reached into her handbag again.

“Is everything okay, Jill?” Robert asked, and looked back at the camera with a smile intended to reassure the viewers. Without emotion, Jill pulled a revolver from her handbag

and shot Robert in the head. Graham's jaw dropped in shock as he watched Jill casually walk off screen and the television channel blip to darkness as it went off air.

There was a scream from somewhere in the building, followed by a car alarm and gunshot from outside. Graham hurried over to his window and looked down at the streets below. A dozen youths wearing purple sashes were smashing a police car with bricks and bats. The beginnings of Vortak's uprising was underway and moving fast.

"Son of a witch," Graham whispered.

END