

Tunnel of Arrogance

2025 January 11th, Wednesday 9:00am

Going through the arcane archive's slush pile is beneath me. It's work for juniors and students, not for full-fledged archivists with years of experience. But Head Archivist Yelena says I need to "reconnect with day-to-day work" or whatever.

Honestly, it wouldn't be half bad if I could read through it, but I'm just supposed to sort everything and leave the analytical work to others. Great! Instead of reading a journal from someone who helped develop arcane lightbulbs, or pre-evocation era cooking practices, I just put it in a bin.

For hells sake, I'm an archivist, with a real eyepiece, cape, everything!

Whatever. I'll continue the day's journal at lunch.

2025 January 11th, Wednesday 9:42am

Bored, bored, bored, bored.

2025 January 11th, Wednesday 10:28am

Sandra brought homemade biscuits to the break room. Tasty. Buttery. Remember to get her a card for her birthday (Feb. 1st) and a bookmark.

2025 January 11th, Wednesday 10:46am

I've finished sorting through the slush pile for the day. I'd go on my phone, but the archive blocks all signals. Though there was one "unidentifiable" piece. Might as well page through it and see if I can put a date on it.

Looks like a standard archivist's journal though. Looking at it through my eyepiece, it doesn't have any magic in it, nor any harmful debris. But it is partially burnt. If only I could cast

a psychometry spell on it, but my certification test is still pending. Honestly, what do they do in the archivist's training sector other than twiddle their thumbs?

Whatever. I can find this out on my own.

2025 January 11th, Wednesday 11:02am

I need to copy this all down. The paper isn't too damaged, but it's so confusing, and with such awful handwriting, that I have to write it out myself to make heads and tails of it. If I had any other work, I'd leave this to the scribes, but . . . I believe I can work this out myself.

"1973 October 9th, Friday 4:30pm

Today marks the first individual decent into the tunnel in the Arcane Archive, at—"

I don't know where it's supposed to be. They were scribbled out beyond legibility. Is this from a real archivist? Obstructing information is against our core tenant.

"My colleagues are all understandably weary of the tunnel. With its constant appearing and disappearing, almost no one has gone more than a few steps in. Of course, I have gone the furthest, going 50 meters in before turning around.

But now, I will go as far as I can and chart the tunnel's path. Though there need be no fear, enterprising student whom may read my journal for prosperities sake, I've come fully prepared. A change of clothes, multiple flashlights, 3 days of food and an enchanted water flask, medical supplies and a healing tome, rope, knife, sleeping bag, recorder and of course my archivist's monocle"

Right. The eyepiece used to be called a monocle before the design changed to a spy glass.

"So. Let me venture out!"

4:47pm

They've changed the formatting since then. If the date is the same, they don't need to repeat it for every new entry. Wish they kept the old format.

"The first ~~45~~ 17 minutes was a slow walk though a tunnel of books, as usual. The tunnel is lined with various books, but as I went deeper, the books started to change.

Some in foreign languages, others in olden eras. I saw one particularly tempting book on the study of transmutation that could show how to change the structure of quarks. But, of course, this couldn't be real. The books in the tunnel start off promising, containing real information, but then quickly divulge into ramblings and the like. They get even worse the more people are in the tunnel. Part of why I elected to go alone.

That, and, who can stop the lead investigative archivist? Some fresh-faced archivist going through the slush pile? Or even dear Yelena? Ha, she's the definition of focusing on the forest and missing the trees"

Well this person can piss off. Though they are right about Head Archivist Yelena. She is always looking at the big picture.

"So far, the tunnel is just the same as it always it. I'll continue once it changes"

5:06pm

"This is amazing/awesome!"

The handwriting was so poor I couldn't tell which.

"It looks like a mixture of a library and a natural cave. Some walls have bookshelves carved out and some rocks and moss are molded to look like chairs and sofas. There are lamps of glowing mushrooms and stalactites with lightbulbs at the tip.

And it only expands. I'll include my arcane photos. Thank goodness I br—"

Then the rest of the page is burnt. Not thoroughly, but bunt enough that it's illegible.

6:07pm

I've spent an hour in this cave and truthfully, I could stay here forever. It's warm, comforting, the main issue is the books are odd, but they have been getting more and more legible. I've even learned a thing or two from them.

But if I wanted to stay content, I would have stayed at the archive. I'm heading deeper into the tunnel. Though tunnel may not be the right word. A cavern, more like.

6:28pm

I had to turn on my flashlight. The mushrooms and stalactites are growing sparser.

6:28pm

I heard footsteps. Not my own. I called out, asked if someone came to follow me, but there was no response. Maybe I'm hearing things. I don't know.

8:08pm

The ~~tunnel~~ cave widened out to an enormous cavern. It's approximately ten meters tall and 20 meters wide at the entrance. And it only grows from there. The elements of it being an archive have faded, mostly, with only a few books scattered here and there.

It mostly resembles a laboratory now, or a containment center. There are glass containers that are clouded up and strange equipment all over. It all seems outdated, but expensive.

Notes are strewn around but I can't read the language. The cavern seems to go on for kilometers and kilometers, yet I can't see the end of the cavern. Only more and more broken-down stations and collapsed areas. I've attached—"

The rest of the page is burnt with an imprint. Certainly, of a photo.

8:21

It's strange. These ruins seem to be broken by sabotage. All of the notes are partially burnt and scribbled out. Strangely, there's no bodies. I called out, but there's no response. I didn't expect one, but still.

One of the broken-down facilities has a medical cot. I'll rest up, eat, then maybe I'll head back to the archive.

8:37

HELP. COME. PLEASE. HURRY. GLORY. PRAISE.

That's what the voice, voices, said. It was a cacophony of whispers, but still a voice. I don't understand it, but I want to.

It's strange. It's fascinating.

Mysterious tunnels are uncommon, but the arcane archive is supposed to be well guarded, so I have no idea how a disappearing and reappearing tunnel managed to get past our defenses. Even more, how it's managed to go on for so long.

Pocket spaces are common enough. No arcanist carries more than one bag on them for a reason, but this place is massive. Is it another dimension, or a warped area? Impossible to tell. I don't think I can sleep, I want to know"

Well, it's not impossible to know. It sounds more like a warped space, with the elements of a cave trying to replicate the elements of an archive. But warped spaces are rarely in pocket dimensions, and this certainly is a pocket dimension.

9:17

"Something is watching me. I don't see eyes, but I feel it. The cave is light again, with glowing mushrooms and lightbulb stalagmites. But I'm getting restless. Something's wrong. I'm going back.

9:18

I turned around and started heading out, but the second I did, I heard whispers. And something glowing out of the corner of my eye.

A piece of gold laying on the ground. I tried transmuting it, and it was real gold. But I swear it wasn't there when I looked before.

Perhaps I shouldn't admit to a felony in my notebook. Whatever, I can redact it"

Transmuting gold isn't a felony anymore. Selling transmuted gold, is still one of the highest crimes an arcanist can commit.

9:32

"The bits of gold in the ground and on the walls have changed to now pepper in bits of silver and gemstones. Rubies, sapphires, emeralds, diamonds. If anyone else were here, they'd just mine it and leave. But I'm not after gold and jewels. I'm after knowledge. And I'm starving.

9:42

There are more ruins. They look older than the labs. There are religious relics and various instruments strewn around what looks like a city center. And there are multiple branching pathways past the square. I'll stay and study the square a bit. I've attac—"

Yet another burnt page

It's weird, the research sector and the town center all had burnt notes and no bodies. Who made the tunnel? For what purpose? This archivist should know by now.

9:45

"There are too many tunnels to choose from. I know it could be frivolous, but I'll use my arcane monocle to see which one has the most unique arcane signature.

Actually, why haven't I been using it? It's an invaluable tool. I just haven't used it. Why? What's wrong with my mind? Is the air not oxygenated enough?"

Why haven't they been using it? Sure, frivolous uses are frowned upon, like trying to find all of the training wands in a supply cupboard or winning at trivia night for which evoked flame uses which spell component. But something like understanding a spontaneous magic tunnel is certainly necessary.

Maybe the glowing mushrooms are releasing a toxin, or the cave is filled with nitrogen.

9:45

"Can't see, too loud— yes YES YES. Specimen, perfect, need."

10:12

I'm in a new area of the tunnels. I have no idea which tunnel I entered. Everything was too bright and too loud. Like a million whispers breathing into my mind, yet I can't remember what they said.

Apparently, they said 'yes, specimen, perfect, need' since I wrote it down. At least, I believe that's what I wrote.

My eyes still haven't adjusted to the tunnel. Everything is bathed in white. My ears are still ringing. The photos I've taken will hopefully provide clarity as I continue into the tunnel.

I'm too scared to turn back. Maybe I should. But then who else can figure this madness out. It has to be me.

10:12

My watch is broken. I've tried to transmute it, conjure a new one, but it doesn't work. I thought this tunnel would just be a little alcove. A pocket place that an old archivist used to put their favorite books that hasn't been used in years. What is this place. What monster is in here?"

There are partial photos. Most of it is burnt, but there are edges and corners. A curved grey brick wall, with torches on the sides, a patch of crabgrass mixing with dry red dirt, and a glowing mushroom lamp.

On it's beautiful. Like a moonlight mushroom glowing in the day. Like the green lamps that bank tellers and archivists use.

I need to understand it. If it's transmuted, how? How can they transmute something as complicated as a living mushroom with a lightbulb? Transmutation is done at an atomic scale! It must be conjured, but conjurations are never that detailed. Maybe an illusion, but the eyepiece would have caught it immediately, and every arcanist could tell it's an illusion in person. So what is it? I need to know.

10:30?

"I'm stopping for water, but the whispers haven't stopped. It's like there's something that wants me, or some kind of creature or being, and it's so close. If I can just push myself further, I can reach it, I can catch it, I can understand it. I'm the only one who can.

11:00?

There are notes on the ground. Half burnt. Someone failed, and they couldn't figure out the tunnel. How pathetic. I'll be able to.

The notes say that they tried to tell the future. What weakness. I'll understand it.

12?

The tunnel is endless. My feet can't move anymore. I haven't been able to rest for more than 10 minutes. Have I only been here for 7 hour? It feels longer. I'm in agony. Why did I think I could understand this alone?

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I know how to understand this.

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I'll never know. I'll die here.

-

I'll conquer this place. I'm the youngest archivist ever!

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I'm going to die here. I'm going to die here. I'm going to die here.

??:??

Theres an end to the tunnel. And there's a book on the ground. Can this place let me go once I open it? Once I do what it wants, once I bend to it.

No. It will bend to my will. I will understand it. I will solve it. I will overcome it.

An entire burnt page. A sloppily burnt page. Like they lit their finger on fire and burnt it out.

I can't understand it.

I failed, I failed, I failed, I failed, I failed, I failed.

Like the one before me seeking future sight, Alaria of the Everdark. Like the scientists from the labs of Mycelliala. I have failed. I must burn it all.

I should never have tried to learn, never tried to understand. I can't overcome it. My head is in two.

All of the knowledge I could ever want, all of the understanding. It's not a tunnel, it's a door. Sealed off so no one can reach it. But it's like an anglerfish, like cheese on a mouse trap. So tempting for fools like me, fools who think they can understand it.

I'm at the entrance already. It wanted a weakened vessel, a mad vessel, one who would accept it's power.

But being all powerful will burn and kill almost any human.

It's just a funnel for hungry people to die, choking on what they craved.

How do I warn them? How do I warn Yelena?

If I leave, I'll leak it. If I do nothing I won't be the last person to die.

I will be the last person to die of this. Please let me be the last person who dies of this”

There are some torn pages, then it just ends.

The note on it says that an archivist found it on the first floor and threw it on the slush pile, and no one's had the time to go though it yet.

It seems like this person was Cassie Quinn. She was a brilliant archivist who just left the archive one day, leaving a note for now Head Archivist Yelena.

Yelena must be trying to seal it. To try and make Cassie's final wish come true. If I give her this journal, she would so impressed.

But she would be more impressed if I went in and found the book that's written in the journal. I know the way the tunnel work, I know what it wants and how I want's me to act. I can go in there, document everything—like a proper archivist—and leave.

Then Head Archivist would finally see what I've been trying to show her for years!

Unless she knows what kind of person I am, knows that I want to go, and would stop me. For my own good? Or to hinder me?

Should I go? Should I stay? Should I listen to Cass?