



**BARTY**  
**THE KID**

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**A**  
**LEGEND**  
**IS**  
**BORN**

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# **BARTY THE KID**



Vol 1, No. 1

“A Legend is Born”

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Distributed by Dime Novel Publishing

[www.dimenovelpublishing.com](http://www.dimenovelpublishing.com)

[www.bartythekid.com](http://www.bartythekid.com)

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ISBN: 978-0-9712734-0-5

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# “A Legend is Born”

**B**arty was not your average wizard. His teachers told him so. His mother and father told him so. Even those he beat in back-alley and playground wizard duels said so.

You see, Barty could draw his wand and turn you into dust or a frog, or blow you back 50 feet, faster than anybody else.

Twitching fingers over the wand tucked into his second-year wizarding belt, he could out-draw anybody that wanted to test him. In his short 13 years, he'd established himself as a legend among the Boston Wizarding Consortium. Everyone talked about him, from Senior Wizard down to first-year apprentice, and everyone wanted to go against him.

That is, until he beat everyone.

At his school, the Circean Wizard Academy, he was the kid that everyone wanted to have lunch or practice spells with, but Barty wasn't satisfied. Laying awake at night, staring up into the night sky scenery that he'd enchanted onto the ceiling of the small bedroom he shared with his four brothers, Barty dreamed of somewhere that he could test his skills; somewhere that he could make a name for himself as the greatest, most talked-about wizard, ever.



**B**arty woke to the usual morning clang of pots and pans as his mother prepared breakfast.

“Ugh, can she just let me sleep one more minute,” his eldest brother Paul moaned as he turned over in his bed, pulling his pillow over his head. But it didn’t help much. There was little left of the pillow: Paul had tried to enchant it to block sound, but unfortunately, he ended up doing quite the opposite. When the spell misfired, he’d filled the bedroom with deafening sounds until his father had to come in and despell it. The pillow was not so lucky though, and as punishment, his parents had forced him to sleep on it anyway.

Barty, always more energetic than Paul, rolled out of bed along with his other two brothers, Samuel and Michael, and slipped into his wizard robes. He was the youngest of the four Scrivener boys, and younger than his four sisters as well, making him the last to get anything in the family. He smoothed down his hand-me-down third-generation robe and his second generation wizard belt. Even his shoes had been patched and passed down through the ages, the long toe curl now unraveled and flat..

Robe and belt on, Barty looked down at his shoes and sighed.

Being the fastest draw in Boston sure doesn’t amount to much, he thought as he slipped them on.

Of course, as soon as he got up and got dressed, his brothers pushed him back down onto his bed. Up. Down. Up. Down. Three times until he finally just gave up and lay there, listening to their laughter as they careened down the hall, crashing into the kitchen where their mother screamed and ordered them to behave.

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Barty could hear his sisters as well emerging from their room complaining about bathroom time. The apartment was in its usual morning ruckus.

He pushed himself up from the bed and tried to smooth down his robe, which he knew from past experience, was nearly impossible. At least with his brothers gone, he had the mirror to himself. He stood in front of it—an old, worn out mirror that was well beyond polishing. But it allowed him to practice his draw a little, pretending that he was squaring off against the entire sixth-year wizard class. He remembered when he'd pulled up Colin O'Reilly's robe in a duel last week. Colin, a Senior Apprentice Wizard had challenged him right as they walked into school, right in the courtyard. Too bad Colin didn't know that morning was Barty's best time of the day, when his reaction speed was highest. Standing back-to-back, the two had walked 10 paces away and turned, hands hovering above their wands. But as Colin went for his wand, Barty already had his drawn, the spell cast, and peals of laughter filled the hallways as Colin frantically tried to push down the robe that was flying up above his face. Barty could still remember his polka-dot underwear and it brought a smile to his face as he whipped out his wand and pointed it at the mirror.

"You getting faster, Barty?" his dad asked, standing in the doorway.

Barty stuffed his wand into his belt and whirled around. No matter what all the others said about him, Barty was still shy about showing off in front of his parents. They had tried to instill in him a sense of humility. They wanted him, like all their children, to be reserved and gentlemanly. That was the mark of a truly important wizard, one that probably would live to serve in government or some important business.

But Barty had never taken to staying in the background. Perhaps it was because he was the baby of the family and wanted to be different, to be noticed. Or, maybe more like it, he was just born that way—a fiercely burning star in the night waiting to be seen and admired.

“Sorry dad, didn’t see you there,” Barty mumbled, shuffling towards the door.

His dad put his hand on Barty’s head, tousling his short, wavy brown hair a little, making Barty realize that he hadn’t paid any attention to it when reflected in the mirror.

“It’s OK, son,” his Dad said softly so only Barty could hear, “I know what they say about you. Just remember to keep your wits about you.”

Barty looked into his dad’s eyes. They were the same eyes as Barty’s. That’s what everyone said, at least. One blue. One brown.

“I just feel like I’m different than everyone else, Pop. Like I am destined to do something bigger than Charlestown...bigger than Boston, even.”

His dad smiled sheepishly at him and opened his mouth as if to say something, but then closed it quickly. In a family like theirs, it was almost impossible to find the opportunity for a parent to spend time alone with one of the children. But they seemed to find it, even if for a few seconds. And in that stare, it seemed to Barty that so much was being said. They had an understanding of all that had passed and would come.

Barty nodded sheepishly and squeezed past his dad to see if there was anything left for breakfast besides bacon crumbs and bread crusts.

**B**arty stepped from the apartment building onto the crowded Boston street, remarking to himself that even if he didn't make a name for himself, he was going to get away from all this.

All this...sameness.

When Barty turned 13, four months ago, in late April, his father had finally let him walk by himself to the Academy. It was only a couple of miles away but his father had always felt it was a dad's duty to escort his son to school during his first year. The streets of Boston were an easy place to get distracted. That, and perhaps his dad needed an excuse to get away from the morning madness that took place everyday at the Scrivner house.

And for the past few months, the streets had been unsafe as well; the Wizard Quarter had been haunted. Not by spirit or by magic, but by fear. Dubbed the Wizard Thief, a shadowy drawing of his face leered from "Wanted" posters that were plastered on shop walls and lamp posts throughout the Wizard Quarter. It was a menacing photo, despite it not having any real definition, and it was a constant reminder that Boston was not safe for anyone, magical or not.

But over the past four months, stepping out of the apartment each morning, the air warm and thick with perspiration and the fumes of industry, Barty had seen no change in anything. The same people were walking along the sidewalks, the same horses clomping down the cobblestone streets, the same smells. Even the same loud calls from the herald on the corner,

"News of the day. News of the day. Another young wizard snatched

from the quarter. Authorities still searching.”

Barty shouldered his books and stepped into the flow of people like a fish in a river.

Boston was a jewel on the East Coast. Rich. Cosmopolitan. Sophisticated. At least that’s what people said. Like New York, it had the latest fashions from London and an established upper class. To Barty it was old. Smelly. Confining. And like all cities on the East Coast, Boston was embroiled in a constant struggle. It was common knowledge that wizards had established the first British colonies, using their magic to build the powerful cities, subdue the natives, and even conscript wildlife into service. But the study of magic was a closely guarded art, passed down from generation to generation, allowing entry almost exclusively to those who could prove a wizard in their family tree. And for those, it meant a hard and rough teenage life, spending most waking moments in a Wizard Academy underneath the scornful gaze of a Senior Apprentice Wizard.

But those with magic could do so much that others could not. From protection to combat, wizards were revered and feared at the same time, and this had led to an upheaval in many of America’s cities. A new movement, called the Mechanics, had looked to the study of Physics and Science to stand up against the magical order. Soon it was Wizards against Mechanics and although it was really about beliefs—that magic was old and prone to failure, that science was new and used laws and math to describe how the universe worked, even magic—it sometimes erupted into terrible fights that left people dead and property destroyed.

Like all wizards, Barty was taught to despise Mechanics, to hate their



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inventions—robot men, automobiles, great machines to move earth and mine for metals—and those messages were drilled into him at every turn. Even the paper that was thrust at him as he turned the corner of New Sudbury Street, heading towards his academy. He just caught the headline as he turned with the flow of people:

*Mechanics device explodes. Dozens of people hurt and killed. Mayor calls for immediate inquisition.*

But paper boys weren't the only ones peddling something on the corners. Boston's street corners were full of pan-handlers and peddlers, everyone selling something or begging for a few spare coins.

“Hair tonic, guaranteed to go from bald to bushy or grow your beard to your toes. Get it right here.”

“Can you spare a pence kind sir? Please? I need to feed my children.”

“Red hot almonds here. Fresh out of the fire. Dragon fire that is! Best, crispiest almonds around!”

Barty ignored it all, pushing past out-stretched hands and merchants waving their wares in front of his face. He stayed the course, letting himself flow with the crowd as it moved ever forward.

It wasn't that he was penniless. In fact, Barty had managed to save 30 pence (most of it the result of duels against the students and children of richer wizards than his parents). It was just that none of it, even the money, excited him anymore.

The Wizard Quarter, where Barty lived, covered all of Charleston. Prior to being annexed by Boston, Charleston was the largest concen-

tration of wizards outside of New York. Thought by most to be named for its proximity to the Charles river, it actually got its name from the wizard that founded it, Sir Charles Drake III. And so Barty had grown up in the throws of magic. Like all kids, he could find anything he wanted among Charleston's vendors and shops—a new spell, an amulet of protection, or even an illegal enchantment. So where some other, common folk from Boston might find the glamour of the Wizarding Quarter enchanting, it had lost its luster for Barty.

Perhaps that's why the men walking down the middle of the street, effortlessly dodging horses and carriages, caught Barty's attention too readily and wholly.

There were three of them, dressed in nothing like Barty had ever seen. From their strange hats with large brims and flat tops, to their colorful shirts and plain pants, to their shoes, which looked like some kind of boot. Their faces were worn from being in the sun, and all three wore short, light beards with tightly cropped hair that was only barely visible underneath their hats. The beards were especially fascinating because in 1895 Boston you were either clean-shaven or trying to emulate the great Merlin. 8 inches, a foot of beard, sometimes facial hair down to the knees, was not uncommon.

That's why the shadowy beards struck an almost immediate chord with Barty. It was different. They were different and Barty couldn't take his eyes off them.

They walked with a gait of sorts and as they came closer, Barty moving toward them with the crowd, the men walking closer to him up the middle of the street. As they neared him, Barty could hear that with each step there came a slight jingle and realized that it was their boots.

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And he noticed that from their pants hung small strips of leather.

But what grabbed his attention most were their belts.

Studded with stones and metal and ornamented with a huge buckle, they hung low on their hip and supported some kind of pocket that rested against their leg, held firm by another small strap that tied around the thigh.

And resting in each was, as Barty quickly surmised, a wand.

“Hey watch it,” someone said as they quickly tried to avoid running into Barty who had stopped in the middle of traffic. In doing so, though, they ended up bumping into others creating a chain reaction radiating out from Barty who simply stood and watched the three strange men pass by.

“Sorry son, gotta keep moving or step out of the way,” a gruff voice said, followed by a firm hand on his shoulder that guided him into the street. But Barty almost didn’t even notice him as he watched the three men enter a door a few hundred feet back from where Barty had come.

“Ah, they are something to look at, aren’t they?” the man asked.

That’s when Barty turned to see who was holding onto him and realized that it was a Wizard Officer. In most areas of Boston, the police force was staffed by normal, non-magical folk. But in the Wizard Quarter, the police had to be able to deal with magic, with criminals that wielded wands. A billy club wasn’t much use against a spell-casting magician.

“Who are they?” Barty asked. “Are they wizards?”



“Well, I’m not sure who they are but I know what they are. Cowboys. Looks like they probably just got in. Lot of them moving through Boston these days, bringing in sundries from the West.”

“The West?” Barty asked. “Like Brighton?”

The officer looked hard at Barty for a second, quickly assessing the robes and belt, his look suddenly turning softer.

“Second year, eh? You’ll have geography next year; learn about it. There’s a much bigger world out there than just Boston, son”

“Well...are they wizards?”

The officer shrugged.

“Some of them are. Looks like that trio was. You noticed the wands in their holsters? Pretty observant.”

But Barty wasn’t listening anymore. He was thinking of those belts, and the beards, and of his 30 pence saved.

Holster, he thought, imaging one on his thigh.

“I bet you’re going to be late if you don’t get moving, though,” the officer said, finally letting his hand off Barty’s shoulder.

The officer was smiling now, looking at Barty who had turned to look back at the doorway the three cowboys had entered. The officer could only imagine the excitement that those cowboys represented to a young wizard and part of him remembered when he felt like that.

“I bet they went into the Dragon’s Nest,” he whispered, crouching

down a little and pointing out the hanging sign above the doorway they had entered. “Not the sort of establishment for a young man like yourself, though.” His voice had a tone of warning to it but also something else.

Barty half-turned to look at him and the officer caught the gleam in Barty’s eye. It surprised him for a second. Barty’s was a hard stare, an intensity that the officer had only seen on much more seasoned wizards. And like those stares, it made him want to step back a few paces, give the owner of such a glare some room. But from a kid?

“I’d remind you that I don’t want come back here to clean up any messes,” he said, standing up and assuming an air of authority.

“I’m not looking to make any messes officer,” Barty said half-heartedly, turning back and looking at the door, then at the sign.

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you,” the officer mumbled and headed off on his normal beat.

Cowboys, Barty mused. It was such a foreign word but one that rolled off his tongue, swirled around his mouth, begged to be spoken.

“Cowboys,” he whispered and in that moment, when that word left his lips, he knew he had to see them again. He wanted to see how they drank. He wanted to hear how they talked. And so he headed quickly up the street, dodging horses and buggies, towards the Dragon’s Nest.

When he got to the door, he stood just off the sidewalk, just before the gutter and the foul-smelling rotten water that lay stagnant there. He stared at the sign. It was a huge, splintered and worn round plaque of wood into which was carved a faded red dragon sitting atop a nest.

What must once have been smoke curled from his nose. Above it, in faded greed lettering: The Dragon's Nest.

Standing there, Barty suddenly felt a pang of nerves, his stomach tightening. He was vaguely aware of his satchel of books dangling precariously over the disgusting gutter. For a split second he actually considered turning back around and heading to school. But there was no way. Although he would probably be late, and he might be risking a good whipping for getting caught in what was clearly an adult establishment, he knew he had to walk through this door.

The jingle of the cowboys' steps filling his ears, he could swear that he heard their boots behind the thick wooden door. And that pushed him over the edge. Taking a deep breath, he stepped onto the sidewalk, buffeted a bit by the flow of people, pushed open the door, and stepped into the smoky darkness inside.

The pipe smoke hung in the air like a blanket, covering the people inside of the establishment in a gauze of obscurity. The door closed behind him with a bang that made him jump but seemed not to phase a single soul in the bar. He stood where he was, partially frozen with nerves, partially taking it all in.

Every bone in his body told him to turn around and head back into the street. There was no doubt that he wasn't supposed to be in there. Curious gazes, unscrupulous looks, and even far more wicked eyes passed over Barty as he stood there, his eyes adjusting to the dozens of tables stretching back into the far reaches of the pub. Most of the tables were filled with various people. Some wore wizard robes, others different uniforms, but none of them wore the wide-brim, flat-topped hats of the three cowboys.

Barty suddenly wondered if he'd made a huge mistake when a large man stepped out from behind the bar and approached him. He wore a gross apron that barely fit around the girth of his stomach, stained with the blood of a thousand swipes of his cleaver. Like many other bar owners, he'd recently launched a butchery as well hoping to meet the many needs of his patrons. Whether it was meat or mead, he was ready to provide. His arms, stuffed into a shirt that was a dozen sizes too small, were huge and meaty ending in the stumps he called hands, which looked more like stuffed sausages.

"You lost boy?" the man asked.

But Barty didn't answer, his tongue suddenly tied into a thousand knots.

"Come on boy, I ain't gonna stand here all day. You want something? This ain't no place for a young man like yourself."

They stood there for a moment longer, almost facing off for a duel until the barman gave a big sigh and put one hand on Barty and the other hand on the door.

"Okay boy, out you go," he said, starting to push Barty out when the knots suddenly untied and Barty blurted out,

"Cowboys!"

The barman took his hand off the door and looked down at Barty, his eyebrow cocking.

Without saying anything, he gestured with his pudgy thumb toward the back of the establishment and headed off back to the bar, shaking his head.

Barty was breathing hard. He tried to catch his breath and his composure. Standing there, he realized that the novelty of his visit had worn off. Apparently when you had a reason to be in such an establishment, everyone lost interest. As such, Barty became just another patron.

Trying to tuck his school books underneath his arm so no one would notice, he headed toward the back, weaving through chairs and tables, through men drinking their fill of ale and others passed out from a night of revelry, dodging the bar maid and her arms full of empty tankards. And as Barty neared the middle of the pub, he noticed the three cowboys in the back. Almost at the last table, they sat huddled over their drinks. If they were talking, Barty couldn't hear and so he edged closer, finally taking a seat, nonchalantly, near their table.

He felt like he sat there for days, watching the cowboys raise and lower their drinks. One of them had taken off his hat and was repairing the ornate, metal-studded band that wrapped around it, bending pieces back in shape. But none of them talked.

That is, until the bar maid stood over Barty.

“You drinking something...honey? Maybe some ale?” and she chuckled as she said it.

She towered over him, her greasy apron stained with blood, fat, beer, and who knew what else. She reeked of sweat and meanness and Barty tried not to crinkle his nose or step back. At least not in front of the cowboys.

But that didn't stop him from panicking inside. He had been so focused on whom he was following that he hadn't even thought rationally



about making his way through the bar, let alone ordering something. Stammering out the first drink he could think of, realizing some deep seeded desire for a luxury not afforded in a family of eight, he immediately regretted it.

“A cola please.”

Her craggily maw roared with laughter and Barty blanched, trying to sink father back into the shadows. But her roar quickly subsided, her face taking on the same stern countenance.

“You got pence for that? It’s a sixteenth. I don’t want you wastin’ my time.”

“Put it on my tab darlin’. He’s with us,” one of the cowboys said. “And bring him a whiskey to go with that soda.” It was the one who had just repaired his hat. Another of the cowboys moved on the bench, tilting his head slightly to Barty indicating that he should take a seat.

Shaking, sweating, mouth dry, Barty got up slowly and stepped around the table to sit beside the cowboy.

The first thing that he noticed was the smell. They were unlike anything he’d smelled in the city before and couldn’t even put a name to it. Sweat mingled with something else, something raw.

“A whiskey? Really?” she asked.

The cowboy slammed his hand against the table, his palm slapping against the wood. The effect might have been the same as if he’d pulled his wand out and cast a destination spell—the bar maid almost jumped into the air.

“I said a whiskey. I didn’t ask your opinion. And be quick about it.”

Shaking, she backed away, mumbling something about worsening clientele.

“I’m Alister,” the cowboy who’d ordered his drink said, offering his hand. It engulfed Barty’s small hand and when he squeezed, Barty swore he could feel iron, like bands of metal encircling his fingers. “That’s Jedidiah. That’s Philip.” Barty watched him point to both of the other cowboys. In response, they tipped their hats slightly in Barty’s direction.

“Saw you watching us in the street,” Alister said. “Never seen a cowboy, huh?”

Barty shook his head.

“Well, now you seen three. Three of the best around, if I don’t say so myself. Jedidiah here is the fastest draw I ever seen. Phillip not so much, but the ladies seem to like him a whole bunch.” Phillip laughed

“You’re wizards?”

Philip chuckled and Alister smiled.

“Well, not like you got here in Boston. But, if you mean we can cast spells and are good with a wand, then, yeah, we’re wizards.”

Alister took a drink from his tankard and set it gently back down on the table.

“Where are you from?” Barty asked. He was trying to hold back. He didn’t want to explode with questions at the table but he also didn’t

want them to stop talking. Their voices were almost magical. The way they said each word was so much different than what he was used to. His father had told him it was an accent, a way that people spoke depending upon where they were from.

“West,” Alister said. “Colorado if you want to know the name of the state.”

Colorado.

The word echoed in Barty’s head.

“Whiskey,” the waitress suddenly said, slamming the drink down onto the table. “And one soda. Anything else?”

Without hesitation, Alister pulled out a full pence from his pocket and put it onto the table.

“Settle us up.”

“You’re leaving?” Barty asked.

Philip chuckled again.

“Yup. Got business to take care of and then headin’ home.”

“Colorado?”

“Colorado.”

They sat there for a moment, the men drinking occasionally from their tankards. Barty sipped from his soda. He looked at the whiskey, not really paying attention to it, trying to figure out what he could ask next to keep them there a little longer.

“You gonna drink that?” asked Jedidiah. Up until now he hadn’t uttered a single sound. “Rude not to drink a drink that a man’s gone and bought for ya.”

He was looking over the brim of his own drink. Both Alister and Philip followed suit, staring at him expectantly.

Barty swallowed hard.

“Whiskey?” he asked.

This time, Philip laughed loud and hard. Alister smiled slyly but Jedidiah kept his gaze firmly on Barty. Putting his drink down, he crossed his hands on the table.

“Cowboys drink whiskey boy,” Jedidiah said. “But I’ll tell you what. You beat me in a draw and I won’t make you drink it.”

Had it been anyone else at the table, it would have been a good joke, but Alister had just told Barty that Jedidiah was truly a wicked-fast draw. In fact, unbeknownst to Barty, he’d already put down several people in the 24 hours they’d been in Boston.

But at the mention of a duel, Barty’s countenance changed almost immediately. Phillip caught the slight change in demeanor and cautioned Jedidiah, half-joking, half-serious, “I don’t know Jed...I think this boy’s gonna surprise you. He’s got that same look you had on your face when that joker rolled up on you in St. Louis. And I assume he ain’t been drinkin. Yet.”

It was hard to find anyone at the Circean Wizard Academy who couldn’t describe Barty’s face when he was dueling. Although most of them had seen it while in a frenzied crowd watching Barty duel,

some had the direct experience of standing across from it as Barty's fingers calmly twitched above the handle of his wand. Whomever you happened to be, they could all attest to the sudden change in Barty's normally subdued and even shy expression—a cold, calculated resolve steeled over him, his pupils dilating, the muscles in his face tensing, the rest of him seeming to totally relax.

And that's what happened there, at that table.

Jedidiah noticed as well and found it curious. But it didn't stop him from standing up and moving some of the other tables out of the way.

Under other circumstances, like when his bar didn't have three potentially dangerous cowboys in it, the barman might have waddled out and put a stop to what was happening. Who dueled a child anyway? But he saw something that apparently no one else in the bar seemed to notice, including the boy himself (and definitely not any of the cowboys)—as the kid got up from the table, he confidently, if not sub-consciously, pushed the shot glass of whiskey over to where his opponent had been sitting.

The barman began to wave frantically to his patrons, trying to draw their attention away from what was happening in the shadows of his pub. It had little effect and the patrons soon formed a sizeable crowd just outside the dueling area that Jedidiah had setup. One industrious patron actually began shouting out odds and collecting a few random bets around the room.

“You ready for this, kid?” Alister asked. “Like I told you before, Jedidiah's the fastest I ever seen. And he wouldn't take it easy on his own mama if she challenged him to a duel!”

Barty didn't even hear him. The strange effect of dueling had complete control over him. Like an icy coldness, he was numb to everything else besides his own body—his heart beating, his fingers twitching, the smell of the smoke, the smell of the sweat—none of it registered anymore. That's something that Barty never told anyone. When it came down to dueling, his body and mind became so focused, his senses so heightened that he could even smell his own opponent.

And right now, he smelled hesitation. Not fear. But definitely something from Jedidiah that equated to uncertainty.

"Rules?" Barty said.

It was the way that all duels worked. Without rules, personal combat would be chaos. So everyone who trafficked in duels understood that the one who made the challenge made the rules as well, whether it was fastest to bring the wand up or, in some cases, anything goes.

Jedidiah cocked his head again, even more curious.

"That's right. My duel, my rules. Okay, so you done this before. That's good."

They stood 20 feet apart, as far apart as they could in the space that Jedidiah created. Backed up against benches and tables, Jedidiah and Barty stared at each other.

"So, how 'bout this? Considerin' that this is just over a cup'a whiskey, let's say no spells? Just the draw? Okay?"

Barty nodded.

"Alister, you countin'?"

“Ten, nine, eight, seven, six,” Alister counted.

Barty’s fingertips grazed the top of his wand, tapping it, rubbing it, doing more in few milliseconds than most wizards could do in couple seconds. He felt, like always, that he was operating at five or ten times the normal speed of his body.

“two, one, DRAW!,” Alister said.

And before Jedidiah could completely pull out his wand, Barty had his drawn, pointed, and a spell cast.

He hadn’t meant to work any magic, as it wasn’t in the rules, but he was caught up in the moment. At least he wasn’t angry. The last time he’d dueled when he was angry, his opponent had ended up in the Academy hospital for two weeks and Barty had ended up cleaning bathrooms for the same amount of time.

So when Jedidiah cleared his wand from his holster, his belt suddenly unbuckled, the lace holding the holster to his leg untying, and the whole rig flying through the air to land at Barty’s feet. There was a collective gasp of surprise from the patrons as well and then a sudden cheer with tankards clanking and backs being patted. The “oddsman” busied himself collecting his winnings from a few shocked patrons.

“Holy Mother of Mercury!,” Philip said, laughing hysterically as Jedidiah’s pants began to slip down.

That’s when Jedidiah went to put his wand back in his holster, only to realize that it was missing. He patted his leg frantically, suddenly noticing that it was lying at Barty’s feet, and grabbed at his pants to keep them from completely falling down.

“Hey, you broke the rules!” Jedidiah started to walk towards Barty when Alister stood up.

“I think that’s OK, Jed,” he said, walking over to Barty and picking the holster and belt rig from the floor. He looked at Barty and half-smiled, his eyes saying so much more than words could ever. It was very similar to the look his dad had given him only an hour earlier in front of his mirror. An understanding.

“So, Jed,” Philip said, “you gonna’ drink that whiskey?”

But caught in the moment, Barty strode to the table, and lifted it to his lips only to have it snatched from his grasp.

“That’s my whiskey, boy,” Jed said, downing it quickly, gritting his teeth at the sour liquid.

“Stick to soda for now, son,” he said, giving him a wink. “You already draw faster than a grown man. You don’t need to drink like one.”

Barty just nodded at him as the adrenaline began to wear off. He didn’t want to say it, because he wanted the cowboys to see him as one of them, but he was glad that Jed snatched the whiskey away. His dad was always chiding him for too often acting without thinking, so Jed, a stranger had just kept him from making a huge mistake.

Jed reached down and put a large hand on his shoulder. “Gheesh kid, you got more guts than some cowboys I know,” he said, smiling. “Next time, remind me to stay in my chair.”

“All right boys, I guess we gotta’ be headin’ out,” Alister said, handing Jedidiah back his holster as Barty tucked his wand into his belt.



Jedidiah took the holster, still looking at Barty, and buckled everything back on.

“Listen here kid,” Alister said, crouching down to Barty’s level. “I thought that I’d seen fast, until I seen you draw. Anyone who says different don’t know squat. If you ever get tired of this city, there’s plenty of opportunity out West. Plenty of it for a cowboy like you.”

And with that, Alister put his hat on Barty’s head. Jedidiah tipped his to Barty to acknowledge that he’d earned it.

Even though the hat didn’t fit quite right, dipping back a little to show too much forehead, Barty felt as if it was custom-made for his head. He felt that this was the best day in his life...and it wasn’t even lunchtime! Finally, being the fastest draw in Boston had got him something special.

Cowboy, he thought.

“You be careful kid and maybe we’ll see you sometime in Colorado. Place like this ain’t right for someone who can draw like that.”

Before he realized it, the cowboys were gone, the front door closing with a muffled thud, and the patrons returning to their seats. In fact, as the barmaid began rearranging the chairs and tables around Barty, he realized that in a few seconds it would be like it never happened. Part of him wondered if it hadn’t been a dream.

Until he put his hand up to his head and felt the hat.

I’m a cowboy, he thought.

Well, at least as much as a cowboy could be without boots and those

pants and the holster. He was pretty sure he was more cowboy than any other wizard in Boston though and that swelled him with pride. Barty thought about the 30-pence he'd saved and wondered where he would even buy all the rest of the clothes. He imagined walking up the steps to the Circean Wizard Academy with his new, imagined wardrobe.

He'd be the most talked about student at the school.

Barty grabbed his books and headed outside with the thoughts of cowboys, quick draws and adventures in the West still filling his head. He oddly found himself wishing his dad had been there to see it, though he was pretty sure he wouldn't appreciate him skipping his morning classes to spend time in a place clearly not meant for kids.

Sometimes you need to break the rules, Barty thought. Well, at least that's what his brothers always told him.

In a city as crowded as Boston, where foot traffic on the streets seems like a constant flow, day and night, it was common practice to stand on the sidelines, assess the pedestrian traffic and figure out the best possible way to step into it. Failing to do so could sometimes cause unforeseen circumstances.

And so it was for Barty when he stepped out of the Dragon's Nest.

Still reveling in his cowboy adventure, still fingering Alister's hat, Barty was distracted and didn't even break stride when he stepped from the pub's doorway onto the sidewalk. As a result, he walked headlong into the moving stream of people and directly in front of an elderly lady cradling her small dog.

She screamed in surprise as she stumbled to avoid Barty, the dog

jumping from her arms and into the gutter. The crowd bumbled around her as she pitched forward, ending up next to her dog in the dirty water.

Barty's euphoria vanished as the woman lobbed curse after curse at him, as strangers assisted in helping her to her feet.

"Curse you, little urchin!" she screamed, picking up her dog and assessing the damage. Its hair was matted down, bows and other accessories dripping off. The woman didn't look any better and that's when Barty realized not just the dirty state of her clothes but her expensive, elaborate robe itself.

She was a Lady. He had knocked over one of Boston's blueblooded Ladies.

"How dare you??!!! How DARE YOU??!!!" she screamed again, the anger of her voice surpassed only by the spittle.

A crowd began to gather and suddenly Barty felt so vulnerable, eyes boring through him, fingers pointing, sneers forming, noses turning.

"My Lady, please allow me," a deep voice said. Barty was turning to see who had spoken, but only a second too late, when the slap came.

It was the back of a hand, something Barty had become used to as a second-year apprentice, but this one was big and the strike was firm and hard. Barty stumbled backwards, through the foul gutter water, and into the street, catching himself only at the last moment to avoid being trampled by a horse and carriage.

Regaining his balance, ready to kneel down and accept his punishment from a member of the aristocracy, he realized he'd dropped his

hat and noticed it in the gutter. The hat that he'd just been given by a cowboy. The only thing that being the fastest draw had ever gotten him. The first thing that spoke to him of a world that was bigger than Boston, a world he could be a part of.

And suddenly, that coldness crept over him.

Even without being challenged, Barty was ready to duel.

He looked up at the man that had slapped him, steeled his eyes upon the foot-long black beard, and convinced himself that this was about honor. The boy that normally accepted this kind of treatment from the blue bloods and senior wizards and willingly tolerated the bullying from his seven older siblings seemed like a completely different person than the boy who's gaze went from the man to his hat and back again. A new voice was whispering to him from a dark part of his mind, deep inside.

This voice spoke of dueling cowboys and shooting whiskey.

"Duel," he hissed, pointing at the man who had slapped him.

There was a moment of shock from the man's face. He wore wizard robes, at least seven levels above Barty's, and was apparently the woman's bodyguard since he was carrying a bundle of bags and packages in the hand and that hadn't slapped Barty.

Barty couldn't have cared less. "Duel!" he repeated, this time a little louder to make sure that no bystander could misunderstand his challenge to be anything else but what it was.

"You heard him," the woman suddenly roared, her powerful voice booming through the street. "The boy challenged my bodyguard. This

is fair and legal. You heard him! ”

“He can’t duel a boy, no matter how impudent,” a voice from the crowd said.

“Yes, let him go. The slap was enough. He will be punished by his teachers as well,” another voice said.

But the rest of the crowd said nothing. They simply waited. It became apparent what they wanted to see. Maybe it was because they resented the snotty upper class as much as Barty. Maybe it’s because they saw in Barty’s eyes what the barman from the Dragon’s Nest saw. Maybe they just wanted to see a duel.

Barty was already in duel-mode. Every sense was focused on the bodyguard wizard. Eyes, ears, nose. His brain was assessing the situation at rapid speed, taking in vast amounts of information about his opponent—how he moved, how he stood, where his wand was, the size of his hands, the focus of his gaze.

The bodyguard however seemed to have disregarded everyone and began to shuffle the Lady away so as not to make any more of a scene than had already been created. And besides, what good could come out of dueling a little kid? Nothing he concluded...despite what the crazy old woman wanted. He didn’t get paid enough to entertain her with this type of childish behavior.

“Another time, Madam? I am currently burdened with all these packages.”

“You may put the packages down here in the street, Charles,” the Lady ordered, adopting the haughty air of an aristocrat. “And then you

may deal with the boy.”

“No offense Ma’am,” said Barty, never letting his gaze stray from the woman’s bodyguard. “I do apologize for knocking you down. I am truly sorry. But this is between him and me now.”

His eyes dropped once more to his precious cowboy hat in the gutter, and his entire, meaningless life flashed before him. A second-hand life full of hand-me-downs. That hat was the first thing that anyone had ever given him. Just him.

“For the last time,” Barty barked, “I said duel.”

And that’s all it took for Charles. He now felt the crowd’s collective gaze upon him, bearing down on his honor and station. He sneered at Barty as he put the packages down next to the woman and stepped into the street.

Charles nodded once. “Rules?” he asked.

Like in the bar, duels were governed by rules and the person who made the challenge got to make the rules.

“Subdue,” Barty said coolly.

And a collective gasp echoed through the street.

Even though duels could be fought to the death, those that adhered to a set of rules for subduing could be far more painful as combatants had, at their disposal numerous spells meant to inflict pain.

That’s why Barty had said it. He wanted to make Charles feel like his hat in the gutter.

Charles nodded again, the sneer returning.

“Now please finish this Charles!” she said. “These people need to learn their place.” Charles, though, didn’t know what to do. He looked at his employer.

“Shall I count?” a man from the crowd said, stepping forward. He was dressed in short black trousers and a tight-fitting black jacket. A banker. Perfect for counting the duel.

“By all means,” answered Charles, as he turned and crushed Barty’s new hat with his wizarding shoes, the curled toes pressing downward on the brim. “You won’t be needing this anymore.”

His eyes fell upon Barty for a second, perhaps hoping to see some sort of uncertainty, a reason he could call off the duel. But all he saw was Barty’s resolute face and steeled countenance.

“Are you ready?” the banker asked. Both duelists nodded.

“Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one....”

There were so many people that day it seemed like time stood still. In fact, despite Barty’s growing status as the fastest wand in Boston, many would recall that he almost moved too fast, that he must have had some enchantment to slow time down to augment his talent with the wand. Although expensive for a boy of his age and social status, it provided the only explanation for an otherwise impossible scenario—that Bart Scrivner’s youngest son was just that fast.

And to Barty, it actually did feel like time slowed down. He saw Charles reach for his wand, even admired the delicate, gold-wrapped handle, before pulling his own out. He was sure he could have pulled it

out 10 times, putting it back each time and drawing again in the time it took Charles to pull his out just once.

But he'd save that trick for another day.

He didn't want to toy with the man. He didn't want to pull his robe up or take his belt or push him back.

No, he wanted revenge for what he'd done to his cowboy hat now floating disfigured and lifeless in the grime of the gutter.

And so even before Charles got his fingertips on his wand, Barty had already drawn his and cast the almost forgotten Brisance spell. Like in the Dragon's Nest, he hadn't meant to use it, especially given that he'd set the rules for subdue and not death. In fact, he wasn't even sure how he knew it.

But it came out none-the-less, directed at a Senior Wizard who had taken his opponent far too lightly.

Filled with his anger, the blast that followed was tremendous, blowing people back in a 20-foot radius, Barty himself included, and leaving nothing more than a black smudge on the cobblestones where Charles once stood.

There was a brief moment, in the vacuum of sound, as people picked themselves up, when Barty couldn't believe what he had done.

It was an accident, it was an accident, I didn't mean it, Barty repeated to himself. He didn't even know what spell he had cast, nor where he had read about it. But as the aristocrat woman shook her head and groped for her dog, a look of incredulity spreading across her face. Barty woke up to reality, the sound of his surroundings rushing back



in like water filling a jar.

Regardless if it was an accident, it was done and he knew there was no going back. Looking back, he knew the screams would haunt him. The Brisance spell, more powerful than most adult wizards could accomplish, had caused significant damage to the surrounding buildings and innocent people. Nearby shop windows were broken and bystanders' clothes seemed tattered by the blast, their shopping bags and hats strewn about the street scene.

“Run boy!” a hoarse voice rasped and Barty realized it was Alister who had apparently decided to stick around and see the show. “Run!” he repeated, picking himself up, as Jedidiah and Philip did the same.

He didn't need to say it again.

Barty ran...fast. Even as he saw the portly officer from earlier that day running up the street towards him, commanding him to stop, Barty picked up the hat from the gutter and sped away as quickly as he could, stepping nimbly over the sign of the Dragon's Nest that now lay in the street, shattered and broken.

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**B**arty wasn't sure how he got home but he barreled into his apartment building, up the 13 flights of stairs, and into his home.

He knew that everyone would be out at school and work, and he was glad nobody was home. He had one goal.

Hide.

Barty tore into his room and looked around frantically. In such a small apartment, it was hard to find somewhere to hide. In lieu of furniture like armoires and dressers were beds and mattresses. Thinking of nowhere better, Barty scampered onto all fours and headed underneath his bed.

Having never done so, he was almost immediately disgusted by the heavy layer of dust that rose up to engulf him as he wriggled farther into the shadows of his bed. Stifling sneezes, he tried to tune himself into the noises of his room, the apartment, and even the street that managed to drift through the thin walls. And slowly the dust settled until it was just Barty there, almost un-noticeable.

He wasn't sure how long he waited, but soon after the dust had settled, his memories began to unfold and he cried at the thought of what he had done. It started gently at first but soon his sobs began to wrack his small body as the screams of the people in the streets filled his head. He could see their faces like he was standing there, staring at him in horror, aghast at what he'd done to Charles. His sobs slowly subsided into sniffles and he realized that he still held the crushed cowboy hat. Shifting his position, he looked at it, brushing off some of the dirt from the gutter, pushing the top back out and noting to himself that it wasn't in that bad of shape.

But as he admired the thin silver band, he began to idly go over the last few minutes after he'd blasted Charles. He saw himself standing there, remembering how the sounds had all rushed back in, remembering Alister telling him to run, remembering picking up the hat as he sped off.

Then he remembered that he'd left his book bag at the scene.

The suddenness of that memory brought a gasp to his lips. Although in some way he might not care about losing his books, they had his name and the Circean Wizard Academy stamp all over them.

Barty's eyes grew wide with horror.

She'll know where I live, he thought.

A realization like no other, Barty scrambled back out from underneath the bed, certain that he could hear the old woman, a line of wizard police in tow, tromping up the stairs.

But when he stood in his bedroom, covered in dust, he knew that no one was coming...yet.

How long do I have, he wondered. 30 minutes? 15?

Barty grabbed a rucksack from his closet and began to stuff clothes into it—his work clothes, pajamas, extra shirts, another set of robes. Then he dug into his hiding spot, underneath the floorboards next to his bed, and scooped up his small bag of 30 pence, putting them into a small, concealed pocket within his robes.

Finally, he stuffed the hat into the rucksack as well.

His room in disarray, Barty pulled out his wand and cast a quick Scribe spell, the paper and quill jumping off his desk and into action.

He knew that he needed to make it quick.

*Dear Mom and Dad,*

*Something terrible happened today. Just know that it was an ac-*

*cident. I didn't mean to do what the Lady will say I did. I hope that by leaving right now, she will leave our family alone and I can come back later tonight or tomorrow to explain and figure out how to handle it. But if I wait here any longer, I might not have the chance to explain everything to you.*

*I love you very much,*

*Barty*

When finished, the note nicely folded itself up and drifted onto his pillow. Satisfied, but still anxious to leave, Barty headed into the kitchen and grabbed some bread, some sausage, and some cheese. He then hurried back to his room, pulled out his wand again and scribed some more note:

*P.S., I took some food with me. Don't think Sam, Paul, or Michael ate it. It was me.*

He put the food into this sack and headed out the door. In that moment, standing on the threshold of the apartment building hallway and his home, a thousand memories passed through his mind. All the pleasant times he'd spent with his brothers and sisters as well as all the not-so-pleasant. Both of which he found he valued equally. All the holidays at the family table. The first day of school and how proud his father had been. The unspoken words between he and his dad that very morning.

But then he remembered the last memory—the sneer of Charles disappearing in a flash of detonation and the screams of dozens of people caught in the path of Barty's uncontrolled anger.

With that, he gently closed the door and headed off knowing full well that it may be last time he'd ever see the little apartment.



# In the next installment of Barty the Kid:

*The overweight officer grunted, which was apparently cue to continue, and so she plowed ahead.*

*“And after all these peoples gets up and dusts themselves off, well, lots of them starts talking ‘bout how fast the kid was. ‘Bout how he was the fastest they evers seen draw a wand. And I remembers this part ‘specially,” recalls a haggard old woman at the scene of Barty’s crime. Barty watched her rub her hands together, perhaps thinking how she’d sell the story to the Herald, how she’d become rich off this one chance event when she’d stepped out into the street after everything had already happened, not even witnessing it herself.*

*“Someone says, I knows that boy. I seen him duel before. That’s Barty’s kid. You know, Barty Senior’s boy.”*

*And she repeated it again, her voice drifting farther away as Barty slowly retreated into the shadows of the sidewalk.*

*“Barty, the kid.”*

## **About Barty the Kid**

Barty the Kid is a serialized story for young adult readers published by Dime Novel Publishing. Each volume of Barty the Kid is comprised of approximately 26 issues (30-50 pages per issue) published bi-weekly for \$.99 per issue (the first issue of each series is free). You can access additional issues of Barty the Kid, and other Dime Novel Publishing series, from [www.dimenovelpublishing.com](http://www.dimenovelpublishing.com). You can follow Barty on his blog at [www.bartythekid.com](http://www.bartythekid.com) or via Twitter at [www.twitter.com/bartythekid](http://www.twitter.com/bartythekid).

## About the Author

Jason Thibeault has been an aspiring/failed/re-born writer for over twenty years. He finished his first novel *If This is Adventure...I Don't Need It* when he was sixteen (thankfully unpublished). He wrote his second novel, *Ordinary Magic* (a magical realism novel set in Haiti), while in the Campus Wide Honors Program at the University of California, Irvine. Focusing on creative writing, he spent a lot of his time working with the faculty of the Graduate Writing program as well as at numerous writing conferences including Squaw Valley. He also helped edit, publish, and develop the UCI Journal of Fiction, *Faultline*.

After getting his undergraduate degree, Jason spent time abroad, working for HarperCollins London and trying, unsuccessfully, to publish numerous short stories and *Ordinary Magic*. Upon his return, he finished his formal writing education at California State University, Northridge and wrote his third novel, a hard sci-fi dystopian titled *Red Dust Storm*. He also founded the Phoenix Writing Project, a literary journal and local reading series featuring CSUN, local community, and celebrity writers. Jason has also taught numerous creative writing classes at various colleges and universities.

Taking a decade off from serious writing, Jason finally returned to fiction in 2007 focusing on young-adult. Paying attention to what his children were reading (from *Harry Potter* to *Cirque du Freak* to *Percy Jackson*) Jason began to understand that his imagination and writing style were ultimately suited to young adults and pre-teens. With less concern for the details of adult-oriented novel (and far more suspension of disbelief), Jason found quickly that he could generate young-adult fiction at a frighteningly fast pace.

Jason is currently the author of several of DimeNovel Publishing's series (*Barty the Kid*, *Jake: Vampire Hunter*, *Conjunction*) and the creator of many of Dime Novel Publishing's syndicated storylines.