



Better Than Him; Worthy Of You

A Scenario for *Ars Magica*

by Timothy Ferguson

The following is a single-session scenario designed for use with the *Ars Magica* game, but it is easily converted to other fantasy settings.

Forty years ago an elderly puppeteer named Geppetto carved a marionette from an enchanted block of wood. He developed paternal affection for his puppet and, when his wooden son ran away, Geppetto abandoned his workshop to search for him. Geppetto found Pinocchio, who fled from him time after time until, worn down by sickness, fatigue and exposure, Geppetto hovered at the edge of death. Pinocchio changed his ways and nursed his father back to health, then cared for him until his death, twenty years ago. Pinocchio was granted a human body, by the faerie mistress of the forest from whence his wood first came, and so all that was wrong now seemed right.

During his first adventure, Pinocchio was captured by Fire Eater, an evil puppeteer who kept animate marionettes as slaves and firewood. After softening his captor's heart, for just a moment, Pinocchio was set free and he never saw Fire Eater (also called the Director) again. Pinocchio never returned to the hamlet where he was carved, settling down as a basket-weaver, then a rich craftsman, in a distant village by the sea. His father's house, his father's goods, his father's other marionettes, all were forgotten . . .

. . . except, of course, by the Director. He bought the house. He animated the puppets. For the last thirty-nine years, they've been his toys. He's broken almost all of them, all but a scant few who were too inconvenient to replace. One of those was Polendina, a girl marionette designed as a seamstress, who also prepared his meals and tended his house.

When the Director died, his puppets were freed. Freedom, though, isn't useful when you are broken and suffering. Polendina can transplant parts between animate puppets, sewing together the fragments of the broken to repair her siblings. Short of an accident, however, there is no dying puppet to donate all of the parts her family need. That's why she needs to find her brother, the legendary puppet who became a real boy, the one she thinks of as The Liar.

When Pinocchio became a "real boy" he was given a new body, not transformed from wood to flesh. His marionette remained, and he has kept it safe all these years, since it is linked to him sympathetically, like a voodoo doll. Polendina can vivisect the marionette and use the pieces to mend her family. It will kill Pinocchio, but Polendina thinks he's irredeemable.

Characters

Pinocchio Today

Pinocchio, named Paul Collodi after his confirmation, became wealthy in his youth. He was, at first, a skilled basket-weaver, then was given a fortune by the Lady with Azure Hair, the faerie guardian of the grove his wood came from. He's since married Jeanette, the daughter of an older weaver, taking over that family's business.

Paul is technically one of the Fae. The block from which Pinocchio was carved could move and speak before it was carved into a boy. It was animated by a spirit, which Geppetto's Free Expression virtue allowed him to mould into a marionette. Pinocchio was a sort of kobalt (*Faeries Revised Edition*, p. 117) The Lady transformed Pinocchio into a variant of hamadryad, linked to his marionette the way normal dryads are to trees. As an urban faerie, Paul is unharmed by the symbols of divine power, but gains no benefit from miracles.

It's central to Paul's sense of self-worth that he is a "real" person. He does not know that he is a faerie, and will not accept the idea if someone informs him. Although he knows he is sterile, he doesn't connect this to him being something other than a "real" person. Paul is unaware that Geppetto's other puppets are sapient or mobile.

Faerie Might: 25

Size: 0

Characteristics: Int +1, Per +2, Str +1, Sta +5, Prs +2, Com +0, Dex +3, Qik +3

Powers: Although he has faerie powers, Paul's Delusion makes him unable to use them deliberately. He has the equivalent of the following virtues and flaws.

Virtues and Flaws: Wealthy Merchant +3, Temporal Influence +2, Contortions +1, Perfect Balance +1, Well-Travelled +1, Knack With Swords +3, Faerie Friend +2 (Lady with Azure Hair), Delusion -1 (is human), Enemies -2 (Polendina, possibly the Talking Cricket he murdered), Cursed -4 (sympathetic link to marionette)

As a faerie, Paul is not Faerie Blooded, which is a virtue for mortals with faerie ancestors. He has Faerie Sight, but doesn't realise it. He just thinks he's very perceptive.

Traits: as the GM sees fit.

Skills: as appropriate for class and lifestyle, along with high scores in Carouse (dancing), Juggling (acrobatics) and Single Weapon (sword), from his initial design.

Polendina

Polendina is a female marionette about two feet in height. She has blonde hair (worn in pigtails) and freckles. Her eyes are wide and brown and look like a baby's. Those who know Paul can discern a family resemblance in Polendina's features. She's removed her strings, so the small holes in the hands and feet can be covered with gloves and boots. When fully rested, she can appear to be a six-year-old, or a tiny woman. She is technically a kobalt, but thinks of herself as a marionette.

Polendina, although the villain of this piece, is not mechanistically evil. If she were offered another way to save her family, short of suicide, she'd probably accept it. That she is morally superior to Pinocchio is a very important part of Polendina's identity: she doesn't hurt other people, and tries to avoid other "sins." Abandoning her family to their suffering or being repeatedly dishonest would make her too much like The Liar for comfort, so she's both truthful and driven.

Pinocchio was deceptive, tried to commit murder, and drove Geppetto mad with grief. His reformation occurred after he'd run away to the coast. Polendina doubts Paul's epiphany, because marionettes, like other faeries, can't change their personalities without assistance. It could all be a trick, another ruse to make himself comfortable at the expense of others. Polendina, although she doesn't admit it to herself, envies Pinocchio's humanity and emotional rapport with their father. She expresses this by despising the opportunities Pinocchio wasted, and by loathing him for not coming to his family's rescue, once he was a real boy.

Faerie Might: 15

Size: -2

Characteristics: Int +1, Per +2, Str +5, Sta +5, Prs +2, Com 0, Dex +3, Qik +3

Powers:

Communicate with Animals, 1 point.

Control Element (Terram), 2 points: Can make needles and pins appear from nowhere and fly. Flying needles are not elfshot, but if Polendina returns in later scenarios, she might have developed that power.

Shapechange to Person, 2 points: A variant of the Shapechange to Object power. Polendina's natural form is as a marionette.

Enchant Object (mending needle), 1 point: Empowers the magical needle that Polendina uses to mend marionettes. This can also be used to join together other wooden objects. For example, Polendina can sew a door to its arch. Her joints are always slightly stronger than the surrounding wood.

Traits: Hard Working +3, plus those the GM sees as fitting.

Skills: Tend to the domestic, but also performance and communication skills.

Weapon/Attack	Init	Atk	Dfn	Dam
Scissors	+7	+7	-1	Dam +9
Flying pins (Ranged)	1st +2	+2	Parry -	Dam +3

Dodge: +5

Soak: +7

Fatigue Levels: OK, -1, -6, Incapacitated

Body Levels: OK, -1, -6, Incapacitated

Player Character Involvement

How the PCs become involved in the story will vary depending on their class and experience. One way of introducing them to the story is to have them hired as guards by Paul, who has noticed that someone is entering his house and searching it while he is about town or at night while he sleeps. Oddly, the burglar doesn't force entry, and doesn't seem to steal anything, with the exception of loose change and a little food. His wife Jeanette, a rather pious woman, wants to hire a cleric to bless the house, fearing that some imp or ghost is moving the family's possessions. This provides an alternate hook, or, in the *Ars Magica* setting, an extra complication.

The items in the house are being moved by Polendina as she searches for Paul's marionette. She doesn't want to be seen by the family, so most of her foraging occurs while they sleep. One the few occasions when both Paul and Jeanette are out of the house she searches their chambers. She steals loose change in case she needs to buy transportation back to Geppetto's workshop.

Characters guarding Paul's house may conclude that the thief is looking for a particular item. Paul doesn't want them to search his house, since it would involve damaging his possessions, but they can wait until he is away, much as Polendina does. Paul's marionette body is stored in a wine barrel in his cellar. Polendina hasn't found it yet, because she doesn't have the strength to bust a barrel seal, and wants to search other areas before she starts sawing into things, in case she accidentally damages the marionette. That might mangle a part she needs to repair one of her siblings.

Options

Combat

The simplest, and least attractive, solution is for the player characters to catch Polendina red-handed and chop her to pieces. A complication is that when first discovered Polendina probably looks like a human girl. Combat is unlikely to solve the problem in the long term, because Polendina remains alive even if dismembered, and has the power to patch herself up. Once she

finds Pinocchio's doll, she'll fix herself permanently, then take her spares home. To destroy her they need to immobilise her pieces, (by burying them separately for example), or destroy them utterly, by (for example) burning them.

Capture

Polendina will surrender if she feels it is in her interest. Once captured, she has no qualms against revealing Paul's secret, or seeking to turn his protectors. To the morally shady, she can offer the Director's treasure, which isn't large but might tempt low-level characters. For characters of a higher level, she can offer the services of herself and her family. The GM should tailor this potential retinue to be tempting. In an autumnal *Ars Magica* game, she might hint that an injured marionette knows the Arcadian trods that lead to the City of Puppets, where the ability to craft her kind of faerie can be learned (although that, of course, is another story).

Trickery

Polendina can try to trick the characters to her side. If they are taken in by Jeanette's ghost story, Polendina will begin to plant clues which indicate that Paul is guilty of murder. This includes speaking to the characters in her "little girl" form, asking them why they are in the house haunted by the ghost of Jeanette's father. If she's using this ploy, Polendina will be sure to imply that Paul is "undead," so that the characters uncover his faerie nature. She believes this will make killing him less objectionable to them. Although Paul's death would damage his marionette, many of his parts would still be useful. Polendina would prefer an execution, by hanging or drowning if possible, to the usual gore of sword combat because it would ruin fewer of the marionette's parts.

Conclusions

Death

The simplest resolution is that one of the non-player characters dies, probably assisted by the player characters. If they kill Polendina, the characters should then be encouraged to travel to Geppetto's workshop for another story. If they kill Paul, or aid in his death, they may be answerable to the authorities, but if they demonstrate his faerie nature things may go less hard on them.

Deadlock

Characters can stop Polendina's attacks by destroying her family. Were they to die, she'd seek the Land of Puppets in Arcadia to build a new life for herself. Although she's not generally violent, once her family are dead she has no further need for pieces of Paul's marionette. At this extreme she might set fire to Paul's house, after sewing the doors shut. Like all villains who escape to Arcadia, she can return in later stories.

Alternate Solutions

GMs wanting to spare both characters can include another way to mend the puppets in a second scenario. Examples include:

- Go on a quest to find the Lady with Azure Hair, who gave Pinocchio his body. She can cure puppets, or make all of them "real" if she wishes, so that they heal like people.
- Travel the fairs of Europe seeking another puppeteer who will care for Polendina's family. After her experience of abandonment and slavery, Polendina isn't sure such a person exists, and will require skilled convincing.
- Summon Geppetto's ghost, or that of Fire Eater, so that they can train a new puppeteer.

Remember that only someone with the Free Expression virtue can successfully make magical marionettes, and only then from the Virtuous woods of certain rare trees.

- Seek a magic item which makes the puppets who touch it animate, so that Polendina can harvest them for pieces.
- Hunt down dryads, the wild form of marionette, so that Polendina can use their body parts to repair her family.
- Journey to the faery Land of Puppets, where marionettes are free and their strings trail languidly into the sky.

Acknowledgements

- *The Adventures of Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi (Lorenzini) is available online at http://www.ulib.org/webRoot/Books/Gutenberg/Etext_Books/etext96/pnoco10.txt
- The title is a quotation from "Just a Toy" by Barenaked Ladies, from their *Born on a Pirate Ship* album, which is a lament by an inanimate puppet that wants to incinerate Pinocchio. It provided the spark for this scenario.
- The term "The Liar" appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and is echoed in both Pinocchio and "Just a Toy." It may refer to Saint Paul, which is where Pinocchio's Christian name comes from in this scenario.

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