



Meerfus the Magician

The collected stories of the wand-making magician and his assistant Duncan

SUMMARY:

Meerfus is a magician. He is a talented maker of magical artifacts. He specializes in making wands that do things, like shooting fireworks or making lunch. Duncan is his young assistant. Eager to learn and hard-working, he often goes to fetch items that Meerfus needs to make his magical wands. Together they collect items needed to create the perfect recipe for magical items. It takes careful thought and preparation to make the best wands.

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Magic Wand Collection

Meerfus was not a great wizard. He was a wizard with a great magic wand collection though. He couldn't do a lot of spells, but he had wands that did everything he wanted.

He had a purple wand that did his household chores. He just had to shake it at the dishes, and they got washed. He could point it at the laundry, and it got folded and pressed. He could waggle it at the floors, and they got swept! He could use it two or three times a day to get the chores done.

He had a star-shaped wand with ribbons on it. That was probably his favorite. It cooked for him. If he wanted some juice, he'd shake it once. He could think about a steak and potatoes, and shake it twice, and there it was! Or, if he wanted some dessert, he'd shake it thrice, and chocolate lava cake with whipped cream would appear. It was way easier than cooking for himself, but he could only use that one once a week, usually on a Saturday or a Sunday.

A wand with a glowing tip like the sun was useful for heating things up. He could tap it on logs to make a fire in his fireplace. Swirling it above a cup or mug heated a drink. Dipping it into a tub full of water instantly made it a steaming bath. That one was good for several uses a day, too.

He had several other wands as well. A six-pointed star wand was good for outside work. If he shook it, swirls of magic would sweep across his yard, cutting grass, tidying leaves, and trimming hedges. It saved him lots of time, but he could only use it once a week.

Meerfus' wands helped him so he could search for more wands or find pieces to make more on his own. Magic wands were a lot of fun to make, but more fun to use. Meerfus enjoyed traveling around, finding rare stones, pieces of precious metals, and perfect lengths of wood from ornamental trees to use in making them. People came from all around to buy them from him. He wasn't the best wizard, but he was a great wand maker and collector.



Magic Wand Collection

Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. Meerfus the magician makes magic what?
 - A. potions
 - B. charms
 - C. wands
 - D. amulets

2. Merfus' purple wand does what?
 - A. yard work
 - B. cooking
 - C. household chores
 - D. heats stuff up

3. Merfus' 6-pointed star wand does what?
 - A. yard work
 - B. cooking
 - C. household chores
 - D. heats stuff up

4. Which wand heats things up?
 - A. purple wand
 - B. star wand with ribbons
 - C. 6-pointed star
 - D. sun wand

5. Meerfus' favorite wand is which one?
 - A. purple wand
 - B. star wand with ribbons
 - C. 6-pointed star
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Meerfus Makes a Wand

Meerfus was up to his old tricks again – literally some magic tricks. He was making a new wand for a customer, who had made a special request for a wand that could be used to punish naughty kids. Apparently, the man’s triplets were horribly mischievous, and they needed some help beyond spanking to keep them in line. So, Meerfus and his apprentice, the dutiful and somewhat dull Duncan, began to gather the parts necessary to make the wand.

First, came the wood for the wand itself. Meerfus thought long and hard about the wood he would use to make the wand. He came up with a piece of yellow, fresh willow. Willow was a bendable wood, much like a lash or a belt, which made sense for a wand of punishment. It was not hard to find, either. Duncan cut down several branches for use. It was always good to have a spare in case the first piece didn’t work.

The next ingredient was the tip of a bullwhip. These whips could crack very loudly to scare oxen or large animals into doing the right thing. The tip could cut skin if needed. They went to a cattle drover and paid him to snip the ends off a couple of his older whips, ones that had seen much use.

Next, they needed the tears of a bad child. That wasn’t that hard. Duncan himself misbehaved regularly, so Meerfus just asked Duncan’s parents to spank him until he cried. The tears were quickly collected in a glass vial for use, and Meerfus capped it with a small cork to prevent leaks. Duncan wasn’t much too pleased about it, although his parents were pleased to be paid for chastising their naughty young son.

Finally, Meerfus and Duncan had to go collect scrolls and papers that discussed obedience and duty. They bought a few aging scripts and snipped out key phrases and words. These would help instill the values of behavior into the children being punished. It took quite a while to find the right words.

That was all just collecting of materials. Anyone could do that, but only a wizard like Meerfus could add those things together and make them into a wand. He carefully tied the bullwhip tips to the end of the wand with golden threads. Then he glued the words and phrases from the scrolls along the entire length of the wand. After that, he drizzled the salty tears on the wand. The final step was saying words of power that would make the whole thing magical: *Behaviorus Betterus or Elsecus!*

Magic coursed up and down the wand, binding the ingredients together. It was like a magic coating that bound everything together permanently. The wand was ready for the customer, just as soon as he tested it. Just where had that Duncan disappeared to anyway?



Meerfus Makes a Wand

Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. What is Meerfus hired to make a wand for?
 - A. punishing bad kids
 - B. fixing bad students
 - C. doing housework
 - D. chasing away bad boys

2. What ingredient for the wand does Meerfus go get first?
 - A. bullwhip tips
 - B. tears of a bad boy
 - C. words about respect and duty
 - D. the wood for the wand

3. What ingredient for the wand does Meerfus go get second?
 - A. bullwhip tips
 - B. tears of a bad boy
 - C. words about respect and duty
 - D. the wood for the wand

4. What ingredient for the wand does Meerfus go get last?
 - A. bullwhip tips
 - B. tears of a bad boy
 - C. words about respect and duty
 - D. the wood for the wand

5. Why does it seem that Duncan is missing when the wand is finished?
 - A. He had to go home for dinner.
 - B. He probably knew it would be tested on him.
 - C. He was doing chores outside.
 - D. He was bored and went to sleep.

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Meerfus Vs. Duncan

Meerfus decided it was time to test Duncan's skills in wand-making. He had been a good apprentice, one who was very good at fetching and listening, and it was time for him to actually put his talents to full use. He left a letter of instructions, the challenge really, on Duncan's work table. It was the first thing the boy saw after he got up and washed his face. Duncan looked over at his master, eyes wide, and grinned. Then it was off to the races.

Both of them set to making a wand that could make plants grow faster. Meerfus had never made one quite like this before, so he wanted to challenge himself. Truthfully, he wondered how hard it would be to do it alone, as he'd quite gotten used to having his assistant do lots of his work for him. He didn't have the youth's obvious energy, either. Duncan had already run off toward town without even eating breakfast.

Meerfus thought before starting, something Duncan might have better considered. He decided that new growth would require fresh bamboo for the wand. Bamboo grew quickly and a fresh piece of bamboo might grow a foot in a day! Then, he'd add some sprouts from the garden, and maybe some fresh rainwater from the trough out back. All of that seemed to indicate fresh and fast growth for him.

Locating bamboo was far from easy, but he had a friend that grew exotic plants. Sadly, it was quite a walk. Duncan, meanwhile, was running errands around town, collecting his own ingredients. Meerfus thought he saw the boy running down the gravel crossroad on his way to collect the bamboo, but it was hard to tell when someone was moving that fast!

Once Meerfus had collected his bamboo, not cheaply either, he walked back home and collected the other ingredients. He waited for Duncan then, but didn't have long to wait. The boy returned with a curious bag made of burlap, full of secret ingredients. Meerfus shook his head, set up at his own worktable, and started assembling his wand. "*Growus Giganticus Fasticus!*" He called out, the room filling with power as he connected the ingredients into a magic wand. It pulsed green with life.

At the next table, Duncan was readying his own wand. He wrapped the coiled creepers from fast-growing vines around the stalk of a new shoot of corn, which he was using instead of wood. Then, he sprinkled warm dirt and water near the roots. Finally, he held up a hand lens



near the window to focus light from the sun onto the head of the growing corn. "*Makus Super-sizus Planticuses!*" The words came out in a bit of a awkward struggle, but Duncan had magic in him, and the wand was made!

Meerfus shook his head in amazement. Some of the boy's ideas were almost better than his own! He had great instincts, but the true test was in the wrist. They both went outside, not without a little worry. Meerfus certainly didn't want to lose to his student, and Duncan had a lot to prove.

Meerfus tried first on a patch of their garden with tomatoes. He shook his bamboo wand at it, and watched the plants grow from knee high to the height of his shoulder. Fat red tomatoes plumped on the vines, heavy enough that they pulled the tomato plants back toward the ground, just shy of breaking.

"Wow!" Duncan said, shaking his head and looking at his own wand. Suddenly, he was not so certain.

"Try it. I want to see what you and it are capable of." Meerfus encouraged him. He was curious, too.

Duncan shook his wand at some sunflowers. Suddenly, one of them grew, its stalk growing from the thickness of his wrist to the width of his leg! The head of the sunflower grew so fat that it split open with ripe seeds. It continued to try to grow, splitting and cracking until even the stalk had splintered. The plant was dead.

Meerfus smiled. "Good try, excellent in fact."

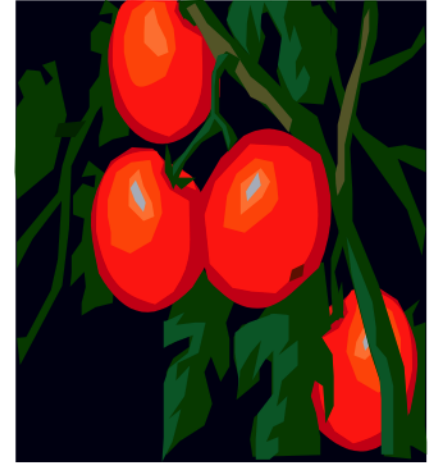
"I killed it..." Duncan sighed.

"When you make a wand, you must consider the entire effect of the wand. If you think only to make something grow big, it can get *too* big. If you wish for it to grow big, within limits, and to stay healthy, it will do better. Your wand was amazing though. You have much to learn, but you have come SO far. I am proud of you." Meerfus declared.

Duncan beamed. "Thank you."

Meerfus' eyebrows waggled mischievously. "Now, let's try that wand on a pumpkin. I want to see how big it can get!" He cackled.

In the end, they made a pumpkin so big that, even though it cracked, they took to town on a wagon and it made over 30 pumpkin pies!



Meerfus Vs. Duncan

Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. What does Meerfus challenge Duncan to do?
 - A. clean the chimney
 - B. weed the garden
 - C. make a spell
 - D. make a magic wand
2. How does Duncan feel about this challenge at first?
 - A. He is excited.
 - B. He is scared.
 - C. He is bored with it before it starts.
 - D. He is worried.
3. What does Meerfus realize when he's making his wand?
 - A. It's lonely being alone.
 - B. It's nice to have someone helping you.
 - C. Duncan is a waste of space.
 - D. Duncan isn't learning anything.
4. What forms the major part of Duncan's wand?
 - A. bamboo
 - B. a piece of a huge tree
 - C. a branch of a big fruit tree
 - D. a corn shoot
5. How does Meerfus feel about Duncan's efforts in the challenge?
 - A. He is not impressed.
 - B. He's proud of his assistant.
 - C. He wants to fire Duncan.
 - D. He is a bit sad that Duncan beat him.

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The Rules of Wand-Making

Meerfus sat in front of the fire, warming himself on a cold winter day. The wind was chilly outside, and the mug of hot tea in his hands was very pleasant in comparison. Duncan sat before the fire, watching the fire light dance. He had his knees hugged to his chest with his head resting on them. Meerfus smiled and began reciting the rules of magic wand-making, a common lesson that Duncan had learned to recite by heart.

“First, never make a wand with the direct purpose of being a weapon. Why, Duncan?”

Duncan looked up from the fire and smiled. He knew this answer by heart, but he understood it, too. “We try to make tools that help, not hurt.”

Meerfus nodded and continued. “Second, use materials chosen for their purpose, not for their ease of finding. Why?”

“Quality materials make quality wands, while convenient materials make poor wands, unless they are exactly what are needed for the making.” Duncan recited.

“Right again, Duncan. Now what is the third rule?”

“Third, focus on the making when the words are spoken to bind the magic to the wand.”

“And how many words are spoken?” Meerfus asked. This was an important point.

“Three.” Duncan answered.

“Why are there three?”

This time, Duncan had to think carefully before answering. “One is for opening the magic, the second is for expressing intent, and the third is for binding the magic to the wand.”

Meerfus smiled broadly, showing his approval. “Perfect.”

“Is there a fourth rule?” Duncan asked.

“It is a special rule, the last one: let your conscience guide you to do what is right. If you do this, then you’ll never make the wrong kind of wand or give it to the wrong person.” Meerfus explained, looking again into the fire. He grew silent and thoughtful.

After a few quiet moments, Meerfus began telling stories of long ago, when he was a student himself, working for a wizard named Benjamin the Brown. Duncan listened closely, trying to learn lessons from what his master explained. Someday, he might pass these same stories down to a student of his own.



The Rules of Wand-Making

Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. Why are Duncan and Meerfus sitting around the fire?
 - A. It's cold outside.
 - B. It's night time.
 - C. It's lunch time.
 - D. They're bored.

2. How many rules are there for wand-making?
 - A. 1
 - B. 2
 - C. 3
 - D. 4

3. Which rule explains the use of magic words in wand-making?
 - A. 1
 - B. 2
 - C. 3
 - D. 4

4. Which rule explains the use of materials in wand-making?
 - A. 1
 - B. 2
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5. Which rule explains what kind of wands not to make?
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Meerfus Fights with Magic... Sort Of

Meerfus the wand-making magician was a pretty easy-going fellow. He didn't often raise his voice. He didn't try to teach by shouting. He didn't even like to argue with people about prices, but his job made that a necessity. All-in-all, he was a pretty even-tempered guy. Duncan had never even gotten yelled at by him. Oh, Meerfus *had* ways to let you know he was displeased, but he didn't need to yell to do that.

So, when the two of them were walking to go get some supplies for a new contract they had to make a couple wands, and three tough guys were waiting on the road for them, Duncan didn't know what would happen. It was obvious that these guys were the sort that would give them trouble. They had a look about them that said they would either try to bother them, take their money, or both. Duncan figured both, and he began to get really nervous when Meerfus didn't pay them any attention as they grew nearer and nearer.

The three of them could be described as the tall one, the big one, and the fat one. The tall one was skinny and bony, with a hawk-like beak of a nose and greasy hair. The big one was burly and huge, with furry arms and a bulb of a nose. The fat one was average height, but quite heavy, and he had beady eyes like a rat. They were a mean-looking bunch.

"Hey, old-timer, how about you let us look in that bag of yours?" The biggest one suggested. It wasn't so much of a suggestion as a demand though.

The tall one grabbed at a wand that poked out of Meerfus' backpack. He stuck his hand on a sharp edge and hissed in surprise. He sucked on his cut thumb and waved the wand at Meerfus. "You did that on purpose!"

Meerfus frowned at the man. "It seems to me that you grabbed something that didn't belong to you and got what you deserved."

Duncan's eyes widened in surprise, and he felt a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. Hadn't Meerfus ever been bullied before? This wasn't how you dealt with bullies, or you got hurt.

The tall one shook the wand at Meerfus. "We'll see how you feel about that after I burn you with this wand!" A cloud of butterflies appeared in the air around them, and the tall guy's two buddies started laughing uproariously. He shook the wand again, hoping for something else, but nothing happened.



Growling at his embarrassment, the man tugged open Meerfus' backpack and pulled out two more wands. He pointed the first at Duncan this time. Duncan cowered, but Meerfus stepped in front of him with a smile. The tall one shook the wand threateningly, and Meerfus' beard fluffed up, all neatly groomed. The tall man had just used a grooming wand. It cleaned hair.

"Thank you, sir. I was feeling a bit unsightly." Meerfus' teeth gleamed whitely as he smiled, and again the tall man's friends guffawed in laughter.

"This is your last chance." The man waved the last wand threateningly at Meerfus, but Meerfus actually stepped aside for this one to reveal Duncan, still cowering. The tall one laughed and shook the wand. Duncan's eyes grew wide as the arms of his shirt ripped. He suddenly felt amazingly strong.

"Duncan, please retrieve our wands." Meerfus said calmly. "We're moving on to complete our errands."

Duncan stepped over to the men, amazed at what was happening but also confused. He just followed orders and took the wands from the three mean men. They cowered in fear of him and he was only thirteen!

"Shake their hands and bid them goodbye." Meerfus suggested.

Duncan shook each of their hands, watching them wince in pain as his powerful grip nearly crushed the bones in their hands. Actually, something as simple as the shake of his wrist threw them to the ground. He mumbled an apology as they landed in a heap beside the road.

Meerfus smiled and waved at them, shaking a fourth wand in their direction. The weeds and grasses grew terribly tall around them, entangling them all in a mess of green and a riot of colored flowers.

Duncan shook his head as he handed back the wands. His strength had returned to normal. His new powers had only lasted a minute or less. It had been amazing to be so powerfully strong, if only for a short while. "I never want to get on your bad side." Duncan muttered. "You could have hurt them a lot more with the magic wands you have in your bag."

Meerfus winked. "There are always those who want to pick on people. It is important to stand up for yourself, but remember that causing great harm only causes greater malice. If we'd seriously hurt them, instead of just giving them something to think about, they would want revenge. Hopefully, they have learned their lesson about picking on people."



Meerfus Fights with Magic... Sort Of

Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. How many tough guys confront Duncan and Meerfus?
 - A. 1
 - B. 2
 - C. 3
 - D. 4

2. How are the tough guys described?
 - A. the tall one, the fat one, and the heavy one
 - B. the tall one, the fat one, and the big one
 - C. the big one, the fat one, and the heavy one
 - D. the huge guy, the ugly guy, and the mean guy

3. What effect comes from the first wand the bully tries to use on Meerfus?
 - A. super strength
 - B. grooming
 - C. butterflies
 - D. plants growing

4. What effect comes from the second wand the bully tries to use on Meerfus?
 - A. super strength
 - B. grooming
 - C. butterflies
 - D. plants growing

5. What is the BEST reason why Meerfus doesn't use his magic to beat up the bullies badly?
 - A. He doesn't want to fight.
 - B. He doesn't need to.
 - C. He wants the bullies to learn a lesson without getting too hurt.
 - D. He is afraid to.

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Fireball Wand

Meerfus the wand-making Magician was always making new wands. It was his hobby, his life, and his career. People would come to him with a desire for a magic wand, and he would find a way to make it. You see, not everyone could do magic, but anyone *could* use a magic wand. This time, he had been contracted to make a wand of fireballs.

Meerfus was often leery of making wands that could be used as dangerous weapons. Yes, he'd made some that started campfires, that spanked bad kids, or that killed bugs, but he didn't often make ones that could cause the owner to get into a lot of trouble if used wrong. The client this time was a traveling entertainer and an old friend, so he didn't doubt the man's intentions.

Meerfus set out early with Duncan, the young apprentice that helped Meerfus get some of his ingredients for wand-making. Their first task was to get a dragon's morning breath in a flask. It would not be easy at all, and it could be very dangerous. Duncan was dressed from head to toe in fire-proof layers, and he wore a visor over his face as he journeyed into a cave where a young dragonet was supposed to live.

Duncan crept up carefully, as quietly as he could in the cave. He spotted the red serpent-like creature with ease. Even a dragonet, a young dragon, was rather large. This one was about the size of a cow, not counting the tail. He knelt carefully and put the flask right next to one of the sleeping creature's nostrils. A huff of sulfurous exhalation fogged the flask. Duncan quickly corked the flask just as the dragon's eyes began to peel open, and then he ran for the exit, hearing roaring at his back. There was no waiting around near waking dragons!

The two of them hid in a gully near the dragonet's cave for a couple hours, and then moved on to find the next ingredients: the ashes and a charcoal twig of a rare tree. There was an ornamental garden several hours' ride away by horse. Meerfus entertained Duncan with legends and lore as the rode along; that was part of his job as master to his apprentice. Duncan wasn't the sharpest pupil, but he did listen.

With some haggling and bargaining, the owner of the ornamental garden allowed them to cut some branches from a tree that otherwise grew only in a land far away. Meerfus and Duncan were quite tired by the time they made it back home.

The next morning, Duncan gathered a long wick from the chandlery, where they made candles. It was the final ingredient. By the time he'd arrived, Meerfus had already burned the rare branches. He'd saved one as a charred twig for the wand's stick, but the rest was charcoal and ashes.

With the magic words: *Exploedicus Smallus Fireballizimus*, Meerfus bound the ingredients magically. The wick had been coiled about the end of the charred twig, and it seemed to be permanently burning or smoldering in a persistent cloud of ash and dragon's breath. With a quick shake of the wrist, a fireball the size of a fist burst from the end of the wick, which glowed bright red and never burnt out.

Meerfus clapped his hands in delight and patted his apprentice on the back. It was another success!



Fireball Wand

Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. Why does Meerfus not like to make wands that could be used as weapons?
 - A. Someone might get hurt trying to use it.
 - B. They could be used for bad things.
 - C. They might get stolen.
 - D. He really doesn't mind actually.
2. Which of these is NOT a wand that he's made before that could be used like a weapon?
 - A. firestarter wands
 - B. bug killer wands
 - C. face slapper wands
 - D. kid spanking wands
3. What is the first ingredient they have to fetch?
 - A. charcoal
 - B. ashes
 - C. a wick
 - D. dragon's morning breath
4. Which of these is NOT an ingredient they have to find?
 - A. ashes and coals from a rare tree
 - B. dragon's morning breath
 - C. a fire-starting kit
 - D. a new wick from a candle shop
5. Based on the story, how would you best describe Meerfus and Duncan's relationship?
 - A. Meerfus seems to use Duncan for hard work, and sometimes teaches him a little.
 - B. They are like best friends.
 - C. Duncan works very hard, but Meerfus is mean to him.
 - D. They are like father and son.

Fireball Wand

Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. Why does Meerfus not like to make wands that could be used as weapons?
 - A. Someone might get hurt trying to use it.
 - B. They could be used for bad things.**
 - C. They might get stolen.
 - D. He really doesn't mind actually.
2. Which of these is NOT a wand that he's made before that could be used like a weapon?
 - A. firestarter wands
 - B. bug killer wands
 - C. face slapper wands**
 - D. kid spanking wands
3. What is the first ingredient they have to fetch?
 - A. charcoal
 - B. ashes
 - C. a wick
 - D. dragon's morning breath**
4. Which of these is NOT an ingredient they have to find?
 - A. ashes and coals from a rare tree
 - B. dragon's morning breath
 - C. a fire-starting kit**
 - D. a new wick from a candle shop
5. Based on the story, how would you best describe Meerfus and Duncan's relationship?
 - A. Meerfus seems to use Duncan for hard work, and sometimes teaches him a little.**
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Will-o-the-Wisps

Meerfus had another contract. He was a wand-making magician, and his customer had requested a wand that made glowing orbs of light at night. It seemed like a fun wand, one that was useful, entertaining, and a little bit spooky. Meerfus thought it reminded him of will-o-the-wisps, which were strange lights created when swamp gases glowed at night. People thought they were spirits or ghosts, but there was a perfect explanation for them! Well, there were other and scarier explanations, too, but that was another story. Regardless, Meerfus had a wand to make.

He began as he always did, with planning. He decided that a glass bulb, much like a lantern fixture, would be a great start. After that, he would fill it with a firefly and swamp gases. Additionally, a branch of a mangrove, a common swamp tree, would make the wand itself. The finishing touches would be some feathers from a great horned owl. Those were touches of the night that would really make the wand work well.

Meerfus sent his young assistant, Duncan, to a friend's house. His friend was a bird keeper that specialized in falcons, hawks, and owls. He often supplied Meerfus with feathers for wands and owed him a few favors for a wand he'd received last autumn. While Duncan was fetching the feathers, he went and found a glassblower who could make him a glass bulb the size he needed. He had to pay good silver for that.

Once Duncan returned with the feathers and Meerfus had the bulb, they caught a ride on the back of a hay wagon that was headed toward the nearest swamp. It was a long and bumpy ride, but it gave Meerfus time to quiz Duncan on his wand-making skills.

At the swamp, Meerfus, who didn't much care to get his robes or beard wet, sent Duncan out in a small canoe they rented for a few copper coins. Duncan paddled around collecting branches covered in tree moss. It was good to get several, in case the first one didn't work. Then, he filled the glass bulb with swamp air and a single firefly, and then he capped it off with a cork.

With all the supplies, they headed straight home. As they walked, Duncan listened to Meerfus' stories about wand-making, learning all he could. Back at Meerfus' workshop, all that remained was the assembly of the wand and the magic words.

With strands of greenish-gray, stringy moss, Meerfus tied the feathers to the swamp stick he chose for the wand. Then, he uncorked the bulb and shoved the end of the stick up into it quickly to prevent the firefly or the gases from escaping. He stuffed more moss around the mouth of the bulb to prevent leakage.

With a few moments' thought, he came up with the magic words: *Glowingus Orbus Makus!* Magic infused the wand, forever sealing the ingredients together. A few quick casts of the wrist sent green, blue, and yellow balls of light floating through the air.

"Success, Duncan! We'll have another satisfied customer to be certain."

Duncan grinned. "Yes, sir. We've done it again."

Meerfus opened his mouth to argue that it was all him, but he smiled. "Yes, you were quite helpful. Good work, Duncan."



Will-o-the-Wisps

Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. The wand Meerfus is going to make will do what?
 - A. make fireworks
 - B. make balls of light
 - C. make campfires
 - D. make explosions

2. What does Meerfus say *really* causes will-o-the-wisps in swamps?
 - A. swamp gases
 - B. fireflies
 - C. owls
 - D. imaginations

3. What does Meerfus go collect while Duncan gets feathers?
 - A. a stick
 - B. moss
 - C. gases
 - D. glass bulb

4. What does Duncan have to get in the swamp?
 - A. a mossy stick, gases, and a lightning bug
 - B. a mossy stick, feathers, and a glass bulb
 - C. a lightning bug, gases, and a sample of water
 - D. feathers, a glass bulb, and a mossy stick

5. What colors of lights does the finished wand make?
 - A. black, purple, and green
 - B. yellow, green, and red
 - C. green, yellow, and blue
 - D. orange, red, and yellow

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Meerfus Meets Duncan

Meerfus had been a wand-making magician for a long time. He had always done it all alone, ever since going off on his own. There was no one to help him organize his scrolls or sweep out his laboratory. It was a hard life that kept him busy, but it was like art, too. His work kept him very occupied, and people paid well for what he made. Still, as he got up there in years, he started looking for someone to train as an assistant.

Now not just any goofy kid would do as an assistant. Magic did not come naturally to everyone, and even if it did, there were different kinds of magic. Many kids who started to realize they had magic were tempted to play pranks, goof around, and get in trouble. Some saw it as a way to get what they wanted – a power over common people. Meerfus needed someone good-natured and still talented magically.

He had been traveling the countryside, looking for a specific kind of egg to use in one of the wands he was making. The current customer wanted a wand that would make his chickens lay colorful eggs, so he could charge more. It seemed silly, but eggs of different colors sold much better than white and brown ones. So, Meerfus was traveling around, looking for the right eggs to use.

Meerfus was in a town, talking to a farmer who had a breed of ducks that laid bluish-green eggs, and he was trying to negotiate a deal for a few of them. Not only did Meerfus enjoy omelets, but he did need an egg for the wand after all. This farmer smelled a sale and was trying to get as much money as possible for the eggs, when Meerfus noticed the man's son.

The boy was all of six or seven years old, playing in the grass. That was not peculiar, nor was the fact that he was playing with a grasshopper. What was strange was the way the boy was using a twig to coax the grasshopper into performing acrobatics! Yes, the grasshopper was flipping and flopping as the boy giggled and teased it.

"Don't mind my boy, Duncan. He's got a strange mind and silliness about him." The farmer grunted. He wasn't impressed.

"Tell you what. I will give you one GOLD coin if you give me a dozen of your eggs, and then you send this boy to work for me when he turns ten."

"Duncan? You want my son? Whatever for?" The farmer was amazed.

"Sir, I believe he is talented in the magical arts, and it is a talent I would like to see grown. I have need of an apprentice - an assistant. He will be fed, clothed, and taught, just as he would if he were to go work for a blacksmith or any other tradesman."

"My boy the magician..." The farmer laughed and stuck out his hand.

Meerfus shook the man's hand, left a gold coin in it, and walked over to introduce himself to Duncan.

It was a short but important conversation. Meerfus showed the boy a trick with a wand of his own making, one that could make the grasshopper speak. When the boy's eyes lit up, he asked a very important question, one that told Meerfus he'd made the right choice: "How can I learn to do that?"

Meerfus grinned at him. "I'll teach you, but you need to wait a couple years." He left the promise and the wand of voices with the boy. True to his word, he'd come back three years later. The rest was history.



Meerfus Meets Duncan

Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. What kind of wand was Meerfus collecting things to make?
 - A. painting houses
 - B. coloring eggs
 - C. laying golden eggs
 - D. sweeping floors

2. What kind of eggs did Meerfus try to buy?
 - A. chicken eggs
 - B. quail eggs
 - C. duck eggs
 - D. turkey eggs

3. What did Meerfus notice when he was trying to buy eggs?
 - A. a boy doing small magic with bugs
 - B. a boy killing bugs
 - C. a farmer with bad teeth
 - D. a hog that was dancing

4. What offer does Meerfus make the farmer?
 - A. to teach his son to read
 - B. to pay a lot for eggs every week
 - C. to train his son as an apprentice
 - D. to cure his bad breath

5. How does Duncan react to Meerfus' display of magic?
 - A. He is scared of the old guy.
 - B. He is very interested in how to learn more.
 - C. He gets very shy.
 - D. He runs away and cries.

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The Magic of Making

Duncan was getting his lessons in magic from Meerfus the Magician, and one thing he was very curious about was the types of magic. He decided it was as good a time as any to ask. “We can make wands, but why don’t we make rings, magic swords, and potions?” Duncan asked his master.

Meerfus smiled at the question. Understanding one’s limitations was very important, and a great lesson to learn. “Well, we could make them, but with only limited success. Our success with wands is very high, but with rings and potions it might be one successful attempt in a handful of tries. That gets tiring to do.”

Duncan had a disappointed look on his face, and he needed to know the whole truth. “But we could make a potion if we had to?”

“Yes, but witches and warlocks are better at it. They aren’t much good at wands, though. Brooms, they do well at.” Meerfus admitted, pulling at his beard.

“I don’t much care about brooms, but magic swords that never get dull, or arrows that never miss their targets – those are very interesting to me.” Duncan’s eyes lit up.

“Ah, but you were born with talents in working natural materials. When I found you as a young lad, you were playing with a grasshopper and a twig you’d unknowingly worked some magic into. If you were meant to work metals, you’d have been using a spoon, a knife, or a fork to do it. You are naturally drawn to wands, and that is part of why I chose you as my student.”

“I will never make a magic set of armor or a pair of flying shoes then.” Duncan said with a sigh.

Meerfus let out a great belly laugh. “Magic armor is heavy and expensive, even if it’s magical. It’s better to have a wand that makes your skin as hard as steel for a short time. You don’t have to worry about skin rusting! Flying shoes are just plain ridiculous. You’d fall over and crash. It’s better to have a wand that gives you the ability to float or fall slowly. You can do the same thing with wands that you can do with any other piece of magic!”

“I guess that’s true, but those things impress people when they see them.”

Meerfus put a hand on the boy’s shoulder. “Duncan, you and I are not impressive. We’re not particularly tall, strong, or even handsome, though I have a splendid beard.”

“It’s true.” Duncan agreed. His master’s beard was a source of pride, and quite handsome in fact.

“The thing is... wands are versatile, useful, and easy to carry. A set of armor or a great sword can do but one thing, but a man can carry a dozen wands. Sometimes, the unexpected comes from small, insignificant items.”

Duncan suddenly felt very proud of his profession. He was the one and only assistant to the best-known wand-making magician in the whole region! People came from far away to have Meerfus make them a wand, but he still had more questions. “What about magic spells, the kind you don’t need items to use? Why can’t we just use words of power to shoot fireballs and freeze rivers?”

Meerfus chuckled. “That, my boy, is an entirely different story. These are dangerous things, not to be played with. Be happy with what you have and what you can do. Some things are not worth learning, for they will only do you harm.”

Duncan nodded, taking his master’s advice... for now at least. Someday, who knew what would happen?



The Magic of Making

Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. Which of these items did Duncan NOT ask about making?
 - A. magic swords
 - B. potions
 - C. rings
 - D. amulets
2. What is Meerfus' reason for NOT making those items?
 - A. They are too expensive.
 - B. The success rate is much lower.
 - C. They just don't have the powers.
 - D. They aren't interested.
3. According to Meerfus, witches are good at making what TWO things?
 - A. soup and potions
 - B. brooms and hats
 - C. potions and brooms
 - D. swords and sorcery
4. Why does Duncan feel proud of his profession toward the end of the story?
 - A. He realizes that he can make useful things, even if they aren't always flashy and cool.
 - B. He thinks he'll get paid well.
 - C. He just tries to agree with Meerfus.
 - D. He thinks he will get famous.
5. What does Meerfus warn Duncan to stay away from?
 - A. love potions
 - B. witches
 - C. mom's cooking
 - D. spells

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Meerfus the Magician Returns

Meerfus the Wand-Making Magician had a new commission. He had to make a new wand that could make fireworks for celebrations. This was going to be an interesting and exciting piece of work, and even his apprentice, the indubitable Duncan, was excited to help gather the required materials.

After some consideration, Meerfus decided that he would need the following things to make the wand: lightning bugs, black powder, crushed gemstones, and a stick from a black walnut tree. Most of these were not too hard to obtain, but the crushed gemstones would be expensive. Thankfully, his rich client could pay for the materials.

First, he set Duncan to collecting fireflies or lightning bugs. He gave the boy a net and a small mesh cage to keep them in. The boy ran himself dizzy, darting to and fro, gathering the dozens of bugs required for the magic. It was a fine summer evening, and it was a fun way to pass the time.

The next day they went to find black powder. There was a mine the next town over, so they went there. Demolitions were used to clear parts of the mountain to get the gold out more easily, so it really just took some talking and a bit of coin to convince the foreman to part with a sack full of black powder.

The crushed gemstones came from a jeweler's market in the next county. It was a long ride and a pricy thing, all made up of green emerald dust, red ruby dust, and blue sapphire dust. There was a bit of garnet, tourmaline, and amethyst in there, too, adding the blood red, greenish-yellows, and purples that would really round out the fireworks.

Finally, the black walnut branch came from a grove that Meerfus himself was growing. He had learned long ago that he would save much time if he had his own grove of trees. He had many different trees growing, all in different sizes, shapes, and ages. He never knew when he might need a branch or a twig from one of them, so it paid to keep gathering seeds and saplings to grow his collection.

With all the ingredients assembled, it was time for the magic! He squeezed the glowing but guts out, stirred it into the mortar full of gemstone dust, and carefully added spoonfuls of black powder. He mixed it around and then stuck the black walnut twig he'd cut into the mix. He shaped the goopy mixture into a ball and said the magic words: *Explo-dicus Beautificus Skywardimus*.

Meerfus didn't get excited often, but testing out that new wand was something he certainly enjoyed. The magic had caused the wand to harden into a sparkly, glittering orb atop the polished black walnut stick. Flicks of the wrist sent bursts of flowering light into the night sky, snapping, sizzling, and popping in a rainbow of colors.

Magic was fun. He loved his job, and his apprentice Duncan loved the fireworks. Meerfus knew that this wand was bound to make one happy customer!



Meerfus the Magician Returns

Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. Which of the following is not an ingredient required for the wand-making process?
 - A. crushed gemstones
 - B. black powder
 - C. a steel rod
 - D. lightning bugs

2. Which ingredient do they gather first?
 - A. crushed gemstones
 - B. black powder
 - C. black walnut stick
 - D. lightning bugs

3. Which ingredient do they gather last?
 - A. crushed gemstones
 - B. black powder
 - C. black walnut stick
 - D. lightning bugs

4. By growing his own trees for use in his wand-making, how would you describe Meerfus?
 - A. showing foresight and planning
 - B. thoughtful and careful
 - C. unorganized and haphazard
 - D. careless, but lucky

5. Meerfus seems successful at his job because of all of the following except which one?
 - A. He likes what he does.
 - B. He has a good assistant.
 - C. He works quickly and carelessly.
 - D. He seems knowledgeable in his field.

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Milton the Green

Meerfus the Magician had a rival in the wand-making business. Yes, he was probably the most famous wand-maker in the land, a magician of great renown, but he did have a rival: Milton the Green. Milton was a strange fellow, a magician in his own right, but really more of a mischief-maker and a wacky inventor.



Milton's most famous invention was an Amphibious Assault War Vessel. This was a fancy name for a rowboat with two axles on the bottom and wheels. If the conditions were right, the people rowing the boat could catch enough wind in a sail and row fast enough that when they hit the land, they could keep going. The boat would just roll up on shore and the special oars could be used to keep moving along the land.

Milton's normal crew consisted of goblins, which made poor rowers in the best of conditions. They often got stuck in the muck and sand at the edge of lakes and had to drag the boat out with ropes. Still, they did tend to strike terror in the small townfolk, which allowed Milton to collect wand-making materials without much challenge. He was something of a bully.

Milton made lots of wands, often from cheaper materials. Many of his wands were used for mischief. He didn't spend the time and effort to get high-end materials, but he sold a lot of wands. Unfortunately, many of his wands would not last long or would not work exactly as planned. You got what you paid for in magic and just about everything else.

Meerfus and Milton had a strong rivalry over their territory. They both wanted to sell wands, but Milton's mobility as a traveling salesman meant that he reached more customers. Meerfus, on the other hand, relied on word of mouth. Many of his customers traveled to see him, because of good reviews from other customers he'd had. Reputation was very important.

In addition to that, Meerfus' helper apprentice, Duncan, was fairly useful. He was beginning to learn the trade, and could generally follow orders without bungling them. Milton's team of green goblins was pretty useless. It was a good thing there were lots of them, because terrible accidents often befell them when collecting Milton's supplies. It was rather sad really.

Finally, Meerfus liked to fancy himself as being a bit more handsome than his rival. Milton had scabby skin, mostly on account of poor hygiene and associating with goblins. Goblins were known to carry ticks and all manners of diseases. Milton was also balding with a patchy beard. Meerfus had a rather magnificent beard himself, and was known to be complimented for it on a regular basis. It was curly, soft, and tied off with colorful strings or decorations to fit the holidays and seasons. This was not to mention that he was a snappy dresser, unlike Milton, who wore threadbare, stained rags for the most part.

Truly, Meerfus was the superior wizard in matters of fashion, appearance, skills, and professionalism!



Milton the Green

Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. This story compares what two wizards?
 - A. Merlin and Gandalf
 - B. Milton and Meerfus
 - C. Meerfus and Merlin
 - D. Milton and Merlin

2. What is Milton's most famous invention?
 - A. Amphibious Assault War Vessel
 - B. Self-Winding Watch
 - C. Fire-Starting Wand
 - D. Goblin Tamer

3. Which of the following would probably NOT be used to describe Milton?
 - A. cleanly
 - B. creative
 - C. ambitious
 - D. dangerous

4. Meerfus makes most of his sales because of what?
 - A. showmanship
 - B. sales techniques
 - C. reputation
 - D. traveling to meet customers

5. Meerfus compares himself to Milton in all but one of these areas. Which is it?
 - A. wand-making skills
 - B. appearance
 - C. apprentice and helpers
 - D. general charm

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Duncan's Great Success

Duncan was getting ready to make another wand. His master, Meerfus, was letting him try more and more often these days. Duncan had been working with the famous, wand-making, magician for more than three years now, and he was getting to an age where he needed to be able to make some of his own wands. It was part of the learning process.

Sadly, Duncan didn't always succeed when he tried to make wands. Meerfus claimed it was all in his intent. That is, what was he thinking when he was trying to make the wand? Apparently, he had to focus completely on the goal at hand, and could not allow himself distractions. Distractions made for poor wands, and he was still not able to focus all of his thoughts on the task of making wands. He always had things he was wondering about or things that diverted his attention.

For example, when he was making a wand that was supposed to shoo bugs out of a house, he was also thinking about the dairy man who was delivering milk down the road at that moment. So, instead of just shooing away bugs, the wand switched bugs with little puddles of milk. This was a pretty silly result for a wand to have, and one that smelled after a few days.

Another time, Duncan's wand to sweep the floors ended up making dust clouds that spun like mini tornadoes. The dust devils raged around the house, all because he'd been staring out the window at a swirl of leaves that had been caught up in winds against the house. He realized he really needed to focus, or Meerfus was bound to get upset. The mini tornadoes had really messed up Meerfus' scrolls and papers, and it had taken nearly a week to sort them back out.

Meerfus decided that Duncan needed to work without distraction, so they'd built a curtain that surrounded his whole work table until he figured out how to ignore things around him. The white sheet hung on all four sides of him as he worked now. Meerfus always said it was not the materials that Duncan chose that caused problems, because Duncan chose those well. So, if it was entirely the fault of his focus, he really had no excuses now, did he?

Duncan looked at the materials on his worktable. He was making a fire-starting wand. The ingredients for this particular wand were warm coals, a long splinter of dried pine, bits of tinder, and flecks of flint and steel for creating sparks. Duncan wore gloves and handled the coals with care, because they were hot enough to burn. He laid out the ingredients carefully, cleared his mind, and spoke the words that came to mind, words that helped focus his natural magic into the wand he was making: "*Fireus Startus Easicus.*"

The wand picked up a glowing red aspect, as if he'd just blown on the coals to heat them up. The length of the wand glittered dangerously with flint and steel chips. It seemed as if he'd succeeded, so he took the gloves off and went out to his waiting master with his new wand in hand.

Meerfus grinned and nodded toward the fireplace, where a few logs sat ready to be lit. All other flammable materials had been moved back from the fireplace at least three or four steps. Duncan shook his wrist and pointed the wand at the fireplace. There was no huge explosion, there was no blast of smoke and ash, and there were no strange side effects; just a simple, warm fire started around the logs, burning cheerfully.

"Excellent work, Duncan!" Meerfus clapped happily. "You shall have to sell that wand and keep the money for it – minus the cost of materials, which was next to nothing."

Duncan grinned sheepishly. He didn't know what to say, but it seemed sad to sell the wand. "Can I keep it? It is my first successful wand, after all."

Meerfus nodded. "That is fine, perhaps better than selling it. Make another tomorrow and sell that one instead."



Duncan's Great Success

Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. Why is today's wand-making special?
 - A. Usually Meerfus makes them.
 - B. It's Duncan's birthday.
 - C. Meerfus is sick, and Duncan has to cover for him.
 - D. It is Duncan's first time making a wand.

2. What kind of wands does the story NOT mention?
 - A. fire starting
 - B. bug shooing
 - C. dust sweeping
 - D. dinner cooking

3. What was wrong with the bug shooing wand Duncan made?
 - A. It replaced the bugs with worms.
 - B. It made the bugs smell bad.
 - C. It replaced the bugs with milk puddles.
 - D. It did nothing.

4. What was wrong with the dust sweeping wand Duncan made?
 - A. It made mini tornadoes of dust.
 - B. It made dust clouds.
 - C. It didn't do anything.
 - D. It put all the dust in the blankets.

5. Why doesn't Duncan want to sell the fire starting wand he makes?
 - A. It won't be worth much
 - B. He is too shy to try to sell it.
 - C. He is afraid it will be used for evil.
 - D. He wants to keep his first successful wand.

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