

Pocket Oba Jabari Backstory

Species: Hybrid between a lesser Egyptian jerboa and a silky pocket mouse

Sex: ♂

Age: Physically 20, actual age 2,079

Height: 0ft 3in

Weight: 60g, or 2.2oz

Siblings: None

Description: Small grey rodent with a paler belly, blue eyes, black hair, and a tuft at the end of his tail.

Attire: Wears a ring at the base of his tail tuft that grants him strange magical abilities, and which serves as his family's crown and passed down through the generations. Also wears a satchel around his waist (in adulthood only).

Setting: Ancient Egypt, 60BC (at birth)

Cultural Notes

The presence of magic in this setting is just accepted by its inhabitants, and magic creatures can either be a blessing or a nuisance. It is not unheard of for magical folk to help out random people, usually without making their presence obvious. Most folk are happy to be helped by the fairy folk.

[I usually put a summary of your character here. It's still in blue because I normally finalise it after everything below is completed, checked, and confirmed to be correct by you.]

Trust & Confidence

(newborn)

Pocket was born into a royal family: to a king, and to a princess who hailed from Ireland, and who had married into the royal family.

Despite their regal status they were kind and nurturing, and made as much time to raise him themselves as they could. They succeeded quite well in this, although at times they had to hand him over into the care of palace staff. Overall, this was handled so that his care felt seamless to Pocket, who felt well looked after for the duration of his infancy.

Freedom & Self-Determination

(toddlerhood)

As Pocket became more aware and more mobile, he began to explore his home. He lived in a palace

So good was the parenting Pocket got from his parents that he felt secure enough to wander away from them to find out what there was to see. In addition to this, being the prince and living in a palace full of his parents' staff, there were always eyes on him, and he felt secure in this extended network of care. Everyone, right down to the gardener and cook, watched out for him, and he was aware of this. The palace was an exciting place to explore, with all sorts of pretty trinkets.

As previously stated, Pocket's father took an active role in his upbringing, including playing with him. Sometimes the trinkets he found were not appropriate for a toddler to handle: jewelled things with sharp edges, ornaments given by foreign dignitaries as gifts to initiate formal discussions, and so on. More often than not, the king gracefully separated Pocket from the particular object of interest before he could hurt himself, and distract him until Pocket forgot about the object and decided he wanted to see or explore something else.

The practical upshot of this was that Pocket harboured some doubts about his own preparedness to explore the palace (he poked himself with sharp things a couple of times, for instance), but that he felt as if his father was there to guide him. His father's guidance was excellent, it was just that Pocket was growing up in an environment optimised for leadership and showmanship, not child-rearing, and it was clear to Pocket that the space was ultimately his father's. This was never articulated to Pocket, at least, not in such a way that it had any meaning to him, but he sensed the truth of it.

Ambition

(young childhood)

As he started to pay attention to the world (at least, to the wider context in which his mum and dad lived), he realised that they were special. This was a slow, even 'soft' realisation, as toddlers invariably believe that their parents are special. After all, when two people comprise almost your entire world, how could you not? As Pocket woke up to the fact that his family was royalty (and began to get a vague idea of what that meant), he began to realise that one day he would be king too.

His parents responded well to this, making sure that being king looked like an exciting prospect and not a frightening one. It was inevitable that Pocket would see the hard work they put in during their days - the meetings with important people, the political discussions, the handling of domestic affairs, and combat training and military matters, to name a few - but they were determined not to frighten him away from his long-term responsibilities. A reluctant king would not be a diligent or attentive king.

They 'taught' him these things in a way that was age-appropriate: they talked with him about various political issues over tea, simplifying the issues at hand and asking him what he thought. They made combat look like a fun way to exercise. They made international affairs look almost like friendships. Anything they could do to translate the issues related to ruling a kingdom to the sensibilities of a small child, they did.

They did well with this. Young Pocket engaged with most of these things with enthusiasm and became comfortable with them without even noticing that he was being deliberately familiarized. He believed that he would make a good king, and this came to be his childhood ambition.

Then, one day, something terrible happened. When Pocket was 5, his father was killed. This changed things drastically for Pocket. The responsibility of being king, once an exciting prospect, now became deadly serious. He did not yet have the capacity to think rationally - as yet Pocket was an intuitive thinker and would be for another year or two yet - but the sudden and shocking death of his father left an impression on him that being king could be dangerous, and that the unexpected could happen.

Worse, his role model - again, his father - was gone. Without a king to model his behaviour from, how could he know how to lead? Pocket's mother and the royal advisors stepped in as best they could, but Pocket had identified himself so thoroughly as the next king, that without the actual king to guide him, he felt unready to step up.

The ring that his father had worn around his tail was retrieved from the body and passed on to Pocket. He wore it, but was as yet unaware of its magical powers and would not have been able to use it even if he had.

And he was expected to take his father's place, despite his very young age. In many ways this was a ceremonial position with advisors always being on hand to give counsel when needed, which is part of the reason that Pocket was groomed to become king from such a young age. Again, his mother and advisors did their best to give him the input that would help him bridge the gap, but he could not.

Now that his father was gone, being king was no longer an adventure nor a game. It was a deadly game where he was very aware that he didn't understand the rules. His mother and advisors continued to train him, and stepped up the intensity of the training to bring Pocket up to speed as soon as possible, but Pocket's heart was no longer in it. He dragged his feet - both figuratively and literally - in lessons, and sometimes hid when the time for a lesson came.

The only part of his training that he continued to attend to whole-heartedly was his combat training. It helped him to get his feelings of anger and fear about the overall situation out, and to feel that he was doing something constructive to

protect himself.

For a child who had entered young childhood full of energy and enthusiasm, the reality of sitting on a throne for hours while grown-ups explained their problems to him was boring, not least because they did not simplify matters to make it all easier to understand or (literally) sweeten the situation with morsels of food or sugary tea, like his father had.

The advisors always seemed to know what to say or do, and Pocket found himself relying on them to the point that he felt superfluous to the entire gathering.

His mother continued to try convincing him to do it to be like his father, but to Pocket, being like his father - who had failed to see an assassination attempt coming - had lost its sparkle. He faked it, for his mother's sake, but as time went by, appeasing her with this became more and more wearing.

Worse was to come. Pocket's mother had been wed to his father for trade and political reasons, so when news of Pocket's father's death reached his mother's family, they sent soldiers to retrieve her so that she could be re-married.

Pocket, as he was technically the king, was considered to be capable of looking after himself and was left behind, and this frightened and confused Pocket all the more. The death of his father had been bad enough, but at least he had felt able to trust the advisors. They continued to advise him, but Pocket began to doubt them: how reliable could they be if they did not anticipate and prevent his father's assassination, and his mother's abduction (as he saw it, despite the advisors' attempts to explain what had happened)? He could not imagine that their advice was worth listening to, and if it wasn't, then how long would it be before somebody came for him? The removal of his mother from his side, and the reasons behind it, also raised the question of whether he wanted to be a part of royal life at all. Although he hadn't fully understood the advisors' explanations of what had happened to his mother, he understood enough to recognise that royal life could be based on cold, hard reason and not love. That only put him off being king even more.

All of this sent Pocket's mind spiralling. He couldn't think how to get out of this nightmare. In time, the stress got to him so much that it affected his health.

Productivity

(older childhood)

At the end of one particularly bad day, when diplomatic and political discussions had been particularly difficult and boring, Pocket looked out into the wide expanse of desert beyond the palace, and ran out into it.

Utterly confused and unsure what to do, he simply ran until he couldn't run any more.

When he took stock of where he was, the first thing he noticed was that nobody else was around. There was nobody to demand anything of him, just blissful silence and space all around.

He had just one responsibility now, and that was to survive. For once in his life, Pocket had at least half of an idea how to do this. He had some basic knowledge of how to survive in the desert, as some of the necessary knowledge had reached his ears even as a prince. It was not easy, but as the hours turned into days he managed to feed himself.

Pocket had developed to the point that he was capable of rational thought. Perhaps this was why he had only run into the desert now: escape and trusting to the scraps of survival knowledge he had heard, had seemed substantial enough to offer him a way out. Now, as he found himself tired, hungry, and thirsty, he used his new capacity for thought again. The idea of going back occurred to him as a way out of this new situation, but he dismissed it. Life at the palace was no life, as far as he was concerned.

He decided instead to press on, and to keep walking in the direction he had run.

He walked for a month before he found something worth investigating: a town in the depths of the desert.

Pocket was hungry. His royal garments had been reduced to unrecognisable, dusty rags. He felt too ashamed for running to ask for help, but he knew he needed help in some form or another.

He noticed a small pile of fruit beside a stall, mostly unattended. Pocket snatched a piece and ran. He was seen and chased, but Pocket's combat training allowed him to evade capture. Soon enough he evaded the adults completely and found somewhere to hide so that he could enjoy his prize. After the paltry offerings of the desert, fruit had never tasted so sweet.

More than that, the rush of theft had been the best fun Pocket had ever had!

This was how Pocket's career as a thief began. He continued to steal - for food of course - but he thoroughly enjoyed the thrill of the chase, and as he got more used to stealing, he took bigger risks just for the fun of it. Being tiny - only 3 inches high - among much bigger folk made it easier, and in this way Pocket began to learn how to play to his strengths (or to put it another way, to turn his weaknesses into strengths).

Pocket revelled in the independence this gave him - mostly. He had the occasional twinge of loneliness, but there was little opportunity or incentive for him to find comfort in other people. He became aware of the privilege that being a prince had afforded him, especially when it came to others' friendliness towards him. To everybody who saw him now, he was a street urchin and a thief, so a lot of the attention he got from other people came in the form of glares, cold shoulders, and angry words. The result of all that was that he remained on his own, came to see himself as somebody who just managed better by himself and didn't need anybody's help, and as a rebel of sorts. If they could not understand his plight then he would cope - even thrive - without them!

Child to Adult Transition *(adolescence)*

Pocket passed the last of his childhood and early adolescent years wandering from town to town in the desert, moving on when his face became well enough known that it became too hard to keep stealing. He continued to relish the excitement and freedom. Unlike during his time on the throne he felt capable.

He continued to feel the occasional twinge of loneliness, but Pocket was becoming more and more entrenched in his social position. From time to time he would entertain the idea of playing with other children, but whenever their parents saw him they would drag their child away. The parents considered him dirty, and a scoundrel who could only lead their children astray.

Over time, Pocket began to notice other thieves operating, and more than this, that they belonged to some kind of group. He found many of these intimidating - some could be quite shady - but they also interested him. Finally, here were the people who were on his level of the social ladder, who would not consider him dirty (because they were just as dirty themselves), and would not be fazed by a little bit of food theft.

Pocket also envied their skill. They had things they could teach him. At the age of 12, he began to work with them. He continued to feel ambivalent about joining so only affiliated loosely - enough to team up and ally when it suited him, but not enough to lock him in when his deeply-felt desire for independence and lack of responsibility reasserted itself.

This worked very well for the guild of thieves, too. Almost all of them had led difficult lives and needed to keep an emotional distance, and avoid making themselves vulnerable with each other as much as possible, just in case a supposed ally were to turn on them. Pocket got what he needed from the group: namely, a certain level of friendship. These were not the deepest friendships, but they helped to stave off the worst of his loneliness.

The thieves he teamed up with liked to use Pocket's tiny size to help them perform thefts that otherwise wouldn't have been possible. Pocket felt as if he was contributing, and that, along with belonging, felt good. More so than this, he loved learning a skill again - it felt like a return to the good old days when he had been learning to be a king!

However, he slowly came to realise that working with the thieves came with rules. They stole from some people and places, but left others untouched, however easy a target they might be. They followed a code of honour among thieves. All loot had to be divided between the members of the guild.

At first, Pocket tried to disregard these (or at least the strictness with which they were observed), because he didn't like them. But this became harder and harder until it became clear to Pocket that he had to observe them all to be included in the guild. This stripped much of the fun and the sense of freedom out of thieving. For him, the ability to work as a sole agent and to not have to consider anybody else was a big part of the appeal. To have to live by rules, especially ones that involved the politics of one thieving guild against another, or the alliances that had developed between a rich merchant and Pocket's (or indeed other) guilds, or to take the history of a relationship into account, grated on him. It reminded him of his latter years on the throne.

And yet, he was unable to make sense of what it was about this that was actually wrong. Objectively, groups did have to take each other into account. A free for all among thieves would be disastrous. Pocket remained quietly dissatisfied for a while.

This was a time of life when Pocket's individuality, and his need to test his own abilities, was becoming important to him once again. He was slowly turning into an adult, and he very naturally wanted to know how effective and independent he could be if he worked to the best of his ability. Following the guild's rules and the thieves' code stifled that.

Pocket had also begun to feel uncomfortable about stealing. He had become highly competent at it. He had put aside enough money that he could make himself look presentable if he wanted to, and he no longer had to appear in public solely as a street urchin. He had even taken the occasional odd job helping householders with various tasks. This work - which fell on the right side of the law - had been pleasant, and he had met some genuinely nice people doing it.

And yet, although this work sat well with him from an ethical perspective, it lacked the excitement of thievery.

Occasionally over the years, Pocket had found himself cornered. Most people in this situation would have needed to defend themselves, using lethal force if

necessary. Given his father's assassination, the idea of using lethal force left an especially bitter taste in his mouth, so he had always resolved to avoid killing if at all possible. Thankfully, his tiny size and excellent manoeuvrability helped him to escape such a dilemma whenever it was presented to him. He was just too tiny and nimble to catch.

The worst of his feeling of being stifled happened during his early teens, a time when his brain was reconfiguring and when, as a result, he had a less stringent attitude towards risk. As his re-wiring settled and he redeveloped a healthy respect for risk. He continued to take risks, but became less reckless about them and more calculated, picking which ones to take based on their risks and rewards, and not on whether they would be exciting. His confusion about whether he preferred excitement or belonging cleared up.

He preferred belonging. In fact, over time his need to belong had gotten deeper and more powerful. He had become so used to bottling up the feeling that his skill at recognising it had become blunted. As his need for connection and closeness became stronger, he became more aware of it - including of the pain that being an outsider caused him.

This didn't mean that he was able to decide to belong to any one group yet, however. What happened instead was that his weaker desire for the excitement of the thief's lifestyle let him see the situation more clearly: he had become the kind of person who had killed his father.

This was not entirely true. As stated above, Pocket had never, and did not believe he ever could, kill another person in cold blood. However, he did operate in the same network as thieves, some of whom were prepared to take on contract killings.

This realisation left Pocket once again feeling trapped, so he did what he had done before: he ran.

Closeness in Relationships *(young adulthood)*

Pocket had been heading towards the French port for some time during his months of thievery. Whether this had been a conscious decision or not he would never be sure, but he had always known that the port served boats that travelled between this land and his mother's homelands.

He stowed away on one such boat.

That journey, one that would last a few days, was not just a physical one, but became a mental and emotional journey for Pocket. He remained in the dark and

alone for the whole time, and during the time, he thought about his life so far, and the decisions he had made.

On the first day he wallowed in anger and self-pity for what he had become. For the following few days however, he was kinder to himself. After the hard self-talk that he had indulged in over the first day he realised that he had had little choice but to survive on the streets after leaving the palace, and that he had done well to adapt. Furthermore, he acknowledged that he had always retained a tenderness in his heart, never turning shady enough to become an assassin. After experiencing for himself the pain that assassinations caused, he had never wanted to inflict it on anyone else.

Pocket continued to reflect more gently on his time after this, and even decided to venture forth from his hiding spot. During the last few days he occasionally went above deck to help the sailors with their chores. None of them seemed to notice that he was not on the ship's official work force.

As the journey came to an end he realised that he wanted to see his mother. But after all these years, he felt unsure that she would recognise him.

Pocket could not be sure that his mother was in these lands, but at this point he had nobody else whom he felt he could turn to, who could give him the love and belonging he wanted to feel. He remembered the explanations of his advisors and hoped that she was still in Ireland.

He located the castle she lived in, and went to try to gain entry. However, the guards recognized him. The most troublesome thieves in Ireland and its surrounding lands were routinely discussed by the guards, and they recognized him from the description they had been given. They chased him away.

Once again, Pocket ran, this time into the forest. Once he was sure the guards had stopped chasing him he hid and had a mental breakdown. He grieved for the princely identity he had lost so thoroughly that he could not see his mother, and for a childhood that had stopped being carefree and burdened him with life-or-death responsibilities far too early.

He remained there for a while, unsure what to do or where to go next, when a female pixie approached him. She was about his size, little more than 3 inches.

It would not be accurate to describe her as sympathetic. She understood his predicament well enough to understand that he was lost in the forest (indeed, he was lost enough that one like him, who was not in tune with the forest, would likely never escape), and this clearly amused her.

She didn't seem to realise that he was emotionally lost too.

Pocket was familiar with a lack of sympathy, so as much as he was hurting, it helped him to feel like himself. He told her that maybe he wanted to be lost, to disappear.

This in turn appealed to the pixie, who pulled him to his feet and invited him to come with her so that they could get lost together. She transported him at high speed through the deep forest, and once again Pocket felt a rekindling of an old feeling: exhilaration. The flashes of the forest he saw - colourful mushrooms, lights, brief glances of the pixies along with the sounds of their laughter - raised his spirits.

She took him to the centre of the forest where a gathering of pixies played. He was unused to play, having had to see to his own survival and watch his back for previous victims of his thievery, but he found himself receptive to their playfulness and he tried joining in. The pixie who had found him guided him until he truly reconnected with his childhood desire to play.

He remained in the forest for many years and came to see it as his new home. He picked up on the pixies' mannerisms and habits. He liked to wander so at times he would venture beyond the pixies' home, but they did not resent this so he always found that he could come back.

He caused mischief in the villages around his home - living with the pixies had reaffirmed his fondness for it - and became stuck in this pattern of behaviour.

The magic of the pixies had stopped him from ageing, so as the years went by little happened to encourage Pocket to think about moving on or to seek new goals.

He did seek one new goal that did not amount to mischief for the sake of fun, although it was very much in the spirit of the pixies' culture. He went to visit his mother.

He tried to work up the courage to reveal himself to her but never succeeded in this, partly because he feared that she would not recognise him and partly because he feared that she would be angry at, or ashamed of, him for what he had become. He regularly spent time around her and performed small kindnesses: making the bed when she left the room for a moment, put flowers on her dresser when her back was turned briefly, and other small pleasantries.

Pocket's mother accepted this help happily.

Pocket, thanks to the pixie magic, had not aged one bit and remained young.

Eventually, Pocket's mother died. This was a bittersweet time for him. As overjoyed as he had been to be in her presence again, however anonymously,

he had felt saddened by what had become of her. Death brought her peace, and also allowed Pocket to close the chapter of his life in which he had needed to seek out his true family.

Over the years of living with the pixies, Pocket learned more than mischief-making. He learned about the magical plants and animals of the forest, and began to merge this knowledge of the local ecosystem in with his talents as a rogue. He made sleeping powders, smoke bombs with magical effects, coated his blade with a paralyzing agent to prevent himself from having to take deadlier action, and many other things. He didn't have the ability to wield magic like his surrogate pixie family, but he had learned to use distraction techniques from them and he was capable of being subject to it, and this, along with his tiny size, meant that he could perform acts that seemed to border on the magically uncanny.

With this in mind, he had developed a mythical status among the local towns and villages.

He had been looking after his aged mother in secret for many years, so after she had died he felt he had no strong reason to stay near to her palace. He began to feel the desire to travel again.

The pixies had become like family to him and he felt that he had a secure home, so he was happy to travel. Before he left, the pixies gave him a gift: a satchel with an infinite amount of storage space inside. This very much appealed to the thief in Pocket.

He promised to return, and travelled extensively. As he did, he added to his skills and talents, including learning to use a limited level of magic in his own right, with the use of runes. The runes offered him a way to use magic that did not require innate ability.

This was how he spent the following few centuries. He had many rewarding experiences during his travels, and every century or so would return to the forest to reconnect with his pixie community.

Passing on Responsibilities

(older adulthood)

Pocket never reached middle age physically but did begin to consider helping out those younger than himself.

During his travels he saw many children on the streets who were in the same position as he had once been in. Wherever possible he befriended them, spent time with them so that they didn't feel lonely, made them laugh, and taught them

skills that would help them to survive far more easily on the streets - including how to stand up for themselves.

End of Life

(old age)

Death is a distant concept for Pocket. The pixies' magic has extended his life span so that he was still alive and youthful by the turn of the 21st century. Whether he will ever grow old is unknown, perhaps even by him, but he doesn't care. He has such a bias towards the here and now (and enjoying it) that he feels that a troubling event so far in the future is irrelevant.

Whether he can die from injury or sickness is another question, but Pocket feels confident in his ability to evade fights or capture. Again, the potential for sickness to catch up to him is a more open question.

Pocket's immortality also comes in the form of legend: stories of his exploits have become something of a fairy tale in the villages nearest his home forest.

Credits

Based on theory by:

Erikson, E., (1951) 'Childhood and Society', W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. chapter 7.

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~Hayley, The Character Consultancy