

Chapter 47 - Shop Smart

The small bell above the door of Threads tinkled a familiar greeting as the Detectives made their way inside the building. “Just a minute!” the voice of Claudia came from the back room, as Gregor folded his arms and leaned against one of the display tables. Grugg walked up to the main counter and tried to quickly brush off some of the dirt from his outfit.

She emerged from the doorway, and her face instantly lit up. “Oh, Grugg! It is nice to see you, and that belt looks great!”

Grugg grinned back and gave the belt a pat. “Has been very useful, thank you.”

The Deputy coughed with little subtlety and glanced out the window.

Claudia leant to the side to see around the hulking form of the Detective. “Gregor! Didn’t see you there - the items discussed this morning should be ready in two days.”

Standing up straight, the ratman nodded. “Well, then I shall take my leave. Ser Grugg - catch,” as he threw a small pouch towards the cyclops. “In case you need it for the Emporium.”

Grugg went to grab the velvet bag out of the air, but his depth perception failed him, and the bag hit his arm, falling to the floor with the sound of coins clinking together. “Oop!” As he bent down to retrieve the money pouch, the door bell chimed to signal the ratman’s exit.

I do still wonder what he could be up to, but I guess we will meet up at the safehouse later anyway.

“Does Grugg still owe Claudia gold for clothes?” he stood back up with the small bag clutched in his fist, anticipating having to count some of the contents out.

“No,” she shook her head and gestured towards the door, “Gregor already covered it this morning, plus Patson sent someone by with the stipend for the protective gear.”

“Everyone so nice to Grugg,” he sighed with a bit of confusion, putting the coin purse into one of his belt pouches.

“You’re doing a lot of good things for the town and putting yourself at risk.” She brushed a loose strand of frizzy red hair from her face. “People are investing in your success.”

And to think, we started this off with the more selfish goal in mind of finding my brother’s killer.

“Happened so fast,” the Detective nodded, addressing them both. “Just fights and falling into clues. Then more fights.”

Claudia eyed the cyclops up and down. “It is good to see you aren’t cut up, although it does look like you’ve been in a scuffle.” Her eyes narrowed in feigned disappointment before her features softened. “At least the bath did you some good!”

"All in days work," Grugg nodded and tipped his hat, trying not to mention the amount of bathwater he had drank.

"And how is my favourite hat doing?"

'Well, I.. uh- very well, thank you,' the wizard stammered slightly, taken back by the question. 'I have been making good progress on my spell learning.'

"I've been practising too," the clothesmaker grinned mischievously, "Want to see?"

An eager nod from Grugg was answer enough for them both, as Claudia withdrew her red glove and pulled it onto her hand.

Let's stand to the side so we are out of the way.

As the Detective moved to the side of the room, The Storm - the dagger-like giant needle rose out of the sheathe on the lady's hip, the trail of shimmering blue thread trailing behind it. With much greater confidence than when they had last observed the magic, Claudia deftly weaved The Storm through the shop space. Rotating, figures eights, a couple of loops - all with a fierce look of concentration on her face.

"Now, I am still working on this... but..."

The large needle floated back through the air and hovered over her shoulder like a particularly sharp bird, as her gaze settled on one of the wooden mannequins by the front end of the shop. Then, with a quick flick of her hand, the Storm zipped across the room at speed and struck the target - embedding a good inch into the hapless figure.

"Drat - I was aiming for the head." She frowned as she mentally forced the stuck object to remove itself from the wooden abdomen of the mannequin, a sliver now chipped out of the clothes stand.

'That is certainly impressive, Claudia. With a bit more experience, I can see you being incredibly proficient and deadly with it.'

"Grugg agrees; pointy needle pretty scary."

Her face flushed a little as she returned the magic blade and removed the controlling glove.

"Well, I will need to be more useful if I am to join you on an adventure... if that is still okay?"

'It is going to be dangerous, but if it is what you want, then you are still welcome to join us.'

"That's why Grugg and Bart are going to Greyjoy's shop next - Claudia should come too." The cyclops grinned, partially just glad the needle had been put away and that he had been on the opposite side of the room to the wooden target.

"Oh, really?" She bit her lip, eyes sparkling at the proposition. "I've looked through the window so many times but never needed to go in. I suppose I could close the shop early; it has been a quiet one today."

Grugg crossed his arms and looked away in mimicry of his Deputy, the wall table creaking as he leant against it. "Grugg just wait here until Claudia ready."

The clothesmaker giggled and with a nod, went out to the upstairs of the shop.

You know, he does spy on us sometimes.

The Detective immediately stood up straight and acted extra normal.

The late afternoon sun was finally giving up the fight against the encroaching clouds, the consistent breeze eventually bringing in reinforcements and threatening a dull overcast evening in short order. Claudia had put on a beige overcoat and now walked with her arm looped around the Detective's thick forearm. For a brief moment, Grugg felt relaxed. Despite the earlier combat, it had been the least stressful day for almost a week - and lurking figures in the shadows were the last thing on his mind.

A strange incense smell carried with the breeze in this new area of the town, slightly more West than he had been previously. It reminded Grugg of the time he had tried to make a broth from different flowers he had found but had left it to boil dry, and burn. It had taken days to get that taste out of his mouth and twice as long for his cave to get rid of the foul odour. This was different though, smoother and with a fragrant spice to it. Still didn't smell edible, though.

It should be just ahead - there on the right; you can see the sign.

Sure enough, Greyjoy's Emporium in embossed gold on an otherwise plain placard gently swayed in the breeze above the doorway. In the window, a byline stated that this was the best place in town for all your adventuring needs. Grugg squinted at the lettering before his eye, unfocused and took in all the objects behind it. The cyclops was not much of an adventurer himself, but this looked like a veritable candy shop for those so inclined.

Weapons of different shapes and sizes, metal armour, leather armour, tools, scrolls, potion bottles, and dozens of labels describing the items and other such details that Grugg could not read, all of this cluttered every square inch of the large window - every potential advertisement space was utilised to the fullest.

Well, if they don't have what we need here, then I'm not sure where would. There might even be some things that could be of use to me!

Grugg stared bleary-eyed at the window, now focusing on his reflection. Other than through puddles and his bath, it had been a long while since he had seen himself properly. Standing at around seven feet tall and built like the mountain itself, his slight hunch just caused his wide shoulders and muscular arms to look even larger. Beneath the peaked burgundy wizard's hat, his big blue eye perched atop a pudgy nose and long smile. His broad, hairless chin was typical for a cyclops - but despite his mass, he felt a little down at the knowledge that he was the runt of his family.

“You okay, Grugg?” Claudia nudged at his arm.

“Grugg unlikely to find anything to fit him,” he admitted, snapping out of his self-observation.

“There must be something. Let’s go look!” the clothesmaker pulled him towards the doorway.

Magical items can actually change shape to fit their owner after a period of adjustment.

That may explain why the wizard’s hat fits his head fine without looking too strange, he considered. No more odd than a wizard hat on a cyclopean Detective would usually look, anyway. Grugg wondered if Bart would figure out a spell to change his appearance. He took one last glance at his side profile, giving his stomach a slight pat, as he followed Claudia into the shop.

To think that the window space was cluttered solely for the purpose of maximising the advertising space would have been a gross underestimation. As Grugg strangely fit through the door almost without having to squeeze, despite it mainly looking human-sized, he took in the candlelit emporium. Every possible space on the walls, tables, and counters were cluttered with all manner of adventuring attire and accessories. The shop itself even was a lot longer than it seemed, maybe even triple the depth of Threads.

As the trio took in the sights of everything around them, a creaking noise rose out briefly from near the far end of the emporium. And then again, it repeated every couple of seconds. Grugg and Claudia exchanged a glance with a shrug, and began to quietly walk towards the source of the odd sound.

Something odd about this place, it is steeped in arcane magic - it’s hard to even pick out individual sources.

Rows of leather armours and steel-plated mannequins lined one section. Helmets of differing designs and protection, breastplates, greaves, and gauntlets. Tall shields, round shields, and some that glimmered oddly in the flickering light of the candelabras dotting the central walkway. And then the weapons! Everything from the humble throwing knife up to and including halberds and polearms. Nothing as weighty and special as Thud, though, Grugg mentally reassured the club.

Wow, look at all those scrolls and components!

Indeed, the next section was full of all manner of arcane instruments. Rows of magic books sat stacked together next to quills and inks of different colours. Scrolls bound with a seal depicting their usage behind a locked glass cabinet. Gemstones, wands, and small pots and drawers filled with ingredients and components that Grugg would not have even heard of if he had been able to read the scrawled labels.

The final section before the end counter was shelves filled with bottles—rows upon rows of glass vials and jars containing different coloured liquids. Red and blue were the most common, but there were purple, orange, green... even some that looked iridescent or swirled unnaturally in the light. The Detective wondered what they all tasted like. His tribal doctor had made him a potion once when he had a fever, but if anything, the foul taste of it

made him never want to get a fever again. And he hadn't since, so maybe it had worked after all.

As they finally reached the counter, the sound of the continuous creaking became clear—a rocking chair - occupied by a figure clad in grey robes. A wrinkled woman with silver hair down to her shoulder sat with eyes closed, gently rocking back and forth. A hat similar to Bart's sat atop her head, in a light grey with a band of vibrant purple just above the brim.

Grugg and Claudia looked at each other to see who the first person to disturb the old lady would be. And then the rocking chair stopped mid-creak.

“Two Message stones, an Alarm stone, The Storm, a Light rune, the Moonchaser Orb, and...”

Her eyes flicked open to reveal light purple glowing irises, a thin smile growing on her lips as she continued.

“A very interesting hat indeed.”