

Chapter 59 - Closed Door Policy

"You okay Grugg? Claudia called down the hatch. "What was that sound?"

"Grugg okay," he squinted out in the darkness trying to make out shapes, but nothing further than fuzzy grey shapes made themselves known. Rubbing the dust off his knees as he stood, every muscle in his body tensed awaiting the approach of the mystery voice's owner.

Gregor descended the short staircase behind him holding the lantern, the orange glow flooding into the dust-ridden room. With Claudia soon behind, both of them on edge at breaching the unknown, the cyclops watched as the room came fully into view.

Across from the stairway, on the far side wall in an otherwise empty room, was a doorway. The door in question was an interestingly smooth wood, with a large face carved into almost the whole size of the entrance.

Well, you are certainly an odd bunch, aren't you?

'How interesting, a talking door.'

Says the talking hat.

Touché.

"Wow," Grugg watched as the carved shapes of the door seemed to shift and move almost as a real face would. "Is door Dungeon keeper?"

You know, I was promised that my role would be in protecting the entrance to a Dungeon. But, so far you are the first adventuring group to even come down this way - in however many years it has been.

"Just alone here, in the dark?" Claudia ventured forward to stand slightly behind the Detective, peering from the side of his arm at the talkative entryway.

Yes, it has been very underwhelming.

"Any chance you will let us in, der Door?" Gregor tapped his foot impatiently from the bottom of the stairs, withdrawing his notepad and pencil.

Only if you can tell me the *password*.

The coy grin somehow exhibited by the wooden barricade did little to improve the normally sour mood of the ratman, as he scribbled something down on the held paper, having placed the lantern on the floor.

"Door want to hear a knock-knock joke?" Grugg grinned and lowered his head, his singular eye burning through the dim light.

No, I am actually incapable of feeling humour and- hey! Woah now-

Grugg withdrew Thud from the sling behind him and drew the club to bear.

Gregor paced in front of the panicked-looking animated door, nose in his notepad as he continued to make notes. "And can ser Door feel pain?"

I- I don't actually know, what is pain?

As the Deputy ducked to the side of the room, Grugg whipped Thud around in a quick arc, striking the middle of the face with a loud clang. Claudia had wisely covered her ears in anticipation of the impact, as the shrill ring reverberated throughout the room and dimly down the sewer passage behind them. A tinny noise remained to buzz in the ears of Grugg as he lowered his club from the struck sentient wood.

That was *grossly* unpleasant.

"Supposed to say... Suppose to say 'Who there?'," Grugg repeated, rubbing his left ear with his free hand to make the continued whine go away.

Looks like it didn't damage him, nor Thud, thankfully. We may not be able to brute force our way through this one.

I'm afraid I am hardier than that, you will still need to give me a password to enter.

Claudia walked over to the Deputy, who appeared to be grimacing through the same lingering noise stuck in his ears. "Gregor, how smart do you think Don Klean is?"

"He is a criminal, so not very," the ratman began, softening his glare as he spoke to the clothesmaker. "To have made this Dungeon would have required immense skill, or a lot of underlings to do his bidding."

"Hmm, okay. Bart, what kind of magic can you detect here?"

'Well, it's safe to say that the... oh - very clever, Claudia.'

Grugg stood perplexed, trying to think of words that could be the password to enter the Nightshade Dungeon. It couldn't be *goat*, could it? It was certainly worth a try - but just as he was about to blurt out a stream of whichever words came into his head, instructions from the wizard filtered into his brain instead.

The Detective took a sidestep to the right, and then a second.

What is it you are up to? You haven't even tried to guess yet - I won't give any clues!

The door switched its gaze from the cyclops to the two other party members, who were now both covering their ears with eyes closed. With a confused brow raised the doorway looked back to see the large figure in mid-swing with the hefty club once more.

This time, a sharper tone reverberated out as the metal struck against the stone wall. As Grugg winced from the noise, the fading drone was accompanied by the sound of falling stone as the brickwork impacted had shattered sending shards to the floor.

Hey now - you can't do that...

It might take a while, but Claudia's intuition seems correct. This was, after all, build in the place the Giant Rat uprising came from, so it's unlikely this part is built against solid earth or stone. The fact that he put a magic door on an otherwise easily breached wall was a rookie error.

Grugg gave a thumbs up to the clothesmaker with a grin as he readied a further blow against the brick wall. She smiled and nodded back, a gesture almost drowned out by the red-eyed glare of Gregor, not at all pleased by the noisy endeavour.

Clang! The second strike knocked further cracked and shorn chunk of the wall. The smattering of heavy dust trickled to the floor as the Detective winced from the ringing in his ears, pausing for a moment to check the steel cap of Thud for any damage. Other than a compacted line of brick dust it looked to be unharmed. Clang! The third strike widened the area of thinning wall.

You can't do this! You are totally invalidating my job here - what need of me will he have if any ragtag group of degenerates can just blow through the wall beside me?

Grugg lowered his club and stepped slowly over to the animatedly distraught door, putting his face close to the carved wooden eyes. "Knock knock," he half whispered, any semblance of his usual goofy grin completely wiped from his face.

Who-who's there?

"Password." The electric-blue eye of the Detective had an eerie glow to it as he waited for the response.

If the door had the biology for it, an exaggerated nervous gulp would have surely followed. Instead, the wide mouth took a downward turn, and the carved eyes looked back and forth trying to squirm away from the intense gaze of the cyclops.

F-fine, but no word of this to anyone - and no breaking any more walls!

A slight click, almost unheard due to the throbbing now in the Detective's ears, punctuated the exasperated plea of the talking door. With little fanfare, it moved a couple of inches - seemingly now unlocked and passible.

"Hmph," Grugg sighed, rolling his eye. "Again - not funny, not how joke go."

Another mystery is solved with your threatening presence.

"Well, that was entirely unrewarding, ser Door. If I wanted to have a conversation that went nowhere with an inanimate object, then I'd just talk to ser Hat." There was the slightest of whispers of a mirthful grin amidst the scathing retort aimed towards the ineffectual barricade to their entry.

'It's a hard life, huh?'

Tell me about it, now I'll have to worry about being replaced before I get a second chance.

“Grugg make door a deal,” the cyclops looked back into the carved face as he gripped the edge in anticipation of opening the door. “If Grugg and friends beat up naughty boss then Door can come live as front door to Grugg house.”

“I’m not even going to consider the logistics of that,” the ratman sighed, shaking his head as he put the notepad away and went to retrieve the lantern.

You’d do that? I mean, I am loyal to my master... but...

Claudia put her hand on the brow of the door. “Sometimes an enemy is just a friend that needs help getting out of a bad situation.”

Oh, I mean... uh. Maybe lead with that instead of the threats of bodily harm?

“No promises,” Grugg shrugged. “What Door name?”

I suppose I don’t have one, I am just an object with a purpose. I am sure your Hat will understand.

‘No, I have a name.’

Oh.

“Can be Barry. Like ‘barricade’.” The cyclops grinned but almost immediately wished he had said something goat related instead. Maybe next talking object or lost soul with no name, he made the mental note.

That’s as good as any... are you people always this nice? You don’t seem to be the kind of adventuring group I would have expected.

“We are Detectives, ser... Barry. We aren’t here for loot and conquest - we are here to solve mysteries and arrest criminals.” Gregor added a squinted glare at the newly minted Barry, just to see if any crimes would suddenly be admitted by the wooden defender.

Oh, in that case, good luck Detectives. I don’t know much about what lies within the Dungeon, only that there has been no movement in the room behind me since I was placed here.

Grugg opened the door wide, the hinges disappointingly quiet - but a smile grew across his face as Barry started to emit a creaking noise himself. For a brief moment, the cyclops considered whether it would be possible to take the door along with them through the Dungeon.

As Gregor stepped beside him holding the lantern, the first interior room became lit up - a simple square room that was surprisingly well furnished despite the location. A low wooden table sat in the centre of the space atop a mottled purple rug. Five chairs of dark, polished wood with purple upholstered cushions and backrests were tucked in neatly by the table. For the most part, it would have been an elegant display if not for the layers of dust covering everything.

'Spark'

Two out of four wall-mounted torches in the room burst into flame, bringing vibrance and contrast to the purples and dark browns of the small space. Several plain purple tapestries hung from the walls between the torches - and both East and West sides each have an exit in the form of a thick, well-made door in a similar dark wood as the other furniture.

'Careful, best watch out for traps first - this looks far too safe and ordinary'

Grugg felt a warm pulse as the Moonchaser Orb activated, the glowing wave of white energy passing through the room, reflected in his singular eye. He stood in the doorway as he waiting for any objects in his view to be highlighted.

"How does the Orb work?" Claudia questioned from behind them. "Like, what does it actually detect?"

'The legend behind it is that it shows what you most desire, or at least what you are seeking. For instance, I was just looking to find traps or anything potentially dangerous.'

Grugg frowned as nothing in the nearby location was highlighted. "Grugg was still thinking about goats."

A moment of silence fell over the group, where perhaps a sigh would have emanated from the wizard had he the capacity for it.

"So either the room has no traps, or it has no goats," Gregor summarised from behind Claudia.

"Definitely has no goats," the Detective concluded, wistfully surveying the room again just in case. "Nice space for lunch though."

'If it keeps your head a bit clearer, that might be the best idea.'

Grugg lumbered into the room under fire of no immediately sprung traps and blew a swathe of dust from the table. The other two party members entered behind him with caution, before relaxing to assist with clearing some of the dust from the furniture before they settled to eat.

The Detective frowned as he attempted to clear the table, and growled low in frustration. "Why table so sticky, can't move dust."

"This chair is also sticky," Gregor grimaced, having already attempted to rest and cross his legs on one of the arranged seats.

Claudia paled, and backed away from the furniture, fumbling for her red glove.

"Grugg..." her eyes widened in terror, "That table has teeth!"