

Chapter 51 - Away with Words

The branches of the evergreen tree above the small park amongst the streets of Helpart creaked as they bent gently in the breeze. Beneath them, Detective Grugg sat struggling to put the new clasps onto his belt. The first one slid on perfectly fine, but the second one kept getting caught on the thick leather and refused to hold in place. He sighed and dropped the indignant piece of metal onto the grass below, waiting for the pinprick of frustrated rage inside him to sizzle out.

I wish I could help, friend.

Instead, the cyclops sat and watched around the small green. A few children were playing with a ball, a group of elderly people were sitting in hushed discussion, and the occasional couple passed through. Nobody seemed to be paying him much attention, aside from the odd glance, but once again, it surprised him how quickly he had become part of the furniture compared to not even a whole week prior he was treated with such suspicion. He supposed that they had decided he wasn't dangerous, at least unless you were a member of Nightshade.

Scooping up the detestable clasp, he placed it back into one of the pouches and hoisted himself off the bench with a grunt. So far, there had been no violence, but it was still mid-morning. The suggestion of shaking down the Lumberyard workers was shot down by the wizard, as he didn't want to ruffle too many feathers so near to their dungeon descent. That was fair reasoning, but Grugg was still a little grumpy about it. Some of the workers there would have been coerced or colluding with Fixion to get them to do all of that walking, and the Detective wanted answers.

More pressing right now, however - he wanted directions. As he stood in the open park, waiting for the wizard to guide him, Grugg felt his eye slowly close as the lethargy from the morning reemerged. The smooth feeling of giving his senses a break was accompanied by the lack of breeze almost making him feel he was warm, and despite standing, the lulling grasp of sleep started to take hold.

Grugg!

The cyclops startled, the muscles in his hands tensing up slightly as his eye opened and filtered reality once more. He grunted and rubbed his hand over his face, trying to shake the sleep away.

Thought I'd lost you there; Library is over to... take the second right down past the statue there, and then I'll direct you as we get closer.

Grugg yawned and patted at his pouch and Thud behind him to make sure he hadn't forgotten anything. Then, seemingly content enough, he started off in the direction the wizard had indicated. The Detective slowed in the passing of the statue, taking it in. A light, polished grey stone figure of a human male with a smartly trimmed beard. He stood poised and elegant and wore some very fancy clothes by Grugg's reckoning.

I think that is the town's founder. Zyban Helpart himself. If you ask me, it seems a bit much to name a town after yourself. From the brief information I read about the town before I got here, he died of old age some years ago. The current Mayor is... Leman Krusth. I've no doubt our exploits have reached his ears, and he will want to meet us at some point.

Grugg grunted. He didn't much care for leaders who did nothing but make rules and weasel words. It's not as though weasels could even talk. But, the Captain had his respect as the half-orc would actually get stuck into fighting crime and making a difference. If the Mayor was too busy to come to see the Detectives putting away Nightshade members, then he could just sit and eat paper. Or whatever they did.

Would you like to know more Helpart facts?

A headache threatened to begin brewing in the thick skull of the cyclops. On the one hand, there did seem to be a lot that he didn't know, and potentially important people to be suspicious of. But on the other hand, the wizard's rambling might put him to sleep. In the end, he settled with a few more facts, directly deposited into his brain, with a quick thumbs up to the hat.

Helpart used to be a logging outpost, originally intended to branch into a mining operation on the Walpeak mountains. But about seventy years ago, our dear Zybian decided the woods were too profitable and started expanding the outpost to a whole town. To this day, lumber is the main export of the town. Take a right here.

Grugg ducked under an awning that stretched from a build and across most of the walkway and swung a right at the next turning as directed. All the houses were primarily wooden, and he wondered how many trees it took for each one. And then how many trees would they need to cut down to build the town and still have plenty of lumber left to sell to other places. There must be more than one lumberyard, surely.

They have two major temples and one minor temple. The majors are for the God of the Forest and the Great Mountain. Minor is for a lesser God... not one I've heard of before, but something to do with the animals of the forest. Possibly Druidic or Elven - it's relatively new, so I didn't get to read much into it.

Grugg's ears perked up at this section of flowing wizard word torrent. "Worship Great Mountain here?"

Indeed, it's interesting. Of course, they don't hold it in such high reverence as yourself and the mountainfolk do, but they give it respect as the mountain provides the stream that flows down the valley and stops some of the harsher weather coming down from the northern ocean.

The Detective made a mental note to go visit the temple sometime - if they survived the dungeon. Whilst he was not the most pious of his kind, most descendants borne of giantkind still gave some respect to the Great Mountain. For the most part, he was just interested in if there were any other mountainkin living in the town he might find there. Other than the twin ogres, he had not spotted anyone of similar stature. Perhaps they were just in the lumberyards or other parts of town... or in the Dungeon!

For some reason, the town animal is a field mouse. I'm no expert, but I don't think they naturally reside around here.

Grugg grinned to himself - they should make the town animal a goat.

Here we are - the library.

The grin across the Detective's face faded as he noted the name on the sign - Helpart Library. How utterly dull. For a brief moment, he wondered what it would take to run for Mayor so that he could mandate that every business should have a funny animal name or pun. He quickly brushed that thought away; what sort of utopia would it be with all these criminals still wandering free? There was still an important job to be done, and steeling his nerves, he gulped and approached the double doors of the word-building.

Immediately as he pushed through the doorway into a reception area, he was hit by stale, warm air. This was probably what the wizard had smelt like, he considered, as he took in the odour of musty books and dust. A young man sat at a dark wooden desk with his feet up upon it, face buried in a tome with a green cover.

In noticing the cyclops entering, he spluttered out a greeting as his feet dropped to the floor "Woaaahheelloo, sir," the man tried to save his outburst, to some degree of success. He scratched his short black hair as he attempted to position himself in a more professional manner. "What can I help you with today?"

"Grugg is here for book man," the cyclops bore down over the desk, noticing the embossed nameplate sitting in front of the man. "Recep-Tion."

That's not - the person we are after is called Edward Pendleton.

"Edward!" the Detective blurted out before the man at the desk could interject.

"Oh, Mr Pendleton doesn't like to be disturbed when doing his research, sir - I could pass on a message-" the youth stopped as he watched the cyclops tap a very shiny Detective badge. "Yessir, Detective. Please, follow me."

Grugg followed through a doorway which opened up to a large room completely filled with shelves and rows upon rows of books. It was as equally fascinating as it was horrifying to the cyclops, as gawked in amazement. He had seen very few books in his life, and here was a veritable dragon's horde of tomes of all sizes. To think they were all different and completely full of words? Yet, despite his apprehension, there was almost a draw inside of him that wanted all of this knowledge and information - if only he could just gobble the words up and absorb them that way.

We will have to see what their book lending policy is; we could do some dungeon research - or even find out about more supposed magic items in the area.

Such was the rising glee inside the Detective that he also walked straight into the back of the young man as he had stopped by a doorway. About halfway through the library, a door with a Private sign affixed to it shook slightly as the librarian knocked on the door, pushing it ajar slightly.

“Mr Pendleton? A Detective is here to see you.”

“A Detective?” a gruff voice came from within. “Okay, send them through.”

Grugg gave an appreciative nod to the door, which groaned on the hinges as it opened fully. The young man, mistakenly assuming the gesture was levelled at him, returned a nod and started making his way back to the front of the library.

The room inside was primarily bare and simple in furnishings. A single bookshelf sat against one wall, and a medium-sized table surrounded by a handful of chairs took up the majority of the central space of the private room. Sitting at one of these chairs was the presumed Edward. He was a tall, slim man with a mostly bare head save for waves of white hair above his ears, connecting at the back. He wore a fitted grey suit with a black bowtie and had been poring over one of several books on the table before the interruption.

“Ah, Detective? Please take a seat.” His voice showed the cracks of his old age, but there was confidence in his tone.

“Hello,” Grugg began, closing the door behind him before he took a chair on the opposite side of the table, “Detective Grugg.”

“Edward Pendleton, researcher. Although, I am sure you know that if you are here.”

Grugg nodded, if only to be polite. He subtly tried to glance over at the open book at the table to see what the researcher had been getting himself into. It was a short-lived attempt - those words were tiny. And also upside down, which unsurprisingly did not make the task easier.

“That is an interesting choice of hatwear, Detective. It doesn’t quite match your profession.” The man leant back on his chair with a sour expression plastered unabashedly across his face.

Grugg forced a grin. It seemed that Edward was not too happy to be interrupted and had no qualms with letting that be known. The Detective drummed his fingers on the table, awaiting the prompts from the wizard, or perhaps for Bart to talk out loud and lead the investigation. Moments of silence passed instead.

His heartbeat started pulsing through his head, whatever remaining energy he had now sapped away by the awkwardly tense silence that now sat between them. Grugg’s brain sluggishly tried to think of a relevant question to at least begin proceedings but drew a blank. He felt the sweat starting to form on his brow as the old researcher sat, maintaining eye contact with an unflinching glare of displeasure. As the pressure finally broke the exhausted cyclops and he was about to blurt out something stupid, the wizard finally spoke up.

That is not Edward Pendleton.