

Chapter 48 - Know the Unknown

The wizened woman leant back in the rocking chair and smiled. "A hat is a very peculiar vessel for Soul Exchange, most inconvenient, I'd have thought."

'It wasn't my first choice, I assure you.'

"Oh?" she now leant forward again, causing the chair to squeal as the hollow voice reverberated atop the cyclops' head. A glimmer of interest sparkled in her purple eyes. "You can talk. That is quite something."

"Bart can cast all kinds of spells," Grugg nodded, attempting to hype up his wizardly friend.

"How peculiar," the older woman rose and approached the counter to get a better look. "Wait... Bart? Surely not Harlan's kid brother?"

A brief silence as all parties stood unflinching, awaiting a response from the inanimate object.

'...Eleanor?!'

"Seventh Circle, it really is you!" she stood, mouth agape in amazement, joy brightening up her face. Noticing the bemused and awkward looks of the other two present, she regained her composure to introduce herself formally. "Eleanor Greyjoy, proprietor of this emporium. Harlan and I were a little sweet on each other in our... early twenties? Before he ran off to seek adventure, he was always so sure of himself. I'm so sorry about his passing, Bart."

'It was certainly unexpected, at least in his later years after having given up the adventuring life.'

"How come Bart didn't know Greyjoy was... Greyjoy?"

"Married name, sweetie," the aged arcanist smiled sadly. "He passed five years ago, but - enough dwelling on the dead. Why don't you introduce your new friends, Bart?" The sadness faded and was quickly replaced by a warmer smile as she eyed the potential customers.

'Of course, I am pleased to introduce Detective Grugg, and Claudia, who owns Threads a little down the way.'

Grugg waved his hand in a polite hello, despite being a few feet from Eleanor.

"You have a wonderful shop here," Claudia beamed, still in awe over the extensive inventory of the emporium.

"I'm happy you think so; it has been a-

"Is you... a witch?" Grugg stood on his tiptoes to get a good look at the grey pointed hat that was a close match to the one on top of his own head, despite the fact he could see it clearly just by being taller than the robed woman.

"I prefer the term 'Enchantress', my dear. Witch conjures up images of hags living in dens in the woods, and I like my creature comforts too much for that!" Her head tilted as she tried to get a good read on the odd cyclops.

'Plus, Eleanor is literally a magic user specialised in Enchantments, if I am correct?'

"You are right, little turtle," her right eye twinkled at the pet name. "Although my spell list is limited, I mostly deal with weapon and armour enchantments. It's what keeps the shop running, at least."

Grugg nodded, and his mind started concocting plans for what he could get Thud enchanted with. He didn't even know what you could get enchantments for - what about one that could make Thud cook meat? Or if it could make an even funnier sound when he hit things? Maybe best of all... what if there was one that could turn Thud into a large umbrella when he wasn't using it to bash people. The possibilities were potentially endless, as far as he knew.

'Perhaps we could catch up sometime, maybe when I don't require a chaperone?'

Eleanor let out a dry laugh and folded her arms. "Seems like the little turtle is coming out of his shell. But I'd like that. However, I'm sure you all didn't come here to butter up an old woman. So how can I help you?"

"Hunting criminals in sewers." Grugg leant forward and whispered, "Below sewers," emphasising with a one-eyed wink.

"Oh, not the Dungeon," the enchantress rolled her eyes with a sigh.

'There's a *Dungeon*?'

"You call yourself a wizard and haven't felt the presence?" she huffed. "Dungeon, sweetie," she added in Giant, noticing the Detective's blank stare.

'I was only in Helpart briefly before I... became a hat. Magic is a bit different in this condition.'

"You'll have to tell me all about that when we catch up. But yes, there is a Dungeon beneath the town. I've mostly tuned out the energies over the years, but you know my signature spells were Identify and Detect Magic - so I can't be mistaken."

Grugg recalled the wizard mentioning something about signature spells previously. Most magic users, no matter their proficiencies, would have a spell or two that called to them, a natural fit that they would find easy to excel at. It had been fire spells for Harlan, and he remembered Bart saying something about Defensive Wards. Eleanor's signature certainly explained how she so easily dressed them down magically upon entry to her shop.

"A Dungeon," Claudia repeated quietly.

'Sound dangerous.'

“Sounds like fun!” Grugg cheered, partly just eager for some time away from the socially busy town for a change.

“What on Othea could you want down in the Dungeon?” Eleanor asked, leaning against the counter with concerned interest painted on her wrinkled face.

“Criminal investigation,” the Detective replied frankly, flexing out his chest for the badge to be noticed.

“I won’t pry further then, Detective.” Then, with a wink at the cyclops, she spread her arms wide, indicating the breadth of the emporium. “But do tell me what you need.”

‘If we are heading into a Dungeon, then we will need a lot more than originally planned.’

And with that said, they set off around the shop, browsing for things under the direction of Bart and with continued advice from Eleanor. A *Dungeon* would indeed be more preparation than just knocking over thugs on the street. Grugg had heard of them in stories before but never thought he would get to meet one. They were said to be filled with all manner of monsters, traps, and treasure - but that seemed unrealistic to him. But, on the other hand, the possibility of getting his hands on more magic items beat out his scepticism.

A Dungeon to explore needed a bit of planning than just hopping down the nearest sewer inlet and stomping through whatever came up. Healing potions would be a necessity, so five of the red-hued bottles were added to the list. A vial of Cure Poison and a scroll of Remove Curse. Lockpicks, lanterns, cloth bandages, and a general tool bag. Grugg saw so many more interesting things that he wanted, but the prospect of carrying or even paying for them all dampened his enthusiasm. He left Claudia to pick out the more mundane and useful items as Bart guided him over to the weapons and apparel section.

For Gregor, they picked out a set of throwing knives. The ratman had already mentioned something mysterious about knowing what weapon he wanted to get, and he seemed content and proficient enough with his whip. Grugg and Claudia had their preferred methods of attack already as well, but a round shield would be perfect for the clothesmaker, the wizard assured him. The Detective gingerly lifted down the sought-after defensive item; a simple dark brown wooden shield with steel-bound edge and rivets.

The cyclops felt a pinch of worry for Claudia as he held the shield. As much as he wanted her to be safe, he knew her staying topside would not be an option. Grugg didn’t mind being a little self-destructive on occasion as he was a hardy slab of muscle and thick bone - a stark contrast to his stick-thin and less world-worn friend. She had the fire in her though, and it reminded him of when he set off from his tribe, the desire for adventure and discovery forging a path out into the unknown.

He sighed and went to the front counter to add the shield to the growing collection of oddities. Eleanor had been going from tallying up the cost of their selected items, to watching the strange group, and back again. “Any more, Bart?” he asked, looking upwards at the brim.

‘I have some component requests if you have the stock, Eleanor,’

The enchantress cracked her knuckles and stood up straight to attempt to be closer to eye level with the hat. "What can you cast, currently?"

'Healing Ward, Healing Pulse, Neutralise, and I can manipulate a Light rune.'

Her eyebrows raised. "All that from inside the hat, runic magic too? You are full of surprises, turtle."

"Bart can speak inside head and out loud now," the Detective nodded with some pride for his companion.

"A Telepathic link? Two-way, open channel?"

'One way, and not open, thankfully. I still have my internal thoughts and can control what is said to Grugg.'

"That is pretty fascinating," Claudia added, sidling up to the counter with a fully laden armful of dungeoneering accessories. "I can't even begin to imagine how that... feels?"

'Imagine you are sitting in the middle of a completely empty, lightless room. Only the room doesn't exist. And neither do you. It is like my brain and my eyes are in the hat, but nothing else. I cannot taste, feel, nor smell.'

"Grugg can smell," the cyclops grinned, thinking back to his bath.

'I am not even sure how I can see or hear. Even the feel of magic is odd and different; it has texture.'

"Texture?" Eleanor's purple eyes glowed with intense interest.

'I would love to give a thousand-word monologue on the nature and feel of magic and my ability to overcome my predicament... however, using Voice drains my mana, and I like to keep a reserve in case my companion gets into any mischief.'

"So even speaking has limitations, hmm." Eleanor frowned and got behind the counter, digging through some of the many drawers out of view. "I may have something that could help... if I could find the blasted- aha, here it is." She rose again and held out her palm, a simple circle earring in polished silver in her outstretched hand.

"Pretty," Grugg smiled, crouching down to gaze at it closer. "Not got ears pierced, though."

"I pierced my own with a needle when I was younger," Claudia offered, hand resting on the sheathe of The Storm as she gave a wry grin.

The Detective shuffled away from the clothesmaker as his electric-blue eye widened.

"That won't be necessary," Eleanor chuckled, "It's magic - it'll just snap in. It has an enchantment that makes it easier for magic users to access the arcane stream. Of course, it's mostly used by novices, but I'm sure Bart will not take it as a hit against his ego." She

rubbed her chin as she eyed up Grugg's earlobe. "It's a bit like clearing your head after a bad cold, clears your magical airways, so to speak."

Grugg leant forward and turned his head, keeping his eye closed. There was a brief amount of pressure and then nothing. Standing back up, he could feel the slight weight of the object dangling from his ear. He shook his head to feel it bounce around, with a relieved grin soon spreading across his face.

'Thank you, Eleanor.'

"Ah, it's nothing. Think of it as a memento for old times' sake. Just, you owe me some philosophising and insight into magic once you have the free time."

"That kind of suits you, Grugg," Claudia grinned, leaning against the counter. "Very dungeon-adventure-y."

Grugg puffed out his chest and put his meaty fists to his hips to look at impressive as he could, much to the amusement of both women.

'Wow, this is incredible; I can feel it working already - it's like it... this gives me so much more to work with.'

Grugg ended his posing and dug around for his coin pouch, which he immediately put Claudia in charge of. Eleanor began writing up the final invoice now that the rest of the supplies had been chosen, whilst the wizard continued gushing over his new Arcane Boost earring.

'It's like a tingle over my senses if I had any that could. Everything is broader and yet more minutely detailed. I can more accurately gauge all the magic in the room, the individual items, instead of just a general sense. The enchantments over the doorway, the magic lock on your safe, the... wait...'

Eleanor looked up from the money being counted out, her smile fading.

'There's somebody else in the room with us.'