

## Chapter 56 - Thread of Adventure

Grugg awoke with a snort and rolled over on the wooden floor of the safehouse. Sunlight broke through whatever clouds had the indecency to hang about after the heavy rainfall during the night, and the piercing rays managed to find the right angle to illuminate the sleeping cyclops.

"Morning," the voice of Gregor came from the table area.

*Oh, thank goodness you are awake. Trying to communicate with Gregor is like talking to an especially sinister wall. I'm of half the mind that he doesn't actually think I am real. If I am indeed a shared delusion, could you at least imagine me being more powerful?*

The Detective stayed lain on his back, staring up at the wooden ceiling. Then, with slow blinks, he tried to parse the real world. His deep sleep had definitely been fraught with weird and extensive dreams, but now that he had returned to the waking world, the exact details had evaporated and just left an uncomfortable feeling in his subconscious.

"Supplies came in while you slept; I am surprised it didn't wake you, ser Grugg."

With a large yawn, Grugg finally rolled up into a sitting position. The fireplace now lifeless, he stretched out his arms and grinned at the ratman. Gregor was indeed sitting at the table. In front of his Deputy, a mug sat, wisps of steam softly caressing the air above. The strong smell of whatever the drink was slowly drifted into the senses of the cyclops, almost distracting entirely from several boxes placed around the table.

"What drinking?" he asked as he lurched up onto his feet.

"It's called coffee," Gregor blew away the rising steam to cool the dark liquid. "You've never had?"

'It can give you an energy boost, but also can increase anxiety or give you jitters.'

"Grugg wants to try," the cyclops beamed, taking a seat at the table and relaxing as the wooden chairs creaked under his weight.

"Have a look through your things then, ser Grugg, and I will make you one." Gregor left the table but stopped halfway to the kitchen, partially turning back towards the seated Detective. "Thank you for the throwing knives." He then hurried into the other room, the door quickly closing behind him.

*Always hard to read. But, yes - let us have a look into the supplies; I have been waiting for hours, and the suspense is getting to be too much. We have the delivery of dungeon supplies from Eleanor, but also the new outfits that Claudia arranged from the armourer.*

It didn't take much more convincing for Grugg to start digging through the nearest box, excited for what he might find inside. The first box had already been opened, presumably from Gregor looking through. It mostly contained the potion bottles and various straps of pouches, and other gear for preparing to enter the Dungeon.

The second box was more of the Emporium purchases, including the shield they had gotten for Claudia. He had assumed that she would meet them here to get geared up, but the plan hadn't been as explicitly laid out with all the other goings on. In truth, it wasn't fully certain whether they would be heading into the Dungeon today or not. It had been much easier to make such lofty plans from the safety of a day or two away from it actually happening.

Gregor emerged from the kitchen carrying a large steaming mug. "I've already moved my outfit box to my room, ser Grugg so that last one is yours."

Grugg popped the lid off the remaining box as the ratman placed the mug down and sat, one leg crossed over the other. Tossing some parchment paper out of the way, the first items were revealed - a pair of leather gloves dyed a burgundy colour that matched the wizard's hat and brimming with small horn-like spikes along the length. Slipping on onto his left hand, the length reached halfway down his forearm, which would definitely help with some defence without hindering elbow movement.

*It was a heavy box. You should have seen the poor delivery men trying to lug that across the room whilst Gregor berated them.*

Beneath the gloves, a dark red shawl. A waxed leather on one side to deflect the rain, and on the inside, a thick woollen inlay for keeping insulated for the coming winter. The cyclops swung it around his shoulders, almost catching the sitting ratman and sending the mugs of hot coffee over the table were they not caught by the Deputy. It was weighty but comfortable and clasped together at the front with a silver skull brooch.

Grugg could do nothing but beam his pride and excitement for the new items of apparel that Claudia had picked out for him. Lastly, a square, thick fabric filled the rest of the box. Pulling it out as it unravelled, he initially thought it was some kind of blanket or bedroll. But then the pleats in the fabric - the way it was lined and... the familiarity brought realisation. It was a kilt! He turned it towards the like to observe the muted earthy brown with a thin golden grid-like pattern. Although shorts were much more comfortable than trousers, he had missed the freedom his old kilt had given him.

It may not be the most Detective-looking outfit, but it was more than perfect for adventuring and fighting whatever lurked beneath them in the Dungeon. His burning desire to get dressed into these new items was almost enough to convince him that they should be heading down beneath the town today - possibly even this morning.

"I can tell you are eager to go, ser Grugg," Gregor sipped at the last of his drink. "But you aren't going anywhere on an empty stomach. Unfortunately, I have spent the morning being a guardian over the packages, as ser Bart is a hat and couldn't pull his weight"

'Hey now, there's no need for-'

"Is okay," Grugg shrugged and smiled at his new kilt as it rested, folded on his lap. "Grugg can do it."

He dug his ungloved hand into one of the pouches on his belt and withdrew a round stone from within. With a tap, it lit up in a slight glow.

“Lady Valoth?”

**[Detective Grugg, please continue.]**

“Can bring Grugg some breakfast, please?”

...

‘I am not sure why you are so keen on winding up the Lady and her troupe.’

“Lady never said sorry for bein’ uninvited guest,” Grugg smiled to himself as he pocketed the Message stone again, not expecting a more explicit answer than the one received.

“I tell you what, sers. Why don’t we get into our new gear, and pick up some food on the way to meet Lady Clothesmaker?” The slight glint in the red eyes of the ratman perhaps gave a hint that he too was looking forward to wearing the clothes that he had arranged with Claudia.

*That is actually a perfectly reasonable plan of action; I am surprised that-*

“Shame ser Hat has nothing to put on. As he is a hat already,” the Deputy leant back in his chair and folded his arms.

“Be nice,” Grugg wagged his finger at the ratman as he took his first sip of hot coffee. “*Taste like hot mud,*” he murmured to himself, putting the mug down gently. “To beat Dungeon, have to be team. With trust and... things.” He hand-waved the conversation away as the ratman lowered his head. “Gregor, go get ready.”

*Is it me? Am I being too annoying or harsh on him sometimes?*

The Detective watched the ratman leave the room and head upstairs before sighing and standing up to replace his clothing. “No, Bart. Gregor just ratman who use to being alone, not trust anyone. Only trust Grugg because Grugg strong and get results. Also is smart, charming, funny-”

*Alright, as your hat, I can feel your head getting bigger. Or I could if I could actually feel. Very insightful of you though, Grugg.*

“Grugg just read Gregor diary.”

*Don’t fib! We both know you couldn’t have done that.*

Grugg chuckled to himself as he pulled the belt tight around his waist to keep the kilt in place. He opted to go shirtless, instead pinning the Detective badge on the new sling for Thud that strapped around his torso. Adjusting the skull brooch so that the shaw sat comfortably on his back, he then slid the other burgundy glove on, the leather creaking as he flexed his wrist.

*Be careful with those spikes. You don’t want to poke your eyes out whilst you are picking your nose.*

“Hur hur,” the cyclops laughed to himself as he threw a couple of punches out at the air, hopping between feet currently unladen by his usual steel-plated boots. Between the kilt and shawl, he felt more at home than since he had left the mountain. In high spirits and objection on the notorious criminals noted at the other end of the room, he stuck his tongue out at them as he hopped along to grab Thud and his boots.

The door to the stairway opened, and a dark-clad figure walked in. The Detective turned to watch the saunter of his Deputy, standing proud in his new outfit. A high-collared dark grey jacket covered a burgundy padded gambeson. The matching black slacks and matte boots complimented the simple but professional-looking getup. The spaulders of the jacket looked to be of dark leather and paired with similarly made bracers beneath the sleeves. On the sides of the upper arms, the Four-Swirds logo was imprinted in white.

Grugg whistled as the ratman managed a sheepish grin. “Gregor look more like Investigator than the Eye-Sword group do.”

“Thank you, ser Grugg. You are also looking great. Unfortunately, I seem to have accidentally picked something up with my clothing. I believe it is for you, ser Bart.” Walking across to the cyclops, the Deputy held out a small item that looked like five small vials with a set of pins on the back. As Grugg bent down, the ratman affixed the object to the side of the hat behind the band that encircled it.

‘Oh, thank you! This is... some very interesting component compounds - this gives me something to work with.’

Gregor took a step back, fighting the urge to cross his arms and look away, but as luck would have it, any potential awkwardness was cut short by a knock at the front door.

“Who there?” Grugg bellowed at the closed doorway, despite being close enough.

*Just how much coffee did you actually have?*

“It’s Claudia!” the voice of Claudia came from outside.

“It’s Claudia!” the Detective repeated, his single eye blazing towards the ratman.

**‘Enter’**

The pair watched as the door unlocked and slowly swung open to reveal the waiting clothesmaker. Aided by the slow magical spell, as Claudia came into view, it looked as though she came dressed in her adventuring attire too.

Her usual style of dress was instead composed of a dark red one with a slimmer fit, where the bodice was instead replaced by leather that tapered to a flat square on her legs like a tabard. The hemline of the base and end of the short sleeves of the dress were detailed by a golden pattern of eyes in a row. She wore similar leather bracers to Gregors, but in a lighter and more vibrant brown to match her body armour. In addition to The Storm and controlling glove affixed to her belt, the clothesmaker also wore a gemstone pendant with the faintest pink glow.

“Wow, you both look great,” she grinned. “You clearly have an eye for fashion, Gregor.”

Gregor abashedly looked away and made to walk off before being grabbed by the large hands of the cyclops.

Grugg pulled in Claudia, too and gave them all a firm but gentle group hug as the door slowly closed behind the woman.

“Let’s go punch a Dungeon together,” the Detective laughed, “And bring more coffee!”