

Victor BK4: Ch18

Book 4: Chapter 18: A Stroll Through Coloss

“You will wait for me?” Tronk asked, reluctant to leave Victor at the alchemist’s shop. It was near noon, the sun brilliant in the pale, faintly green-tinged sky, and Victor had suggested they kill two birds with one stone—he’d talk to the alchemist about mixing up the rewards he’d won in the arena, and Tronk would take Valla to see Tes; she’d promised to show Valla a new spell that would utilize both of her affinities.

“Yeah, I’ll wait here, Tronk. When you get back, we’ll hit up an artificer. Is that all right? No one’s going to mess with me at some random alchemist’s shop. I’ll stay inside.”

“Yar. Sounds fine. I’ll be back in less than an hour.”

“You don’t need to guide me, Tronk,” Valla said, her fists on her hips, a look of annoyance on her face.

“Warlord said to keep both safe. Said Victor’s foes might use you.” Tronk shrugged and gestured with his hand for Valla to follow as he began to lumber up the street with his odd but fast, rolling gait.

“Can’t argue with that,” Victor said, smiling at Valla. She huffed and turned to follow the giant, and Victor opened the door, stepping into the aromatic shop. The front end of the store was narrow, only a few feet separating the door from the counter. Behind the counter, though, rows of shelves lined with colorful bottles, wooden boxes, jars, tins, and little sacks filled a much bigger space.

“Welcome,” said a Vesh woman with coppery skin, white hair, and a pleasant facial expression. Victor thought she was rather beautiful and would have thought she was human if not for the fact that her left arm was a sucker-covered tentacle, gently swishing a rag over the top of the counter.

“Thanks,” he said, approaching her and digging through his ring for the two prizes from the arena. Victor took a deep breath and smiled; he hadn’t expected such a heavy scent of cinnamon, and he wondered if it was from a potion or if the shopkeeper was cooking something in the back room. He set the jar and the gold foil package on the counter, and she leaned close, brows narrowing and her upturned, little nose wiggling as she examined them.

“May I?” she asked, the tip of her tentacle arm hovering near the jar containing the crypt drake gall bladder.

“Sure.” He watched as her tentacle gripped the jar and tilted it so the bottom faced her, and then she smiled.

“Ah! An arena prize? Are you that offworlder everyone’s talking about?”

“Oh, maybe. I’m Victor.”

“Good to meet you! I’m Shouza. So, a crypt drake gall bladder, hmm? I can make the tincture you’re looking for. It’ll take me a few days. What’s this other?” She set the jar down and picked up the foil-wrapped package. “Dense Energy! Should I leave the foil on?”

“I don’t know if it matters—it’s a rock wrym magma horn. Whatever that is. It’s supposed to . . .”

“Help with Core breakthroughs, aye. I can make the tincture from this at the same time—different equipment is required. Since you’re providing the ingredients, well, the most expensive ones, I’ll charge a nominal fee—a hundred beads each. Fair?”

“Well, it seems steep to me . . .”

“You can shop around if you want,” Shouza said, setting the package down and shrugging, her earlier smile disappearing as she pressed her lips into a line. “Anything else I can do for you?”

“Well, hang on,” Victor said, pushing the two prizes toward her, “I didn’t say I wouldn’t pay—it just feels like a lot to me. I’m not from around here, remember?”

“Oh, sure.” Shouza’s frown softened, and she scooped up the two packages in her tentacle, deftly gripping them both despite her lack of digits. “So, three days at the earliest. Okay?”

“Yeah, that’s fine. I guess I’m going on a monster hunt tomorrow, so I’ll probably be gone a little while.” Victor sniffed deeply, savoring the aroma in the air, and then let his eyes travel over the shelves, wondering what was in all those bottles, jars, vials, bags, canisters, and boxes. “Got anything you’d recommend I bring along on a monster hunt?”

“What are you hunting?” Shouza deftly deposited his prizes under the counter and then turned toward the shelves behind her.

“I’m not really sure; maybe some kind of wrym? I think the warlord mentioned that; though, how he even knows about the hunt I’m signed up for, I have no idea.”

“Wyrms are not to be trifled with. I hope you’re with a strong company.”

“Uh, Spears of the Sun or something like that . . .”

“I’m not familiar.” Shouza wrinkled her nose again, but this time she didn’t look annoyed, more perplexed. “I’d recommend something to help with poisonous fumes. Some of the wyrm species have glands that excrete clouds of gas.” She turned and ran her tentacle along the shelves and added, “You can never go wrong with healing, especially proactive healing. Do you have a stock of regeneration potions?”

“Proactive healing? I have some healing potions I bought back in Gelica, er, a city in my home world.” It felt strange calling Fanwath his home world, but Victor didn’t want to overcomplicate the conversation.

“But not regeneration? It’s hard to drink a healing potion if you’ve been disabled or if you’re unconscious. Drink a regeneration potion before a fight, and if you’re hurt within a few minutes, the effect will heal you.”

“Really? How long will it last?”

“Depends on how much you’re willing to pay.” She walked further back to the next row of shelves and scooped up several different potions, bringing them back to the counter. She set them down in a neat row, and once again, Victor was impressed by the dexterity of her long, flesh-toned, sucker-covered appendage. He tore his eyes away from it to look at the bottles—all smaller than a soft drink bottle but shaped slightly differently, with different colored glass and wildly different contents.

Shouza pointed to the furthest one to Victor’s left, a dark blue, corked vial, and said, “This one will heal terrible wounds but will only last in your system for around a minute. Should you be wounded after that, it will have no beneficial effect.”

“So . . . when you say ‘terrible wounds,’ what are we talking about? Like, will it regrow limbs? Fix a smashed skull?”

“No, it will knit flesh and bone, but it will not resurrect you or regrow lost limbs. It’s possible if you were just mostly dead . . . I mean, if your heart were pierced, but your spirit still clung to your body, the repair might save you—a ruined brain, though? Not likely.”

“Do any of them regrow lost limbs?” Victor had wondered about that for a long while—he’d learned from conversations with Rellia, Thayla, and others that advancing one’s race could mend a missing appendage, but he’d never seen anyone selling potions that could do it.

“Sure,” Shousa’s tentacle skipped over the next two potions and settled on a heavy crystal jar with a red, wax-sealed lid. The contents within looked like shimmering purple jam to Victor. “This one, if consumed, will remain potent for nearly an hour and will mend anything shy of a severed head. Caution, though,

warrior, when I say 'remain potent,' I mean it will lay dormant, ready to heal you—it will only do so for a short while, as the Energy is drained away from each wound mended.”

“How much?”

“Twelve-thousand beads. I would also consider trading it for Coloss prize tokens.”

“That’s impressive, but I’ll need to think about it. Do you have anything in between?” Victor eyed the potions she’d skipped over.

“Yes, of course. These two are both quite powerful and capable of healing many dire injuries. The white-waxed jar contains a potion that will remain potent for nearly an hour, and the blue-waxed jar has similar healing properties but will only last in your system for around ten minutes—it’s a great deal less expensive.”

“What are their prices?” Victor frowned, thinking about how much he wanted to spend on consumables.

“Two thousand for the white, five hundred for the blue.”

“I’ll buy . . . four of the blue ones.” Victor shrugged. He’d rarely been in a fight that lasted longer than ten minutes; he supposed it would be nice to be able to chug a potion and not worry about injuries for an hour, but Coloss had a lot of interesting things for sale, and he didn’t want to blow all his money in one place.

“And would you like some poison immunity tinctures in case you face such a wyrm?” Shousa scooped up the potions Victor had rejected and returned them to the shelves, picking up three more of the blue-waxed jars in the process.

“How much are they?”

“They’re each one thousand beads but will protect you for more than an hour.”

Victor thought about it—he wasn’t sure, not even fifty percent, if he had to put a number on it, what he’d be hunting, but he figured it wouldn’t hurt to have one on hand. Frowning, he thought about Valla and said, “I’ll buy two.”

“So . . . four thousand beads? Sound right?”

“No . . . oh, for the regeneration potions, too. Yeah. Hey, you know how you’re making a tincture that will, supposedly, improve my strength and vitality? Do you sell more things like that? Permanent boosts?”

“I do, though you have to be careful—there are diminishing returns based on an individual’s tolerance. Have you used such things before?”

“Never . . .” Victor shrugged; he hadn’t even known they existed prior to seeing the award listed on the arena flyer.

“Then you’ll likely gain a large boost from the tincture you’re paying me to create.” She paused, and Victor could see she was battling with some inner dilemma. She opened her mouth two or three times to start speaking and finally said, “I’ll tell you this—I don’t have anything that potent in stock, and should you use one of my lesser tinctures, it may dull the effect. I’d wait until you’ve consumed your prize before going down that road.”

“Well, thanks for your honesty Shouza. You’ve earned some loyalty from me as a customer.” Victor smiled, and Shouza returned the gesture, her rosy lips pulling back from surprisingly crooked but white teeth.

“Good! Here, let me get your poison resistance drops.” She turned and walked further back through her stock, and Victor pulled out a sack of beads. “Hey, do you have one of those counting things? I mean, for beads?”

“Yes,” Shouza said, returning with two tiny, dark-green vials. “Just tilt these into your mouth, hold the liquid under your tongue as long as possible, and you’ll have the best results.”

“Right, thanks,” Victor said, putting them and the regeneration potions into his storage ring. Shouza used a magical rod to count out his payment.

“Hey, I have a few old potions and things that have been gathering dust in my storage ring. Mind looking at them for me?”

“Sure! I love seeing treasures and mysterious mixtures!” She leaned forward with a new gleam in her eyes.

“Okay, um,” Victor dug around in his ring and produced a leather bandolier holding five green flasks—he honestly couldn’t remember where he’d gotten it. “Here,” he said, laying it before her. Shouza plucked out one of the vials and popped the cork, lifting it to her nose and nodding.

“As I suspected—poison. Not a particularly strong one, either. Still, if one were to consume this or coat a blade with it, it would make someone with a rather low vitality quite ill.”

“Oh,” Victor nodded, then took the bandolier back and slipped it into his ring. “One more,” he said, then he took out the large, wax-sealed jar of, what he’d always assumed, was blood that he’d looted from the ghoulish champion so many months ago in the dungeon by Greatbone Mine.

“This is more special!” Shouza said, leaning close and sniffing at the seal. “I can read its Energy density from here. This . . . I’d need to run some tests on this,

but I think it's meant to be consumed and will be quite beneficial; this may be an item like we were just speaking about, something that will boost an attribute or two."

"If I leave it with you, will you identify it?"

"I will. Depending on what I find out, there will be a fee." She grinned, unashamed.

Victor laughed, then turned to look out the window, wondering how long he had to wait for Tronk. He was surprised to see the giant already there, sitting on the stoop, too large to come through the door easily. "Sounds fair enough. I guess I'm off—I'll see you in a few days."

"Glad to have met you, Victor. Your ingredients are in good hands; I'll ensure you have great results; just remember to recommend me to your friends."

"Oh, I will. Thanks again." Victor moved to the door; a tiny voice in the back of his head wondered if he was being stupid, leaving his prizes with a complete stranger. Still, the rational part of his brain reminded him that Tronk had recommended the shop and that he knew where to find Shouza should she betray his trust. He stepped into the warm, slightly humid air and clapped Tronk on his massive shoulder—the giant had eschewed his plate armor and wore a thick, well-worn, and scarred leather jerkin instead. "Ready, boss?"

"Yar," the giant rumbled, clambering to his feet. "Got what ya needed?"

"Yep, she seemed pretty cool." He saw Tronk's blank expression and added, "She was nice and seemed to know what she was doing."

"Mmhmm." Tronk nodded, then posed a question, "What kinds of magic items you want? Gotta think of the best place to take ya."

"Well, I need help with a magical item that stopped working—an amulet with a spirit inside it. Other than that, I'm kinda just wanting to shop around. I'd say take me to the best artificer you know to start with."

"Right," Tronk nodded and started walking, taking the opposite direction from where he'd led Valla. "Back to the citadel—Fough works for the warlord, knows the most."

"Shit, really? Should've started there."

"Yar. Next time I talk to you more before we leave." With those simple words, Tronk picked up his pace and began overtaking other pedestrians. Victor followed in his wake, easily keeping up, though his legs were still a good deal shorter than the giant's. While they made their way through the city, Victor's

mind wandered to his experience the night before, to his conversation with Khul Bach.

He wanted to get some answer for the ancient spirit right away, but he'd been putting off these basic necessities and wanted to honor his promise to Valla; they'd agreed on how this day would go. He figured, if he finished early enough, he could ask Tronk to take him to see Black that evening. Maybe he could get a few answers before he left on his monster hunt.

"Tronk!" a high-pitched voice shouted from above, disrupting Victor's musings. He looked up, as did the giant, to see a female Degh leaning out of a window, two stories up, in the tall, narrow building they were passing by. "Tronk! Where are you going? I haven't seen you down at the Red Harpy for days!"

"Ugh," Tronk grunted, stopping and holding a hand out to indicate Victor should pause too. He looked around, a slight frown on his face, as though he was trying to see who might be watching this exchange, but then he cupped a hand to his mouth and hollered, "Hi, Bell! Been busy. Not much time fer drinks. Maybe later tonight." He shrugged and turned to leave, but Bell—Victor couldn't believe he'd finally met someone with a name that wouldn't be weird on Earth—wasn't having it.

"Wait, Tronk! I'll walk with you."

"Nar!" Tronk said, turning back to the window, but it was too late; the giantess had already slipped away. "Balls . . ." the giant grumbled.

"What's the story?" Victor asked, amused at the giant's discomfort.

"No story. Bell's a friend, but she talks too . . ."

"Tronk! I'm here," Bell announced, slamming the door to the building open and bounding down the steps. She was a giant, no doubt about it, taller than Victor by a head, but she was a good deal shorter than Tronk and significantly more lean. She wore tight leather pants, high boots, and a velvety green vest that showed off her bracelet-covered, swarthy arms. As she strode past Victor to squeeze Tronk into a hug, Victor saw that she had curly, coppery hair pulled into a ponytail and bright green eyes that twinkled with mischief.

"Ugh, Bell! Not in the street! I'm a Fist!" Tronk's cheeks had reddened, and he looked, for all the world, like a little kid embarrassed by his mother's affections. He finally extricated himself and started walking, clearly flustered, and only looked back for Victor after several steps. "I gotta take Victor somewhere. Come with me if ya want," he grunted.

"Victor?" Bell asked, turning, for the first time, toward Tronk's charge.

"Yar, he's important to the warlord, and some folks wanna smash 'im."

“Victor! From the arena!” Bell held out a hand, and Victor smiled, reaching out to shake it. “I knew Tronk must be busy with something important—no way he’d avoid me for days and days without a good reason!”

“I was wi’ ya two nights ago, Bell!” Tronk groused, resuming his stomping progress toward the keep. Victor followed along, and Bell walked beside them, a little in front of Victor and a little behind Tronk.

“Did Tronk tell you about me? I bet he couldn’t stop mentioning me!”

“Uh, well, I haven’t had a lot of time to speak with Tronk . . .”

“Oh really? Well, I’m sure he’ll tell you all about me next time you have a bit of a break. Where are we going, fellas?”

“Ta see Fough,” Tronk muttered.

“Fough? Fough the Artificer?”

“Yar.”

“Oh, well, I’ll wait outside. He’s a bit much for me.”

“Yar. Just Victor will go in. You and me can talk while we wait.”

“I knew you missed me!” Bell quickened her next two steps to catch up to Tronk and reached to take his hand. The giant groaned and shook his hand a few times, but there was no helping it—Bell’s grip must have been secure. Victor smiled, amused, then a weird feeling hit him, and he suddenly experienced an almost violent wave of nostalgia, a feeling he’d not experienced much in his young life. He thought about Marcy and about Chandri; he thought about Teil and even Thayla, and he suddenly felt very alone.

He looked down at himself and sighed, shaking his head. Even if he wanted to go back to Chandri, how could he? She’d joked about his size when he was a full foot shorter and a lot smaller. He knew it was a dumb thought—people of all sorts of different sizes got together, but he couldn’t help how his mind jumped to irrational conclusions, couldn’t help his feelings. “You’re being stupid, Victor,” he muttered, reaching up to furiously scrub at his short hair, trying to shake the feeling off.

He looked around, taking in the wild variations in the peoples of Coloss—the giant Degh, the Vesh, the Yazzians, the Tong-pan. He’d seen a dragon lady, and he’d seen people on Fanwath of all sorts of sizes and shapes—Lam was huge for a Ghelli! As far as he knew, there were thousands of worlds he could visit with ten thousand different types of people. Who was he to worry about being a little bigger than the people he cared about? Victor nodded, happy to see the citadel coming into view, and decided to quit worrying about things he couldn’t control.