

Souls Of Horror  
Chapter One: The Beginning

“And that’s how you give the gift of homemade chocolate chip-” Don would start off, holding a tray of cookies. “Get those brownies out of here, god dammit!”

“What are you talking about? You asked me to bring them, Don!” Shouted a confused Grif. He had just entered the kitchen when Don yelled at him.

“I know, I know! I was just kidding! I was um...I was just referencing something...”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about, man. But regardless, I have the brownies. It’s kind of early to be doing this, don’t you think?” Setting the brownies on the table, Grif turned and looked at the mawile putting the cookies next to them.

“Nope! It’s sort of a tradition at this point. It’s been going on for years and years!” Don rushed back and began seasoning some soup, occasionally stirring it.

“How many years exactly?” Leaning against the kitchen table, Grif would watch his friend go at it and cook more food.

“Three...! Not consecutively, but three years!” Don then proceeded to put a tray of bread rolls in the oven.

“I don’t think it works that way, but anyway...what’s all the food for, anyway?” Grif asked, picking up a cookie.

“Oh, whenever there’s a new dungeon that forms, we all celebrate! You know, once we guild members get news regarding the new dungeon. It’s for later, so put that cookie down.”

Eyes wide, Grif looked down at the cookie he took a bite out of. “Uhm...I don’t think you want this one back...aha...”

“It’s fine, it’s fine, but don’t touch any more until later.” Don would say, slowly turning his back to focus on the soup.

“Mm...this is really good...! I forgot how good your desserts were....” Grif said, using a paper towel to dust his claws off. “Even better because they’re freshly made...better than anything you’d get from a store!”

“Haha, yeah! So why did you bring store bought brownies?” Don would tease, waving the ladle at Grif.

"Because you ASKED me to!" Grif held his arms out, still falling for the bait Don was setting him up with.

"Can you two PLEASE keep it down? It's hard to enjoy the morning when you're both louder than P.A.U.L." Doran would announce, walking into the kitchen. "Huh. Smells like your mom's cooking, Grif."

"Well, that's a compliment to my mom, then! I know Don's proud of his cooking, so I'll let my mom know you really loved the New Year's dinner!" Grif would say, sitting at the table.

"So...Don. Why are you cooking dinner instead of breakfast?" Doran asked, sitting next to Grif.

"Riiight...you're still our newest member...with Grif, that is. But in short, we do this whenever there's a new dungeon that nobody's heard of. Because in this case, we're sure we've witnessed the first in a while to just...form. So when Kojo's back from exploring the dungeon, we'll all celebrate and party hard! Best part is, guild's closed for the next day so we can all just relax! Izzy's very fond of giving us a well deserved break when we work hard!"

"Oh wait, for real?! Hah, nice! Well, I can spend tomorrow talking with my parents!" Grif's expression got more giddy, doing a little fist pump in the air.

"Huh. Alright then. Free day tomorrow, then. That's fine by me. Yesterday's mission wore me out anyway. So then...what do we do today?" Doran looked at Don, a newfound curiosity taking over.

"Oh, you all do your normal tasks. But...Doran, could you do me a favor and take over sentry duty for the day? I'll be cooking all day long, so...it would be a nice gesture. It makes your day easy, honestly. Plus, you can spend your time drawing or reading!"

Don was grinning at Doran, moving on to making pasta for dinner.

"Ugh...fine. I'll do sentry duty, but only because I don't have to do much. You know I hate doing sentry duty."

"Yes, thank you! You did great last time, but you'll still get rewarded at the end of the day! I'll make sweet tea too!"

"That makes all the difference. I'll even be glad to do it for some sweet tea." Doran was now holding Don to that promise, he was already excited to get more of that delicious and cold nectar. He might have a problem. Or maybe it's just because he's a bug.

"Where's the others? They're usually up at this time..." Grif noted, looking towards the doorway.

“Waiting for someone to say we were late!” Amara said with a smile, coming in. She looked tired, but satisfied. “I barely got much sleep, but I got the painting done...you can see it in the right ear tower...”

“Yeah, I don’t think you’re going to function well today. You should go get some sleep. Plus, it’s hot in the kitchen, you’ll be better off in your room. I’ll bring up some breakfast for you soon. I’ll tell the guildmaster you’re too tired to see Kojo off.” Don had approached her, gently putting a hand on her side. He began walking her back towards the elevator, but the tired amaura bumped into a wall before properly walking through the entryway.

It was this time Kojo entered the kitchen, looking as dead as Amara was. “Good morning, everyone.”

“Dude, are you okay? You’re looking like a zombie.” Grif would point out, a bit worried.

“Yes, I simply had trouble falling asleep. I’ll be alright, though. Nothing a coffee can’t fix. I’ll just see myself at Asmos’s place before I head off to the dungeon. I’m expecting to meet one of the authorities with me, so they’ll help me if I’m...lacking in skills today. By the way, it smells wonderful, Don. Great cooking as usual, kid.”

“Where are the guildmaster and Owen...?” Doran had turned to face Kojo, sipping water.

“They’re still discussing things about this new dungeon...I think they’re almost finished, though.” Replied Kojo, looking down at the floor with eyes half closed.

“Are you sure you can explore a dungeon like this, Kojo?” Don asked him, concern in his voice. “You’re never this exhausted in the morning.”

“Yes, I can still carry myself just fine. I appreciate the concern, but I’ve been more tired from an enemy’s Sleep Powder than a bad night’s rest.

The four continued to hang around the kitchen, engaging in small talk. It wasn’t too long before Izzy and Owen finally entered the kitchen for breakfast.

“Good morning, everyone! Well, everyone besides Amara! Where is she, anyway?” Izzy would ask, looking around the kitchen for her. “Is she hiding behind the chair?”

“Um..actually, she can’t make it right now. She spent all night painting, so she’s quite tired. I hope you can forgive her absence, guildmaster...” Don said, back to adding ingredients to the soup.

“Hmm...yeah, I can forgive this. But anyway, it’s time for the moment you’ve all been waiting for! We’ve finally decided who’s going to check out the new dungeon!” Izzy was making a fanfare noise with her mouth, while Owen cleared his throat to speak.

“Um...usually, we’d pick Kojo for this...but after a lot of talking...we decided that we’d give him a break for once. Y-You know...new dungeons can be daunting to explore...that, and you’ve been working really hard for a while...so Kojo, you can have the day off!” Owen would say, smiling at him.

Kojo looked back in confusion, but nodded his head anyway. “Yes, I understand. Don’t worry, I fully respect your decisions. Thank you regardless, Izzy and Owen. But if not me...then who’s going to see this new dungeon?”

“That would be...um...G-Grif. You’re the one who will be scouting this new dungeon. We’ve seen how great you are at exploring, so we believe you’re the best pick for the job. T-This time, though.”

“Huh...neat...but what about Doran? He’s also pretty good at exploring...he’s my partner, after all...” Grif said, not wanting Doran to be upset with the choice.

“Nope. I literally don’t mind. Not feeling up to it. Besides, sentry duty.” Doran replied, carefully patting Grif in the quills. “Don’t worry about my feelings. I didn’t get chosen. Big deal.”

“Well...congrats, Grif. You’re going to be seeing a new dungeon all on your own! Bring back a souvenir, won’t you?” Don would joke, chuckling.

“Yes, do well. You’ll be fine, Grif. You won’t be alone for this, either. You’ll have a member of the Jarask police force with you, because they too have to log the dungeon down. Make sure you eat fast, they’ll be waiting for you. Now then...take care everyone. Because I’m not doing anything, I’ll sleep in today.” Kojo walked off, going straight to his room to sleep more.

“Think you can handle the job? Think you got what it takes?” Izzy would say, playfully punching Grif. She then whiffed one and sort of cut herself with one of Grif’s spines. “Hahaha, ouch!”

“I-Izzy, please be more careful...!” Owen said, immediately slithering over to see her hand. “O-Okay...it’s a minor cut...you’ll o-only bleed a little. You know sandslash spines are sharp...!”

“Owen, relax...I’m not going to need emergency care or anything...you’re worrying too much. Come on, we have work to do today! Lots of paperwork to be done today!” With a tender hug, Izzy walked off.

Owen, now as calm as ever, chuckled. “Haha...you’re right...this is nothing...! Um..Grif, you should get going now...I hope you had breakfast...but it’s about time for you to make your way to the dungeon. I’ve marked the location on your map.”

Grif regret not eating anything while he was here, but it’d all be worth it for a big dinner tonight. He could do without breakfast for once.

“Alright. I’ll get going now. I’ll see you all later, everyone!” Grif said, waving goodbye as he looked back at everyone. He bumped into the doorway, earning a few snickers from his friends. He turned his head around, making sure he wasn’t bumping into anything else.

Everyone else smiled and waved Grif goodbye, watching him disappear in the elevator.

Grif could feel his heart racing, pounding even. He’s only been a part of the guild for a year now, and he was getting a chance to explore a brand new dungeon. This was something to write home about. As a matter of fact, he’d write a letter tonight. But now, he’d just have to focus on his job for the day.

Once he made his way out of the guild, Grif grabbed his map and studied it once more. Looking at the direction of the marker placed there, he would go through Isterio and arrive at the town border.

“H-Hey...wait up...!” A voice called out to him, causing him to turn around and see who it was. It was Penny, the town’s shopkeeper. A purrlain, walking up to Grif and holding up a box.

“Hm? Oh, good morning, Penny! What’s this you have here? A little wooden box?” Grif asked, grabbing it from Penny’s paws.

“Yep! It’s what we in the industry call a treasure box. I was hoping you’d be interested in taking it? No cost, either! So you’ve gotta take it!” He held it up higher, the small red box covering Penny’s view.

“Whaaaaaat? You’re trying to give me something for FREE? What’s up with that? Is this a trick or something?” Grif had put his hands on his hips, leaning forwards with a skeptical look on his face.

“H-Haha...my friend, I promise you this is no trick! It’s just a cute little box! I figure it’s a nice gesture between friends~! Think nothing of it! It’s yours, Grif! Might even help you with where you’re going! Where are you going?”

Grif took the box, inspecting it. It was rather light, but it was firm. A quick knock would sound like a hollow dink, meaning it was empty. The front had a silver latch to it, no keyhole. “I’m actually on official guild business, Penny. Did you see that large light last night? I’ve been sent to investigate that.”

“Ah, I see, I see! My friend, you’re definitely going to do the job right!” Purred Penny, pressing his paws together.

“No, seriously. Why did you give me this box?” Grif prodded at Penny again, still skeptical of his motives. “Is this one of your little scams, little man?”

“Grif, I’m going to give it to you straight! From one friend to another! I ordered too many of them, and you know the laws of supply and demand! So I’ve been giving them to every patron I see! It’s a nice little box, could hold something even nicer!” Penny’s expression had a bit of a forced grin, but Grif knew it’s because he had lost money on this order.

With a sigh, Grif put the box in the team tool bag. “Alright, thank you for the treasure box, Penny. It’s a nice looking box, too. I’m in a hurry, so I can’t stick around anymore. Good luck with getting rid of your stock!” And with that, he ran off once more to get to his destination.

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Once Grif approached the area where the new dungeon was supposed to be, he noted how...warm it was. The grass around the area becomes dirt in a 30 foot radius from the cave, which was also perfectly circular. Grif thought it a bit strange, but he didn’t dwell on it too much once he heard another voice calling out to him. A gourageist was approaching him, wearing a band around one of their arms. Yep, it bore the Jarask mark, the symbol of the police force. They were taller than Grif, a bit intimidating for him.

“Ah, there you are. I was wondering if I had gotten here late. You’re with the guild, right? I can see the badge you all wear, so you’re not just some random citizen. I’m Cass. I’ll be the one exploring this new dungeon with you.” She smiled, holding a hand tendril out for Grif.

“Ah, I hope I didn’t make you wait! I wasn’t sure if I was too slow, but I’m glad I’m in the right place! I’m Grif, by the way. Nice to meet you!” He took her hand, properly shaking it. “I look forward to working with you today, Cass!”

“That’s the attitude I wanna see today! Now then...I must warn you, a dungeon that appears out of nowhere usually has all sorts of wild pokemon crawling all over it. No telling how strong they’ll be, so let’s be careful, alright?” She led the way inside, Grif quickly following after.

The inside of the cave was odd, Grif thought. It was even warmer once he entered the first floor. Maybe it had to do with the flames that lit the walls, but that was even stranger. It hasn’t even been a full day and the cave was already lit. The walls were an eerie purple, but that might just be the fire illuminating the interior.

“Grif, it’s a bit strange...this floor is a straight and narrow pathway to the next set of stairs. It’s...not unheard of...but the chance of this happening is quite low. Not a single pokemon or item here. I suppose this will make the job slightly easier.”

“I was thinking it was a bit weird, but this isn’t my area of expertise. This is just the first floor, after all.”

The second floor came, and it was the end of the dungeon.

“What...? It’s just...an empty room. No monster house, either...this is weird...what do we even do about this?” Grif asked, turning around to face Cass.

“It can’t be this easy. I’ve seen a dungeon like this before. I’m going to check the walls. Might be a hidden switch or something.” She’d say, going along the walls and carefully inspecting them. She felt along the walls, trying to feel for a button.

Grif chose to do the same, but on the opposite wall. He had no idea if he’d find anything, but it was still worth a try. The walls were rather warm, which was incredibly off-putting to him. “Hey, Cass. Can you...feel how warm the walls are? The stone isn’t cold or anything. It’s...like it’s a heat rock.”

“No...actually. I can’t. My hands aren’t exactly made of flesh and blood. No nerves to feel. But if you’re saying this, I feel it’s important to log it down.” Taking out a small pocketbook, Cass began etching some notes down for the chief to view later.

“Huh...? Oh! There’s markings imprinted in the walls here. I can’t read them, but maybe you have knowledge on them? It almost looks like a language, but I...did not study enough in school. Kinda sucks it came back to bite me in the ass, but it’s my own fault. Had no idea it’d actually be useful for exploration stuff.”

Stepping aside for Cass to take a look, Grif closed his eyes to think about the lessons he had when he was still in school. Cass carefully inspected the imprints, nodding her head. “Ah...don’t sweat over it, kid. Be grateful one of us paid attention in school. Although, it may take a few minutes for me to decipher. It looks like Unown to me.”

“Ah! That’s right! Those old pokemon that look like letters! I only remember that much, but I’m sure I can take more time to learn about it when I get back to the guild. Kojo would’ve read this out for sure!” Grif awkwardly grinned, taking a look around him. The cave was still a cave.

“You wouldn’t be the first kid that struggled to pay attention in school. At least you graduated! That’s still something to be happy about. I’ve had friends who couldn’t bother doing their work, and they’ve ended up worse. They’re doing fine now, but when we were your age, I recall their parents having a fit. You’re a smart kid, I’ve heard. You just haven’t shown the world yet.”

“T-That’s actually refreshing to hear. All my life, I’ve been pressured to do my best and get good marks. But I found it’s not my style to sit and listen to the teacher yap about things. It’s suffocating! I need hands-on learning! And this guild is helping me learn a lot more than that old school ever could! So...I’m sure I’ll be just fine! Thanks, Cass...I really needed to hear that.” Grif began feeling a bit mushy inside, but he didn’t think too much on it. The mission comes first.

“Like I said, kid. You’re smart. You’re doing the best you can. Now then...I’ve translated the Unown. It says here...*‘Surrender yourself, and you will be free’*. Not...really sure what that means.” Cass said, turning around to face Grif.

“Surrender yourself, and you’ll be free? Sounds...oxymoronic. You’re a cop, you get what I mean, right?” Grif said, gently elbowing Cass on the side.

With a ghoulish laugh, Cass wiped away a small tear. “Hey, that was a good one. Now we should-”

Before Cass could finish her sentence, the ground began rumbling violently.

“W-What?! An earthquake?! C-Cass, what do we do?” Grif asked, trying to keep his balance.

“Grab a hold of my hand! We’re getting out of here before it caves in on us!” Cass held her arm out, making sure Grif latched on tight. Once he was secure, she began to book it towards the cave entrance.

Just as the duo made it out, the cave crumbled behind them. Turning around, Cass and Grif watched the dungeon swallow itself, making it look as if there was never a dungeon. The pair stared at it, watching it rebuild itself. Rock pieces reconnecting, fusing seamlessly as if it never collapsed from the start.

“I’ve...never seen a dungeon do this before. Typically, the interior shifts, always giving new rooms and pathways. But never the exterior. Interesting! I’ve got to write this down as well!” Cass began frantically jotting notes down, more detailed than before.

“Is...is it safe to go back inside? I don’t want to risk getting caved in. I mean...I can dig, but that’d be risky too. An earthquake would definitely hurt me. But things look safe enough. What’s your call, Cass?” Grif had hopped down, now standing by her side. He looked up towards her, uncertain.

“We aren’t sure what caused it, but...something tells me the cave itself is inviting us back inside. The walls were warm, it’s like it’s...alive. But we have a job to do. Exploring the cave. Let’s finish this job, Grif. And then we get the heck out of here.”

Grif took a step towards the entrance, a little nervous. But he was intrigued by what else the cave could do. Against their better judgement, the pair entered the cave once more and made their way through the long and narrow hall.

Once they got to the second floor, the room was far different. It was rather dark, only illuminated on the far end by a single flame.

“The interior’s changed as well...but only the second floor. It’s...difficult to make anything out in

this darkness, but I think it's worth exploring regardless." Cass would say, slowly floating past the room, going to the far end.

Grif followed, ready to book it if another earthquake were to happen. But it never happened. The air was different this time, although he couldn't quite explain how.

On the far end of the room lay a stone pedestal, a figure of Arceus standing on top. Black and glassy, the figure seemed to be made out of obsidian. The base of the statue bore a single amulet. Thin gilded chains, with a large purple gem embedded inside it. A rather smooth surface, almost like a pearl. It beckoned them both, almost calling their names.

"This is...creepy. Kid, the lights only illuminate this statue. It's Arceus, the god of all pokemon. And...a strange amulet. And...on closer inspection, there's more writing on the wall. Can barely make it out...but it's readable." Cass narrowed her eyes, straining to see the message on the wall.

Without thinking, Grif would tenderly pick up the amulet, holding it up to the light to get a better look at it. Strange, the fire made it seem as if there were smaller jewels inside the gem. Two red pearls, miniscule in size.

"This must be a treasure, something a dungeon would have at the end. But...we've only gone two floors." Grif said, looking back at the Arceus statue. The craftsmanship was immaculate, the amount of detail is insane.

"Hey, don't do anything without me, kid. I'm still studying the wall...all I've got so far is '*Freedom*'. There are even more words than last time..."

Grif had carefully lowered the amulet around his neck, silently waiting for something to happen. Nothing happened. "I'm just paranoid...this place gives me the creeps."

"I told you not to...whatever, it's fine. It's just a necklace. You look silly wearing it, kid." Cass had turned to see him, but turned back to focus on the wall again.

Just then, Grif felt a burning sensation wash across his body. "O-Oh my god....what is this...?"

"Kid, did you say something? You're muttering under your breath." Cass had turned once more to see Grif, then gasped in surprise.

"I-It hurts...it hurts so baaaad!" Grif cried out, collapsing to the ground.

Cass immediately rushed to his aid, helping Grif to his feet. "What happened? Are you having body spasms? Or some kind of food poisoning?"

"No...! My body feels...feels like...nnggh...it's on FIIIIIIRE!!!!" Grif yelled out, blood beginning to

leak out of his mouth and nostrils. He shuddered, gripping himself and falling backwards, only to let out a shriek that shook the room. It was much unlike his voice, deeper and powerful.

"P-Please...help me..."

"Don't w-worry, kid! I'll get help on the way immediately! I can call the chief through this device!" Pulling out a walkie talkie, Cass began requesting immediate help.

"Cass, what's going on over there?" A soft voice spoke over the radio. "What's the situation?"

"Chief, it's bad! We need medical assistance! I'm with Grif of guild Rapidscale, and he's in immense pain now! Send Morton if you have to!" Cass explained, keeping her eyes on Grif.

"Right away, Cass. He'll be there shortly!" Xander ended the connection, rushing to find Morton.

Grif slowly stood back up, then fell down again.

"D-Don't move, Grif! You'll be okay...! Just hold on a bit longer!" Cass pleaded, watching him standing up again, this time more steady. "Grif, I want you to-"

"Stop talking. I command it." Spoke Grif, in a voice that was very much not his. In the light, the amulet's gem almost seemed to be a dull gray now. A far cry from the purple hue it had mere minutes ago.

"I-I...what? Grif, are you..." Cass stammered, immediately being grabbed in the face. She panicked, the grip being like a vice.

"Didn't you hear me, mortal? Cease talking to me! I'm...concentrating."

Cass looked with terrified eyes, unable to say anything to him.

"Are...you the one who freed me? Completed the ritual and offered me this vessel? Oh, that's right. You are allowed to speak now." Releasing his grip on Cass, Grif waited for her answer.

"W-What the hell are you talking about? Grif, have you gone INSANE?! Is this a ghost type playing some sort of prank on me?? I-" She was once again cut off by the booming voice of an angry...Grif?

"You do not listen well. But that cannot be helped, I suppose. Let me give you one more chance to answer me. You have completed the ritual and summoned me back to life, have you not? You have given me this vessel to live again."

With plenty of fear in her heart, she felt she had no choice but to play along. "I haven't done any rituals...! I haven't given you a vessel either! W-Who are you? And why are you controlling Grif's body? I answered you, now you answer me!" Cass said, readying to attack.

“How impudent and disrespectful of you. But I suppose I’ll humor you this once. I am Hitachi, lord of demons. Remember me well. As for this...body I’m inhabiting...it’s all I had. I’m getting used to it, but it belongs to me now. The mortal you once knew as Grif is gone now. His soul is forfeit, and is my property now.” Grif’s body moved unnaturally, as if it was being puppeted by strings.

“Demon...this is...fairytale talk...but it can’t be real...none of this real...” Cass stammered, throwing an attack at Grif. “I’m really sorry about this, but I’ll get that ghost out of your body!

Grif’s body reacted immediately, almost teleporting behind her. “I find it foolish to attack me, mortal. I may not be used to this body, but I can defend myself just fine.” He had a tone of finality in his voice, and with a flash of purple, Grif delivered his attack.

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Morton had finally arrived, carrying medical equipment. He only made it in five minutes, and cursed himself for being slow. The charizard-lucario hybrid made his way into the dungeon, feeling how warm it was inside. He couldn’t get a hold of Cass at all, his heart racing.

Once Morton entered the second floor, he saw Cass floating there alone. Nobody else was in the room with them, he could sense it. But he couldn’t sense her aura, something was off. He stepped closer to her, turning her around to see her face in anguish. Frozen in misery.

Morton fell backwards, dropping the medical supplies and walkie talkie. The sound echoed through the cave, ultimately falling silent. Realization set in. His partner was gone, dead. His heart sank even further, and he slowly crawled to pick up his walkie talkie to radio the chief.

It was then he noticed the letters on the wall, his sharp eyesight allowing him to see it with ease. He read it, and a feeling of dread washed over him. With a gulp, Morton whimpered and radioed his boss.

On the wall, it read *‘Freedom to the world is now forfeit. I have returned at last to reclaim my proper place as this world’s king. I am god.’*