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Category: Science Fiction & Fantasy

Night Shift

Oct. 1:

Tomorrow will be my first day on shift at Arios's Grocery Store on Divine Street, "the most innovative chain of magical services ever!" At least that's what the ads say.

Instead of having AC units, Arios uses Frigus bulbs, purple flowers with powerful ice mana. Also, instead of a checkout system with registers, they use enchanted counters that automatically calculate costs. And instead of those old-fashioned 'refrigerators' that humans use, the store combines ice and time magic to keep your favorite dragon meat fresh for at least 5 millenia!

After living in the countryside for 17 years, I finally get to go to a *real* city and have a *real* job. But the part I'm most excited about is saving up to buy a *real* emerald staff! According to my calculations, this should only take... 14 months.

Tomorrow I'm gonna meet the management and I need to make a good impression because I heard they're all A-class mages. My brother's gonna cry himself to sleep every night with jealousy. He's still stuck cleaning out the Mantalon coops at 6 AM every morning.

Oct. 3:

Okay so my first shift yesterday was *horrible*. First, management didn't bother to show me around the store, so I ended up having to ask the girl who works on shift with me. Her name is Leila and she's a whiny centaur who's studying at the Academy of Mages. Then after that, I was pretty unhappy, but I thought things would get better once some people started coming in, right? Wrong. There were no customers. *Like literally zero*. The entire 1500-square foot store was deserted. The only living beings were me, Leila, and a twelve-legged spider.

I severely overestimated the night shift.

Dec. 15:

Finally something interesting happened on the night shift! I shall start from the beginning...

The fairy lights in the boutique across the street flicked off one by one. I sorted and stacked cans of preserved Didlily in Aisle 4. Leila shuffled into the storage rooms mumbling something about being "out of bellshrooms." Then a man stumbled in.

"Hello dearest, most appreciated customer, and welcome to Arios's Grocery Store, the best and friendliest shop in town. How can I help you today?" I deadpanned the mandatory greeting and glanced up.

The face of a snake stared back at me. Scales plastered a triangular head, grey eyes bulged outward like veins about to burst. The snake-man opened his mouth as his fangs gleamed.

"Ugh please— help..." The snake-man sniffled. "I was trying to do a spell that would swap my face with my pet snake, Bob, as a joke, but now it's stuck like this. And look at my poor Bobby!" He reached into his pocket and presented a snake with the face of a young man. The snake smiled, dimply face twisting into a smile as a forked tongue slipped out from its pink lips.

Choking down a gasp of horror, I mumbled, “Antidotes are in the potions aisle.”

“Thank you, sir,” the man stuttered, teary. Suddenly, Bobby the snake lunged at me, biting down on my arm with pristine white chompers. With my flesh still in its mouth, Bobby looked up at me and grinned.

“AHHHH!” I screamed.

“AHHHH!” The snake man screamed.

“AHHHH!” Bobby screamed.

Leila dashed out of Storage Area 1-B, smashing a jar of mushrooms. “What’s going on? Is that old frog from management back a- AHHHH!” She screamed.

“BOBBY! STOP!” The snake man tried to yank Bobby from my arm as I thrashed on the floor, screeching like a Mantalon. Finally, Bobby let out one last hiss and relinquished my aching appendages.

“I am so so sorry sir!” The snake-man sobbed.

“That’s okay,” I whimpered, staring at the bite marks on my forearm. “At least it was human teeth and not fangs.”

After profusely apologizing, the snake-man retreated to the potions aisle and paid with a handful of moldy coppers. As for my wound, Leila treated it with some healshrooms, but it still took an entire three days for the mark to disappear.

Seriously, I don’t get paid enough for this.

Mar. 7:

After nothing happening for five months other than management scolding us, Leila sleeping through shift after shift, and tediously planting new Frigus bulbs, I made a few extra coppers today! Here’s how it happened:

“Thief! Thief! My hushrooms!”

I started from my sleep on the store counter and glanced out the window. Mr. Tak, the owner of the Exquisite Mushroom Shoppe, was scrambling down the street, yelling at a cloaked man who was clutching a bag of mushrooms. He ran to our store, kicked open the door, causing the walls to shake, and darted towards storage room 1-C. Mr. Tak flew in right behind him, stout frame wobbling, swinging a wooden plank.

“Was that guy wearing a paper bag? Doesn’t he know that invisibility potions exist?” Leila snorted.

“LEILA! NOT FUNNY! WE NEED TO HELP!” I shouted.

Dragging Leila behind me, I flung open the storage room door just in time to see the offender drop an armful of hushrooms and jump out the window. Mr. Tak snatched up the mushrooms on his hands and knees; dust splotched all over his tweed suit.

“*What was that?*” I mouthed, but no sound came out. I tried again, but it felt like an invisible hand was shoving the words back down my throat. I fumbled to get my mana-communicator and dialed the police.

“911, what’s your emergency?” *Oh right, I can’t talk.* I silent-screamed into the phone, but no sound came out.

“...please don’t prank call us again.” *Beep.*

Mr. Tak scribbled in his purchase log: *The mushrooms stolen were “hushrooms” and they’re activated when crushed. That’s why we can’t talk. We need to ingest speakclover in order to undo the effects. Do you have any?*

I nodded, dashing to the herbs aisle, snatching clumps of speakclover and gulping it down.

Immediately, I felt a rush of words. “We can’t let him get away!” I yelled, snatching a mop and raising it above my head like a pitchfork. But Mr. Tak shook his head.

“I beg your pardon sir, but there’s nothing we can do anymore. The thief is probably long gone by now; he could have teleported or flown away, and also, I didn’t lose any merchandise. The police don’t have time for a crime as petty as attempted theft.” Mr. Tak sighed and scratched his head. “It’s kind of strange though. There are so many expensive mushrooms in my shop; I wonder why he only took hushrooms. Perhaps he has a lot of people to keep quiet. Anyway, thank you for your help. If you ever need anything, don’t hesitate to ask.”

He twisted his mustache and pressed 7 shining coppers into our hands.

Hooray for Mr. Tak and his extra pay!

Jul. 30:

Reasons the night shift at Arios’s Grocery Store on Divine Street is horrible:

1. There’s no customers.
2. We have to wear these dumpy uniforms that look like garbage bags because management is too cheap to get us real ones.
3. We’re not allowed to use our manaphones because they will “distract” us from the non-existent customers.
4. The enchanted counters keep malfunctioning so we have to calculate costs on our own.
5. The pay is low, so I’ll have to work here for another 2 years if I want to buy an emerald staff and sign up for magic school.
6. Leila is always complaining about her magical creatures study professor.
7. Leila’s a centaur, and she can pick up virtually nothing with her hooves, so I have to literally do everything .
8. Have I mentioned Leila is whiny?

There must be more to life than this.

Sept. 31:

Another dreary two months have passed on the night shift. Out of boredom, I made a chart of how many customers came each night and over a grand total of two months, we got a whopping 12 customers. Hooray. I don’t think we’ll be getting more for a while, and here’s why...

It was around 1:00 AM. I laid my head on the counter and counted the raindrops rolling down the window (yes that’s how bored I was). Leila snored in a chair by the entrance.

CRASH! The entire frame of the glass door suddenly caved in. A white creature streaked past my head like a broom-racer, toppling aisles like a pixie-bowler, wood splinters mixing with bubbling liquid. The creature rolled around on the ground, horns scraping tile, munching lettuce and kicking stray produce. Leila jumped up and screamed.

“I SWEAR I’M AWAKE PROFESSOR!”

The crinosor shrieked and pounced onto the frigus bulb pot hanging from the ceiling. It chomped down on it and the miserable creature began howling from the ice burn.

“STUPID CRINOSOR!” I screech.

Leila scrambled to the mana-communicator as I flung loaves of bread at the beast.

“AHHHH! MY BABY!” A woman screeched, appearing in the remains of the doorway. She ran to the crinosor and squeezed it, engulfing it in a cloud of highly concentrated perfume. She glared at us with eyes like flint.

“Aren’t you supposed to be employees? Why would you do this to my precious Chichi?”

“Ma’am, if it wasn’t apparent from the state of the store, your crinosor has destroyed thousands of coppers worth of our merchandise. We’ve already called Magical Creatures Contro-”

“Nonsense! We’ll see who the MCC side with when they get here!” she scowled. Chichi the crinosor snorted into her elbow. After a few minutes, a squad of wizards on sagging broomsticks darted into the store and landed in the rubble.

“Woah, what happened?” cried an officer, peeling a slab of Dinoburger from her shoe.

“A crinosor, that’s what. She owns it,” I pointed at the woman.

“How dare you! Chichi is not an ‘it!’” She blared, pelting me with floor meat.

An officer stepped forward, chanting a spell, magic forming handcuffs around her wrists. “Ma’am, you are under arrest for the illegal procurement of a crinosor, damages to property, and-”

“SHUT UP! YOU DON’T KNOW ANYTHING!” She kneed him in the stomach.

“And the assault of an MCC official now I guess,” he croaks.

“YOU PHONY! I’M GONNA PRESS CHARG-” she stopped, howl frozen on her cracked lips and spat out the hushroom that the officer stuffed into her mouth.

“Ugh, there goes another one. It seems like every week something like this happens,” the officer sighed as his subordinates carried the woman to the two-seater broom. He turned to us. “You folks go home. I’m going to ring up your management and let them know about the incident.”

“Can you tell him to give us a raise?” Leila said.

Oct. 15th:

The store is reopening in two weeks now. All of the Frigus bulbs died, all the enchanted counters were smashed, and all the conceptual magic refrigerators were broken. That’s the bad news.

The good news is: yes, we did get a raise. So I guess I have to confess: Leila isn’t totally useless and maybe the night shift isn’t so bad after all...