

# Shadoweape



THE BAND OF UNLIKELY HEROES BOOK 4

DAWN FORD



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*To my dedicated readers.  
You make all the hard work worth it.*



# CHAPTER I

~Horra~

**T**roll Queen Bearer Horra Fyd flipped a page in the large tome open in front of her. Golden sunlight poured through the floor-to-ceiling glass windows in Oddar's Grand Library, highlighting her study of bug critters' habits and defenses.

A full week had passed since the Erlking, her devious elven enemy, had cursed the fairy queen and disappeared on his kelpie to return to his elusive hiding place, leaving Horra's kingdom of Oddar adrift in uncertainty. To ease her desire to do something, Horra had thrown herself into research.

Rowan, her woodgoblin druid companion, shifted in the wooden chair beside her, his branchy crown snagging her curly red hair. His theory book on music magic, the favored tool of the evil elf, lay open before him.

Frowning, Horra untangled her hair from Rowan's limby head and smoothed the strands back into place.

He ignored her silent suffering.

“Bah, this is so boring,” bellowed Fairy Princess Glory Toppenbottom.

Horra jumped at the sudden tirade.

Glory, the third of their study group, slammed her book shut. Her wings buzzed as they fluttered, then stilled.

Rowan sent the fairy a reproachful frown, but she kept her attention on the ceiling.

Glory heaved a heavy, put-upon groan. “It’s been over a week, and we’re no closer to taking him down.”

Horra fought the urge to admonish the girl. Her protests would’ve been more believable had she been in the library for more than half an hour. Though she knew the fairy princess yearned for her mother’s healing after the queen had suffered terribly under the Erlking’s care, her moodiness was more likely due to her sister’s demanding personality and the tedium of sitting at her mother’s bedside. So much for Glory changing her ways. “Go take a break, then,” Horra muttered as she scanned the Critterology book.

After Glory had confirmed the Erlking utilized bugs and small animals for his nefarious schemes, they started searching for ways to inhibit his influence. Which meant a lot of investigation and time spent reading—not the fairy princess’s favorite activity.

At Glory’s loud sigh, Horra ground her tusks into her top lip.

“I already took three breaks today. There’s nothing to do in this forsaken place.” Glory stood, her plethora of skirts swishing with her movement. Though Horra preferred the dresses to the tattered cloak she had worn before Grendel had reversed the Erlking’s hexes, she was no fan of her gauzy replacements. Glory’s heels clacked on the library’s stone floor as she paced, her wings rigid at her back.

Each footfall against the cobbled floor was a nail hammered into Horra's brain.

Rowan cleared his throat—a despicable clackity racket that forced Glory's shoulders to her ears. "Perhaps you should join Grendel in the lab?" he suggested. "She was testing out a new device meant to catch sound on different wavelengths."

"Yeah, because that's so much more interesting," the fairy grumbled under her breath.

Glory stopped beside Horra's chair, her flowing brown hair gleaming in the full afternoon light. Though not as beautiful as she once was, the spells and potions Grendel had used to heal her had returned a portion of her beauty and allowed her some use of her semi-restored wings. Not as ethereal as she once was, the fairy now possessed a more natural attractiveness, which Horra preferred over the normal sparkling perkiness.

If only Grendel could've replaced the fairy's temperamental personality as well. Horra would've paid to witness that feat. Only yesterday, she'd shot a sparkling spell at Rowan after he'd settled in to lecture her. Glitter lingered in the cracks even after the hobboblins had scrubbed it clean.

"You know Grendel's experiments are way above Glory's understanding, Rowan." Horra had found that the one thing the fairy despised was to be seen or thought of as a lesser creature. So far, the fairy hadn't caught on to Horra's manipulations, and she would take advantage of her ignorance to the fullest degree in order to save her sanity.

An ugly scoff slipped from Glory's lips. "As if. Fairies are far superior to giants in every way." Her heel scratched on the floor as she spun and headed for the doorway. "Later, losers." The echoes of her footsteps faded after she left the room.

Rowan blinked at the empty doorway before turning back to his research. He'd grown large enough that his crown

shadowed his face even in the brightness of a clear Springtide day.

Horra's stomach burbled. Unlike the druid, she had to eat regularly. Being that her head was also now aching thanks to the fairy, she needed a break as well. "Lunchtime. I'm going to head to the dining room."

"Hmm," Rowan mumbled. His branchy noggin was bent over a large informapedia. "Right, yes."

She shook her head as she strode from the library into the hallway. The smoky scent of grilled musk ox steaks tantalized her taste buds. A grin tugged at her lips.

*Crash!*

*Bang!*

*Roar!*

Glory let out a high-pitched squeal a second before a furry orange form burst through the lab, breaking the door.

Horra halted, her eyes wide.

Grendel Largeness, more beast than girl at the moment, snarled. Spit flew from her fanged mouth as it stretched into a more animalistic maw. Attached to her ears was something that looked like insect antennae. As Horra watched, Grendel grew larger.

Heart thudding in her chest, she ran toward the giantess. "Out! We've got to get you out of here." She caught Grendel by the arm, and her troll strength allowed her to yank the girl through the Hall of Monstrosity and into the throne room to the double-door castle entry.

Destroyed by Fairy Princess Misty Toppenbottom after the Erlking's last attack, the doorway remained a gaping hole, open and unimpeded. Horra shoved the giantess toward the crumbling opening.

Grendel growled and whined, the arm beneath Horra's claw bulging enough for the seams of her tunic to split apart.

They reached the doorway before Grendel grew too large. Her head struck the tall doorjamb, loosening some remaining blocks. Debris rained upon on them both.

The giant girl wrenched her arm free. Wild-eyed, she ran toward the trees, the strange gadgets in her ears still humming. In a few strides, the giant girl entered the forest on the side of the castle's northern edge before disappearing from sight. Trees trembled with the girl's movement as she tore through the expanse. In moments, silence fell again.

Horra stood staring after her, panting. It was difficult to drag a giant around, and the effort had cost her. Her claws trembled, both from shock and from the energy she'd spent.

Glory rushed to her side, her petite mouth hanging open. Her wings flitted in agitated jerks.

Horra turned to face the fairy. "What did you do to her?"

Shock crossed the fairy's face, and her wings stilled. "Me? I didn't do anything. I just walked into the lab and found her acting strange—quivering and mumbling." She gestured toward the space where the giant girl disappeared into the foliage. "Then she smashed everything. I'm fine, by the way."

Horra glared, still stunned by what had happened.

Rowan glided up beside them. "Master Knurl spoke to me. He said there's been a shift in the ether."

Horra took a deep, cleansing breath. "A good shift, or a bad one?"

The druid studied the tree line, furrowing his woody brows. "He didn't say."

"Well, isn't that helpful?" Glory spun and strode back to the castle. "That monstrous thing destroyed your lab, just so you know," she grumbled over her shoulder. "So don't blame that on me too."

"Was that Grendel?" Concern creased the bark on either side of Rowan's mahogany-specked eyes.

“Yeah. She—I don’t know. Changed back to a giant. I rushed to get her outside. Otherwise—” Horra mimicked an explosive motion with her claws.

He turned to face Horra. “We need to go after her.” His voice was low.

Horra shook her head. “She’s huge now. One of her steps would take us a dozen to compensate. She could be who knows where already.” She ran her claws through her frizzy hair and squeezed, easing the ache in her skull. “If what disturbed her was something minor, she’ll come back.”

“What if it isn’t?”

Horra’s heart sank for the druid. He’d grown close to Grendel. They’d shared much time together, working on the link between the Erlking and the critters the evil elf used to do his bidding. Her absence would be hard for him. “She’s a big girl and can take care of herself. She’d been doing it for quite some time before we found her.”

His eyes darkened and his body fell slack. “But the Erlking.”

She knew what he was thinking. The last time they’d faced off, the Erlking had dispatched a dryad and had critically injured Glory’s mother, the fairy queen. Stella Toppenbottom remained with the other princess, Misty, in one of the guest rooms. So far, their ministrations weren’t successful in waking the woman from her magic-induced coma.

“Grendel’s smart. The smartest creature I know besides you. If she’s not back by morning, we’ll track her down. Just like we did Glory. We’ll find her.”

Rowan lowered his head, his branches hiding his expression. He loped toward the castle.

Horra glanced skyward and prayed silently to the Creature God to supply her with strength and grant them knowledge of what caused Grendel to change back to her giant self. The

## SHADOWCAPE

Erlking was obviously up to something. And that was never good news.

*~Grendel~*

THE TREES BLURRED as Grendel ran, and the noise inside her brain made it hard to concentrate. More than once, stinging from scratches pricked her consciousness. She fell several times but ignored the pain. All she craved was to stop the racket. Even her pounding heart couldn't drown out the discordance bombarding her. And so she ran, on and on in oblivion.