Chapter 46 Bounty Hunting

As we drove south, then east, then north again, trying reach the pin on my GPS the roads were barely plowed out here, so I kicked the truck into 4x4 mode.

I began to think of my circumstances.  I had come out here just to see what this was all about, and I never thought I would run into any actual orcs.  Now I had a stranger next to me, and we would most likely win the race to engage one of the shamans.

“So, Bedelia, what brings you out here?” I asked.  Stupid question. I kicked myself mentally and rephrased, “I mean your accent doesn’t sound local.”

“I am on holiday and thought this might be fun,” she said, studying me while driving.

“Oh, how is Hogwarts these days?” I said in a knee-jerk humor quip.  I kicked myself mentally after.  You would think after all the sex with beautiful women I had had that I might be better at flirting.  The answer is nope.

“I don’t go to Hogwarts, they only accept purebloods these days,” she said seriously.

“Wait, there is an actual Hogwarts?” I blurted out.

Bedelia started laughing, “No, but the look on your face was priceless.  I go to Xavier’s school for gifted children.”

“I’m calling bullshit on that,” I said using my sister’s and friends method of calling out a lie.

“Really?  You look young and your aura is really strong.  But you don’t know any of the magic academies?” She said.

I guess I should get Iris to educate me if I was going to run into more human mages out here. I should at least have basic knowledge.  “I know there are dungeon academies and demis attend them.  I know the Magus Arcanium has their own magic school.”  I flashed back to my first sexual partner who went with the Magus Arcanium.  I wondered how Lydia was doing.  I would have to ask Iris to check on her.

Bedelia continued the conversation, “The Magus Arcanium has three….well four magic schools.  At least four good ones.  The one in Seattle, the one in Beijing, the one in London and the one in Cairo.  The one is Cairo is a rouge academy though and doesn’t answer to the Magus Arcanium.  But it was built by the Magus Arcanium some 2000 years ago.”  She stopped talking so I guessed I had to pick up the conversation.

“And which magic academy do you go to?” I asked.

“What….oh none.  I am at a dungeon delving academy located in a suburb of Paris,” she said and my thoughts went to Jade.  She had never told me where her academy was located.  Bedelia asked me, “You are a lower tier 2 mage like me.  Who trained you?  I am assuming you are not from Earth.”

Her statement held my mind reeling.  “Why do you think I am not from Earth?” I asked.

Bedelia paused, gathering her thoughts, “You are human and tier 2 at least.  There are maybe a dozen such powerful tier 2 mages our age.  I thought I knew them all.” Damn it. I should have aged myself and came here in my adult human form. Appearing as a teenager was a smart move. I thought about aging myself right now but decided to keep the ability from Bedelia since I barely knew her.

“Who are you that you would know all the powerful young mages on Earth?” My phone beeped as we arrived at the pin so I pulled over to the side of the road.  I turned off the car and Kiri slipped out of the car.

Bedelia held up her hand to pause our conversation while she did her magic scrying again.  It took less than a minute and then her eyes returned to normal.  “They are in a ravine about half a mile north.  The warriors are up on the ridge.  They may have seen our headlights.  They are just wielding clubs.”  Kiri was standing by her open door and oriented herself north.

“How is your night vision Caleb?  The moon and snow on the ground is giving the woods good light.  But orcs have decent low-light vision.”  Kiri said as she was scanning the woods and on high alert.

“I have a spell that gives me perfect sight in these conditions,” I told her as I got out of the truck.  Bedelia joined us.

Bedelia paused, “They haven’t moved.  If we bunch together, I can cast a silence spell on all of us.  That should keep the sound of crunching snow from alerting the orcs.” Kiri nodded in approval.

Kiri added, “I have a similar silence ability but it only works on me.  Caleb, you can proceed north and break the snow for Bedelia and I will move right to flank them.”  She didn’t wait for me to reply and moved off to the right.

I moved north into the two-foot snow. I was suddenly enveloped in complete silence.  Bedelia was just a few feet behind me.  My abyssal sight could clearly see Kiri’s aether core in the distance, moving like a wisp in my vision.  Moving forward with a tetsubo in each hand, I began to question my life choices.  Was I really about to kill a sapient being for money?  This had all seemed so game-like when we rushed out here.  Now it felt all too real.

I picked up a feint aether core in the distance. Even at this distance, I identified as a low tier 1 core.  Kiri was off at least 70 yards to moving quickly between the trees.  I hesitated and then drove through the snow directly at the orc warrior.  I kept scanning left and right but only noticed Kiri and the orc.  The orc didn’t move from his position but clearly oriented to face me.  His body was half covered by a tree.  That made sense as he had no ranged weapons.

I watched as Kiri moved closer from the right.  I decided to just occupy the orcs attention and let Kiri do the work. I sped up as Kiri got closer. I guessed she wasn’t planning to use her rifle to maintain silence. It didn’t matter as my rush caused the orc to bang his club on the tree, alerting his companions.

Kiri got within ten feet before the orc noticed the movement but it was too late. Kiri plunged a dagger under the orc’s chin up into its brain. It dropped instantly. I approached while scanning the opposite ridge. I could see two feint aether cores, both over 200 yards away. I turned my eyes to the dead orc and immediately vomited.

It was a naked female orc who looked to be a teenager. Her lightly tinted green skin didn’t hide the fact her body appeared almost human. If her skin was a different color and her face softer, she could pass for a tall human teenager. Her mouth had small lower tusks protruding with blood protruding from her mouth. She still twitched as her brain hadn’t quite figured out she was dead yet. Her eyes had fear plastered on them and were wide….I think that is what triggered my gastric release. The eyes looked too human.

I leaned against the tree for support after my fifth heave. Bedelia looked sick as well but held in her own bile. Kiri spoke, “It’s ok Caleb, I was sick my first time as well.” Bedelia gave me a quick look, and Kiri didn’t realize that she had revealed my real name to her. The orc women was still dying, and I could see her aether core dissolving. I tried placing my aether core over it thinking I might be able to capture some life essence.

Kiri was scanning in the distance, and I spoke, “I saw two others on the ridge, one there and there,” I pointed for Kiri. Bedelia closed her eyes.

“He is right. They both have taken cover behind rocks. The shaman is down there,” she pointed at a small natural cave. Well, Bedelia was certainly useful.

When we moved out I checked my life essence quickly. I had gathered four from the dying orc. Not a lot from the lesser tier 1 demi, but it was something. I still was having trouble with killing them but had to remember they were here to do damage to Earth, where my family lived.

Kiri asked if I wanted to take down the next one, and I shook my head no. If I could avoid killing, then I would. The silence envelope went up again, and Kiri moved to the left, circling behind the orc on our side. I was fortunate this one was face down when we got to it, Kiri having already done her work.

Examining the muscled body, it still had wide hips, which meant this one was also a female. I was tempted to turn it over and see how young it appeared but I thought I would probably just throw up again. I locked in my vortex to gather as much life essence I could from the disappearing core.

Suddenly Kiri unslung her rifle and fired two quick soft blue bolts. I looked and saw and orc on the far side tumbling down through the snow to the ravine below. “She was attempting to make her way to the shaman in the cave,” Kiri said.

I looked at Bedelia, who looked impressed at Kiri. I wasn’t going to be able to get any life essence before we got to that body, “Let me scan the area before we head to the cave. There might be a fourth orc warrior. My first scrying attempt showed three and the shaman but it could have been further out scouting.” We waited, and she came out of her trance and shook her head no.

As we made our way down the slope, I checked, and I had gained 5 life essence from the second orc. So sex was a much more efficient way for me to gather life essence. And it was much more fun and I didn’t feel so malevolent doing it. The life essence I was gathering from them also felt almost dirty, and tainted. Killing to become stronger was the premise of every computer game I played, but it felt wrong.

I needed to wrestle with this internal struggle of morality. This was my new reality. It wasn’t going to be the last time. I might even have to kill humans and demis in the future. Bedelia slipped in the snow behind me and crashed into me. My footing was good for a just a moment as she was not very heavy, but as I caught her she tried to arrest her own fall and pushed both of down.

It was about seventy feet to the bottom and I wrapped her as best I could, protecting her head from damage as we slid down the snow-covered slope. It wasn’t bad with the snow and I just hit my hip on a rock and back on a tree before reaching the bottom and released her from my embrace. We were buried in a mini avalanche of snow and I realized her silence spell had ended.

“Are you ok?” I said checking her out. She seemed to be out of breath. Slowly she stood and collapsed.

“Shit, I think I sprained or broke my ankle,” she sounded more irritated than being in actual pain. She was definitely tough. She tested it a few times before sitting down while Kiri reached us and took on overwatch duty. “Just a bad strain. I am ok, though. I am mostly colder than in actual pain.”

We both had gotten snow packed inside our clothes from the fall. Mine was already melting and I didn’t really mind the cold anyway. Bedelia was starting to shiver though. I took off my jacket and gave it to her, “Layer up. Stay here while Kiri and I finish this. I will carry you back to the truck after.”

She looked at me for a moment before saying, “I am sorry I fell. Thank you for protecting me on the way down.” Her eyes seemed to want to say something else. If she was, in fact, a tier 2 mage then she could be a potential source of aether but I was slightly worried she might be able to see or feel my vortex, so maybe I shouldn’t pursue her.

Kiri was already moving toward the cave entrance, so I left Bedelia. As we approached the entrance, it was more of a crevice than a cave. The narrow entrance had a very light flicker from deeper in. “I will go first,” I said holding up my hand.

Kiri had looked doubtfully at me. She obviously doubted my ability to actually kill a humanoid based on my reactions so far. Well, I needed to get used to being ruthless. I entered the crack in the rocks, and it immediately opened up into a wider path. A second chamber further in had a minor fire burning. I could see shadows of someone moving around. I doubted the shaman could have heard anything outside, being so far inside the cave.

I rushed forward, hoping to take the shaman unaware. As I entered the chamber, I lost myself. Two female orcs were working on drawing runic markings on the walls. Both were naked and in their teens from their appearance. They were shocked, and I was frozen. Kiri came into the chamber and fired her rifle at one of the young orcs. I got my senses about me and rushed to the other one. I raised my club to strike the well-muscled girl and, at the last second, dropped my club and tackled her.

The struggle was brief. Although she looked strong with defined muscles I was far superior in strength. I had the naked orc pinned face down while she struggled futilely. Kiri made sure her target was dead before walking over to me and picking up the club, “doesn’t look broken,” she said, inspecting it.

The orc got even more active as she saw Kiri. I had her arms pinned behind her back and my knee pressured into her lower back, pinning her to the ground. Kiri approached the orc and spoke in a language I wasn’t familiar with. The exchange went on for quite some time, and Kiri started using hand gestures as well. After twenty minutes, Kiri turned to me and spoke.

“She doesn’t know anything useful. They are just part of the clan’s culling. The weak women in their clan were no good for mating and sent here as a sacrifice. She and the other one had a spark of magic, so they got some rudimentary training. If they could set up a cold sink they might have been allowed to return to their clan,” Kiri informed me.

I examined the orc’s aether core and it was just slightly weaker than Irsiss’. So I guessed that would make the young orc around a 0.4 in strength. Maybe I could harvest her entire core….like a succubus was supposed to do. Draining it completely and killing her in the process. The idea sickened me thinking about it. Kiri interrupted my thoughts, “Do you want me to do it?” She had my tetsubo in her hand and pointed at the orc.

“No, we are taking her with us. Do you have anything to tie her up?” Kiri's eyebrows looked at me questioningly. But finally, she produced a roll of paracord and handed it to me. I tied up the orc, and she struggled but was in no position to resist. She cast an ice pike at me, but it couldn’t even penetrate my shirt and left a welt on my skin that was quickly healing.

I used my voice of her to calm her and then looked her in the eyes and charmed her. Her eyes glossed over and her resistance ended. She stood and was ready to listen to my commands and her hand were secured behind her back. She didn’t understand my words and only my intentions. She had a very athletic build and a black patch of thin public hair around her vagina. Her breasts were fist-sized and dotted with a dark green nipple and areola. Her dark black hair was long and braided. I guided her out of the cave.

Kiri said, “I will take the head off of this one, she indicated the orc she had shot.” I had completely forgotten to siphon life essence while she died.

I pushed the orc in front of me back toward Bedelia. “Don’t shoot Bedelia, this one is subdued.”

Bedelia hobbled to stand and studied the young orc, “Why?”

“I know someone who might pay good money for her. She is under my charm and restrained,”I told her.

She thought for a bit, “Well, you owe me $50,000 for her as my half. I will give you a break, though. Half price since you protected me when I fell.” She smirked. Kiri came with a bag and looked at us.

“We should get the other heads and head back. Bedelia has the other shaman group been dealt with?” Kiri asked.

Bedelia went into her trance for a good few minutes and I felt guilty that the young orc was just standing there in the snow completely naked. When she came back to us she said, “Yes and there are two groups heading this way on foot through the woods following the footprints of the orcs we killed….well mostly killed,” she eyed my prisoner.

Kiri offered, “I will collect the heads and you can carry Bedelia back to the truck.”

“Thank you Kiri. So should I just throw you over my shoulder or do you want to hang on my back?” She preferred the second option and wrapped her arms around my neck from behind and I supported under her knees in the front.

After climbing back out of the ravine on the far side which wasn’t as steep Bedelia asked, “So how strong is your charm spell?” The orc had been obediently following us. “And why are you some hot? Your body is like a furnace. Is that a spell too?” She had minty breath as she talked into my ear from my back.

I answered her, “My body heat helps me resist the cold effects. I could go naked and not feel the cold.” She pulled her hips tighter in my back. Even in the cold air I could tell the ride I was giving her was causing a reaction. I continued, “My charm is very effective. I don’t expect her to be able to break as long as I renew it.”

We got on flat terrain and she decided to talk again, “You are not even winded from carrying me out of the ravine. Are you an adept mage?” That was what Jade was. Using her aether core to enhance her physical skills.

I decided to confirm her thoughts, “I am mostly a physical mage. I have an array of enhancements for combat. I have just never been in combat with humanoids before. Have you ever delved into the transits? You never told me which dungeon academy you attended. Or how you know all the powerful young mages on Earth.”

Her thighs gripped me tighter. “I am scheduled for my first dive into the transit this summer. It costs a lot to open a portal, so only after completing our fourth year are we allowed on an expedition.” She paused, and I think she was rubbing herself into me, matching hip rotation when I stepped to hide her actions. I could smell her arousal clearly now. She continued, “The delving academy I attend is for humans only. It is sponsored by a powerful independent mage, Rincewind.”

She waited, maybe expecting me to recognize the name, but I remained quiet. She continued, “All human proteges with aether cores are required to register with the Magus Arcanium. They offer an education and a large stipend in an attempt to bring them into the fold. They don’t force you as long as you have your own means to educate yourself.” She paused but didn’t increase her self-pleasuring efforts, “My father works for the Magus Arcanium and is responsible for registering new mages. I may have logged into his computer a few times to check out the competition.”

I slowed for just a brief step, “Don’t worry, I won't tell him I found a powerful young mage out in the boonies. If I did, I would have to tell him what I was doing out here.” We reached the truck, and I let her slide off my back. Yep, she definitely enjoyed the ride. I went to the truck and got Iris’ go bag from inside, and dressed the orc teenage woman.

Bedelia chided, “Dressing up your doll? You do know they are like rabid wild dogs. You may think you tame them, but they will bite you when you least expect it.”

I guessed she was trying to figure out if I really did have a buyer. “The next owner’s problem, not yours.” I was also finding my charm ability seemed to rewire the brain a bit. That is what happened with Molly and Abigail’s father. Kiri came with the bags of heads.

“Give me some time. I want to obscure the snow tracks of your new friend. When the others hunters get here I don’t want them to realize there was a fifth orc.” She handed me a necklace, “Put this on her. It is a basic human illusion item.”

I took it and handed it to the orc, and motioned for her to put it on. She immediately changed into an extremely attractive teenage girl. She appeared 15 or 16 years old with black hair and eyes. Her larger body stretched Iris’ clothes showing a nice body outline. I stared, and I think Bedelina got jealous because she said, “Still doesn’t make her civilized.”

The truck was quite as I got the heat going and soon Kiri returned. She got in the back next to the orc girl and said, “Nice,” after looking her over. “I covered her tracks and it shounldn’t be obvious that is what I was doing.”

We drove in silence back to the Pour Advice tavern and turned in our heads, well Kiri did. She got back in the truck and handed me $130,000. Stacks of $10,000. I took ten stacks, $100,000 and handed them to Bedelia, “Will this do for your cut?”

She looked at the cash and then at me, “I guess. Do you want to exchange numbers?” She asked stuffing the cash into her coat pockets. She had at least taken off my coat once the truck interior had heated up.

“No, I’m good.” She looked a little taken aback but my refusal.

Kiri in the back volunteered, “Bedelia, I will exchange numbers with you. Knowing a powerful diviner like you is always good for business.” I watched as they exchanged numbers, and Bedelia gave me a smug look that said you are missing out. When she got out, Kiri climbed into the front seat.

I turned the truck to the road and started to head home. “Just thirty thousand left. Fifteen each?” She asked, and I nodded. She looked at the back seat in disappointment. I took my fifteen thousand from Kiri and shoved it into my jeans.

When we got back to the main road Kiri asked, “So what is your plan with….” She pointed at the orc.

“Drill her for information I guess. I am curious about the orcs and what they are doing. Where is the planet they came from? Why keep sending young orcs here to be slaughtered? What is their objective with Earth?” I rolled off some questions. Kiri seemed skeptical.

“Maybe at some of the larger sites they might have orcs with those answers but my guess is this one knows next to nothing,” she offered her opinion. I looked at the compliant human woman in my rearview mirror. She still had her hands tied behind her back.

Kiri was quiet for a while before speaking again, “So what did you do to me? I wasn’t sure but after we had sex my abilities seemed stronger. Now after this little adventure I am sure. It was all after our wrestling match.”

I shifted in my seat slightly uncomfortable. I had been worried in the back of my mind that Abigail might spill that fact that I was not human to Kiri. I had done that on my own. Now I had to decide what to tell her.