

Chapter 236: The Demon Hunter

Wicke almost immediately regretted her teleportation destination of choice. There were a few minutes of fast walking before they were immediately recognised and, the next thing she knew, more than a dozen Bounty Hunters were upon her and her friends. "Just how high is this bounty on us?" Sabine questioned, as they ran through the Capital towards the north-east harbour with numerous hunters shoving aside citizens.

Wicke snatched a new poster off an alleyway wall as they cut through to an adjacent street. "Yikes, that's a lot!" she yelled, throwing it away and slipping through a tight stack of crates. Morgause vaulted over it before Damian smashed through it, spilling straw all over himself. "What's the plan then?" Sabine questioned, slamming her shield into a Hunter that had tried to stop her and knocking her down. "Find a ship, take it, get out of here!" Wicke answered quickly, chanting to herself before soaring upwards into the air. She scanned the docks ahead before dropping back down, the wind slowing her descent. "There's a small red boat, it'll have to do. I think it had chains on it." Cinderlee reached into her jacket and retrieved a stoppered vial of some luminescent green liquid. "That sounds like my territory."

They burst out into the harbour, Bounty Hunters firing shots off at them from the rooftops whilst others charged after them with melee weapons drawn. Sabine used her body and shield to defend against the gunfire as much as she could, whilst Morgause and Damian fought on the backheel to keep the closest pursuers back. A loud clatter followed as the chains locking the boat to the harbour broke open. "Get moving!" Damian yelled, Enki, Cinderlee and Wicke leaping aboard and quickly preparing the boat to move. The small boat began to pull away, Enki tearing open the mooring lines rather than untying them. "Come on!" Wicke yelled, Damian, Sabine and Morgause surging towards the pulling away vessel before diving aboard.

"They're getting away!" came a voice from behind, but it and the other shouts quickly started to fade into the distance. Only as the Capital began to sink into the horizon did the tension present in all of them begin to fade. "What the hell was that?" Damian questioned, wincing in pain as Sabine pulled a bullet out of his arm before applying a healing potion. "I'm guessing that the Guild aren't particularly happy with our destruction of two of their Dungeons," Morgause stated, laying on the floor as she let Enki and Cinderlee tend to her wounds. "Just how high was that bounty?" Sabine questioned. Wicke's pale expression said

more than enough. "Well it seems we've got a problem," Damian stated, meeting Wicke's gaze. "But we do have an inside woman."

"Happy to help," Marisha stated, through Wicke's communicator. "What's up?" "Well, I don't suppose you've seen the new bounty issued on me and my friends?" Wicke returned, watching Damian and the others as they flicked through a series of maps. "Not the area I'm with, but hang on – I should be able to find it without much problem." It was several minutes before Wicke heard Marisha's voice again. "Ah, oh dear..." she stated somewhat bluntly. "Yeah..."

"Well, with an amount like that I'm not surprised that you're having difficulty. It's almost as bad as Jayce's in his peak, and I know you remember what it was like then. I'll do some meddling and reduce it as best as I can, but if you're destroying Dungeons then this will only grow. You've almost halved magic stone production in the New World and they're suspecting that you have something to do with the lack of sales to the Republic as well. But I'm surprised, there shouldn't be many Bounty Hunters out there that would cause problems for someone of your calibre, least of all from what I've heard from Morgana about the rest of your group. Who have you encountered? Has the Oni returned to hunting? The Willow? The Ronin?"

"None of them, thank the Gods," Wicke responded, Damian glancing her way. "I thought not. The Willow has vanished, no one has seen her in over a year, she's probably disguised herself as someone ordinary and is coasting off her assassination funds. The Ronin is teaching swordplay in a school somewhere near the Capital and the Oni owns a farm in the Keeps with a few others of his kind." Wicke couldn't help but crack a smile at the thought of the three baddest Bounty Hunters reduced to living simple lives, but her smile quickly fell. "No, we've encountered a middle-aged, if not older man, his eyes are blue and red and he wields two rapiers. I think he has a Demon – his eyes looked like Mai Lu's."

"Raido Krast."

"What?" Wicke questioned, more surprised by the speed of the answer than the answer itself. "His name is Raido Krast. He's pretty famous in the Old World but he seems to have been hired by a mercenary group in the New World." "We did see a red ship with him," she stated. There was a brief pause. "Kraken markings? That would be the Red Wake, pretty tame group as mercenaries go, but they've got some serious funds on them. Depending on your

funds you may be able to buy them out, but Raido... he's tricky – stubborn – if he's agreed to hunt you then there's little that will get in his way."

"What about his Demon? He coated his blades in blue flame," Wicke questioned, the others now looking directly towards her and listening for Marisha's response. "He's like a phoenix." The faces all fell. "Sorry, it's all I really have. I don't know if there's a limit like with Kitty, or what the requirements are, so just watch out." "Okay... thanks Marisha, stay safe," Wicke stated. A scoff followed from the other side. "Little Flame, you watch out. Trap him, pull out his Demon by giving it little choice and he should be easier to handle. Much love to you, stay safe." "Will do, and to you." Wicke looked at the crew assembled before them in the small cargo boat they had stolen. "Let's focus on getting east. There's no way he can follow us."

"Oh you have to be kidding me!" Wicke yelled, as a familiar red and black ship loomed on the horizon. "Wicke, get us out of here!" Damian called out. "I'll do my best!" she returned, stepping down towards the main deck where a large ritual circle sat carved into the wood. A faint flicker of blue light seemed to be darting through the air towards them. "Incoming!" yelled Enki, the blue light coming from a pair of flaming wings attached to Raido Krast. Wicke finished her incantation and in a flash of purple lightning they vanished, before reappearing with a large splash not too far from the Frontier. "Well this is going to be a problem," Wicke stated.

After resupplying at Last Drop utilising a series of rough disguises and false names, the group resumed their journey east. "Shouldn't we just teleport and deal with the consequences afterwards?" Damian inevitably questioned, on their third day of straight sailing. "The circle I have in the East is on land, it wouldn't be a great move to drop our new boat there. I'm also curious to see if it was coincidence or if we are actually being tracked, and just how they are travelling so quickly if they are. All information will help, no information may get us trapped and then killed." Damian grumbled away but didn't argue.

The sailing was smooth for several weeks before the seemingly inevitable red colours of the Red Wake appeared on the horizon once again. "Now that can't be a coincidence!" Wicke declared, chanting quickly and teleporting the ship once again. This time they landed in the Keeps. "Why here?" Sabine questioned, looking at the nearby castle on the shores of a large island. "This is where we made a detour to on our way north. I figured setting down extra teleportation

circles would be useful in an emergency, and well, here we are. Now we just wait, but I'm warning you now, this plan of mine isn't pretty."

It took a little longer than expected for Raido Krast, and the mercenaries he was working with, to find them, but there was no doubt amongst Damian and Wicke's group that this was the approach they needed to take. "The Demon must have some tracking properties," Morgause theorised, sitting on the edge of their boat in her armour but with her sword in its gauntlet form. "Perhaps, but it doesn't explain how they get around so quickly. They must have a mage onboard, or some kind of magic item to teleport with," Damian added, leaning in boredom against the ship's wheel. A faint flash of blue took to the air ahead of the red ship. Both Morgause and Damian readied themselves. "Let's do this."

Wicke watched the Demon Lord from above as she rode her magic carpet just below the clouds. He did exactly as she had expected, charging straight towards Morgause and Damian aboard the *Stalward* before striking the vessel rather than the occupants. The pair dove into the water, abandoning ship almost immediately before being propelled forwards towards the nearby island of Orange Spear by a waiting Enki. Safely out of harm's way but with the Demonlord in pursuit, Wicke turned her attention to the enemy ship.

Wicke crept aboard under a mirage of enchantments. The various mages onboard were too focused on the island ahead of them, where Damian and the others were engaging Raido, to notice her and the rest of the crew were busy manning weapons and stations. Wicke headed below deck, almost giddy as she swiftly hunted for her target. A grin crossed her face as she found a large runic circle carved into the floor of the main hold. "Sorry folks," she muttered, beginning to chant.

Damian spotted the flash of purple on the horizon out of the corner of his eye as the *Red Wake's* ship teleported away with Wicke aboard it. "Fall back!" he yelled, himself, Enki and Morgause swiftly turning their backs on the Bounty Hunter and rushing forwards towards a nearby treeline. "There's no hiding from me, little thieves!" he called after them, breaking into a sprint and dashing into the woods. Morgause slowed her pace, allowing Damian and Enki to push ahead, using the trees to avoid the slashes of blue flame that flew her way. Trees toppled behind her as she kept his attention upon her before leaping over a large bolder.

Predictably, he bisected the large rock, stepping through the gap he had made only to yelp as the ground gave way and he dropped into a large pit. "A trap like this won't hold me!" he yelled up, getting back to his feet and looking upwards,

SEIZE THE SEAS

only for an unbearable amount of a large viscous liquid to land upon him, sealing his arms to his sides. The walls then began to glow a bright crimson, multiple spell circles illuminating his wide eyes. "Move and we'll tear you to pieces, not even your Demon will help you survive that!" Damian threatened. "Your ship is gone, Wicke teleported it away – you're alone!" Sabine added. Raido faltered, looking at the various spell circles around him with unease. A small clay doll landed by his feet, a large purple stone embedded in its chest. "One of these circles will allow the pair of you to break your pact," Morgause stated. "Do it and you will be shown mercy, no blood has been shed yet, and no blood has to be." Several tense moments passed before Raido let out a long sigh, the clay doll then melted away before reforming into a golden bird with fiery plumage. The glow in Raido's eyes fell away, a firm pair of blue eyes looking up at the group that had trapped him. "I am beaten," he stated firmly. "I offer our surrender."

They left him stuck in the ooze for a few minutes until Wicke returned. "What did you do with them?" Sabine questioned to her, as Wicke peered into the hole at the stuck Raido and the Demon sat on his chest. "They're enjoying a nice vacation near the Frontier. I broke apart their teleportation circle so they may be there a while. What do we do with him?" she then asked the group, looking mainly towards Damian. "He's a mercenary right?" Enki questioned. The others all looked towards him. "We could employ him."

"I doubt you could afford me," came Raido's voice from the hole. Morgause presented her sword over the hole. "But perhaps we could come to some sort of arrangement," he quickly added. The eyes fell on Wicke, who simply shrugged. "Could you please get me out of this hole? It is rather difficult to negotiate when I'm trapped underground." Cinderlee stepped forwards, pouring an effervescent clear fluid that melted away the glue-like substance around Raido's body. Slowly he climbed out before kneeling in front of them with his hands up. The Demon slowly tried to edge away, but Raido grabbed his tail and pulled him back to his side. "You had to drag me down with you..." muttered the phoenix-like Demon.

"What do you know about us?" Damian asked, crouching in front of the Bounty Hunter. "Little other than that the Guild wishes for you dead after being involved with the destruction of their Dungeons," he answered honestly. Damian nodded. "Which of you was in charge of this plan?" Raido questioned, holding his finger up to interrupt Damian before he could answer. The eyes all fell on Wicke. "Beautiful, both in mind and body. Young lady, beauty such as yours is far and

few between. Please," he stated, getting down on one knee and taking her hand. "Marry me?"

Damian's face flashed red with rage and Wicke yanked her hand back, her eyes wide in surprise. "I – uh – how old- no! Absolutely not!" she quickly replied. Raido let a sigh of disappointment before his hand was swiftly taken by Cinderlee. "A gentleman at last," she said coyly. He met her scarred face and almost radioactive eyes, he raised an eyebrow - as if questioning it for a moment – before a solid throat clear refocused his attention on Morgause. "What arrangement were you thinking of – excluding marriage?" she questioned.

Raido stood to his feet and brushed off his grey military fatigue trousers, his upper body covered with a black tank top and suspenders. His arms were thin but muscular, and covered in various scars. His blue eyes were dark, stormy and almost grey, and a thick brush-like moustache covered his upper lip. "Morax and I are seeking revenge upon the man who forced us together. This may surprise-" "You've died before and come back, yeah-yeah, not our first time with Demons" Wicke interrupted. "Who and where can we find this guy?"

Raido looked down at his Demon, the bird shrugging to him. "Well, uh, I request that Morax be allowed to return to my body, on our terms. In exchange for helping me retrieve Morax's sibling from an old rival of mine, I will offer my swords and skills to your cause until you cease to have need of me. Do we have an accord?" he questioned, looking towards Wicke. She faltered, beginning to shake her head, but Damian stepped forwards and offered a hand to shake. "We accept," he interrupted, taking lead and command from Wicke. Raido shook Damian's hand, his eyes glancing briefly towards Wicke before locking firmly on Damian. "You are the leader, then?" Raido eased cautiously. Wicke opened her mouth, but decided against speaking. "Yes. Yes I am," Damian declared.

Tracking down Raido's rival was easier said than done, but after weeding out several batches of Bounty Hunters, he eventually made his move, falling for almost an identical trap that had sealed Raido's fate. "Ha-ha!" Raido boasted triumphantly from the top of the hole in the floor. "Raido!" cried Alan Corr, a rather frail-looking older man with glowing green and blue eyes. "I'll kill you all over again for this! You're a disgrace to the title of Bounty Hunter!"

"Go to hell old man! I'll never forgive you for making me marry that witch of a sister of yours!" Raido yelled down. "Now hand over Avnus and we'll let you live!" Damian and Wicke looked at each other in disbelief, shaking their heads that they had ever worried about either of the crazed old men in front of them.

“Never, I’d rather die than give her up to the likes of you!” returned Alan. Damian swore under his breath, stepping forwards to the edge of the pit. “Avnus, my brother has your King on his ship. Abandon this guy and we’ll take you to... uh-“

“Baal,” Wicke answered. Damian looked back towards her and nodded appreciatively. “Yeah, Ball,” he stated incorrectly. Wicke scowled and pushed him aside, tossing down the clay doll with a magic stone in it for the Demon to inhabit. “Your choice. We also have Belial, and supposedly he has Paimon, Byleth, Asmodeus...” The doll melted and reformed into a tiny vaguely woman-like form, with a lit candle that had melted over her pinkish, scaly skin. “Traitor!” yelled Alan as the tiny Demon clambered up the walls of the pit to freedom. “What do you want to do with him?” Damian questioned to Raido, the older man looking down at his long-term rival and ex-brother-in-law. “He’ll be fine. Good luck catching me this time you old coot!” Raido gloated, turning away from the monologue of swear words emanating from the hole towards Damian. “Well, as promised, I swear my swords and skills to you, Damian Exarga.” Damian beamed as Wicke glowered. “Welcome aboard, we’ve got a Dungeon with your name on it.”

Seize the Seas Tales: Experimentation of Body and Soul

“Are you sure this is safe?” questioned Raido, the door to his temporary accommodation locked from the inside as he lay strapped to a table with two small Demons either side of him. “Most probably,” Cinderlee answered, a loud banging coming from the door as Wicke yelled through it. “It’s suicide, stop this now! Who knows what could happen! A body is meant for one soul, sharing already puts a strain on it, two will almost certainly kill you!” Raido looked at the crazy woman in front of him and then at the blocked door. “Perhaps we should-“

Raido screamed in agony as, in almost an instant, a large tattoo of a ritual circle was printed onto his skin. “One more,” Cinderlee chided somewhat giddily. Chanting was audible through the door and Cinderlee swiftly repositioned the device on Raido’s back. This time he only let out a loud pained whimper before the doorway shattered open and Wicke stormed in. “Quickly,” Cinderlee warned the two Demons. “Don’t do it!” Wicke warned, but the two Demons lunged for the two circles on Raido’s back, the dolls melting away as they were absorbed by him. “Cinderlee you dangerous freak! You’ve killed him!” she yelled as Raido

SEIZE THE SEAS

thrashed against his bindings in agony. "Wait a moment," she responded, with a definitive lucidity that was unusual for the crazed Alchemist.

Slowly the thrashing stopped, a soft dripping of blood falling from Raido's exposed face as he lay limp on the table, but eventually his glazed over eyes blinked, the blue mixed with a luminescent green in one eye and firm red in the other. "This is... weird," he said steadily. Cinderlee spread her arms wide and grinned. "Science!" she stated proudly as Wicke shook her head in disbelief. "That was a stupid solution to an unnecessary problem. Both Morgause and Damian were willing to act as hosts, their arguing will end eventually and this was not needed!"

Cinderlee released Raido from his bindings and cautiously he got to his feet. "How do you feel?" she questioned. He paused for a moment before flicking out his arm, a waxlike substance splattered onto the floor, quickly moulding into a miniature version of himself. "I feel great!" stated the copy. Raido's main body then grew flaming wings. "Wonderful," Wicke sighed. "Now there's multiple of him." She turned and walked out of the room, shaking her head. Slowly Cinderlee stepped forwards before picking up the child-sized version of Raido. "Look dear, our first child together," she said with a grin. Raido sighed as two voices argued inside his head over space. "So it is..."