



THE HUNT IS ON



The street urchin huddled against the brick wall, pulling her undersized woollen reefer jacket close around her body to ward off the spring night's chill. She fluffed her sack of rags and papers but froze at the sound of a sharp whistle. She curled into a ball, trying to blend into the heap of garbage.

Shadowy figures prowled the street outside the tenements. They flitted from one side of the cobblestone road to the other. One advanced, then stopped and waited for another to come ahead. The eerie blue glow from their bowler top hats bobbed like will-o'-the-wisps in the narrow lane.

A teenager stopped in front of the ragamuffin and leaned down to inspect her grimy face. "You live here?"

She shook her head.

"Then scram," ordered the lanky boy as he lifted the green-tinted goggles over his eyes.

She scrambled over the pile of trash and bolted around the

corner of the brick tenement building.

Wilhelm signalled the other hunters to join him. "The street is clear."

The four members of his Demon Watch squad approached, their teslatrons raised. A dull blue aura glowed from the doughnut-shaped ends of their black blunderbuss rifles.

Margaret, a snub-nosed bruiser with crooked teeth, took a position in front of the wooden entrance to the tenement. She gently nudged the butt of her rifle against the door and it creaked open. She peered inside and waved to her squad leader.

"Dear lord, the place reeks."

The pungent stench of human waste mixed with rotting garbage and mould assaulted Wilhelm's nostrils. He strapped his teslatron over his back and drew his dynatron pistol from the holster under his leather duster. The weapon's barrel glowed from the electro-dart inside. Atop the pistol was a clip of six needle-sharp darts with glass tube bodies. "Small quarters. Switch over to dynatrons."

The squad drew their pistols. Margaret checked her clip, jamming it into place so that one dart entered the main chamber.

Wilhelm tapped one of the male hunters on the shoulder. The freckled boy jumped. The others snickered.

"Gino, stand watch. Any of the demons try to run, give them the business end of your pistol."

Gino glanced around the dark street. "You sure you want me down here? Why don't you make Albert keep watch? He's the new guy."

A lanky boy with round spectacles spit on the cobblestone street. The spittle landed inches away from Gino's boot. "That's because I'm handy in a fight."

"Ehrich never pretended to be better than me," Gino mumbled.

Wilhelm's nostrils flared. "No, he didn't. He just betrayed us."

"Okay, there is that, but I still don't think I should be left down here while Albert gets to see the action," Gino whined.

Margaret quipped. "I don't want you accidentally shooting me in the back again."

"I make one mistake, and I never live it down," Gino complained.

"One? Try more like a dozen," a pimply-faced hunter said.

"James, I saved your hide more times than I can count."

"Since when could you count," Margaret joked.

"Cut the gab," Wilhelm hissed. "We're going up."

The group of young hunters slipped into the narrow corridor with the precision of seasoned veterans. Up the creaking stairs, Margaret led the charge while James covered her ascent with his dynatron. She took a position at the top to cover the others as they climbed the stairs. Amid the filth, she detected the strong scent of cigars.

Wilhelm noticed it as well when he arrived at the top of the stairs. "Cigar makers are here," he said. "Must be a few Bohemians among the demons. Careful you don't mix the two up."

"What's the difference?" Margaret asked.

"Bohemians will complain to the newspapers," Albert quipped. "Demons won't."

Wilhelm counted six doors on each side of the corridor. He signalled Albert to take a position past the first two doors and cover the hall. Then he motioned James to watch the one opposite the apartment he was about to enter.

He lifted his foot and kicked open the flimsy wooden door. He and Margaret tried to charge in, but there wasn't enough

room for both of them in what appeared to be a closet. Margaret provided cover from the doorway as Wilhelm stepped in. He nearly recoiled from the stench of mould and body odour, but he bit his lip and surveyed the room. A wobbly table and two lopsided chairs hemmed in a pair of bodies, who had been sleeping on either side of a black valise but now were wide awake. An old man with a handlebar moustache and bulbous nose glanced from the hunters to the closed door at the other end of the closet. On the other side of the valise, a rotund bald man propped himself up on his elbows.

“Who are you? What is going on?” the old man demanded.

“Demon Watch business,” Wilhelm explained. “Show me your documents.”

The man had smooth hands for someone so old. He reached into the pocket of his grey sack-styled jacket. Wilhelm trained the barrel of his dynatron at him.

“We’re not travellers,” he said. “We’re as human as you are.”

“Are you the only ones living here? Who’s in the other room?” Wilhelm pointed the barrel of his gun at the closed door.

“You have some nerve barging in here. What gives you the right?” the bald man argued.

“This gives me the right,” Wilhelm said, waving his dynatron pistol in the bald man’s face.

The two men backed themselves along the filthy floor.

“Check the other room,” Wilhelm barked at Margaret.

“Yes, sir.” She hesitated as she surveyed the cramped area.

“Clear a path,” Wilhelm ordered the two men. “On your feet.”

“Who is your superior? I want to talk to him,” the bald man said.

The German teen shrugged. “Tell it to the wind.”

“Lower your voices,” the big-nosed man pleaded. “You’ll wake the baby.”

The two men climbed to their feet and blocked the hunter’s path to the closed door.

“She’ll wail until she wakes the entire tenement.”

“Wilhelm?” Margaret asked, searching for direction.

“You want to alert everyone to your presence?” the old man said.

Wilhelm eyed the pair, then gave the order: “Margaret, move them out of the way and check that room.”

Before she could take one step, shouts erupted from the hallway.

“Halt!” Margaret yelled. “Stand down.”

Wilhelm whirled around and peered out of the room. A mammoth creature stood in the corridor. A rhinoceros horn jutted out of his wide forehead. He dwarfed all the hunters, filling the entire width of the corridor with his thick, muscular body. His black trousers and white shirt nearly popped at the seams. The grey-skinned Dimensional lumbered toward Albert and James who raised their pistols.

Albert shouted, “Do you understand English? I said stand down.”

The titan stopped.

“Where are your documents?” Wilhelm asked, stepping into the hallway.

“I have them,” he said, reaching into his back pocket.

“Slowly,” James said, his finger twitching on the trigger of his dynatron.

The Dimensional gingerly retrieved a folded yellow paper from his trouser pocket and snapped it open. Wilhelm approached the man, flashing his bowler lamp on the paper.

“Divesh Mintari...” Wilhelm slowly sounded out the name.

“How long have you been in this dimension?”

“Two years.”

“We have reason to believe illegals are hiding in this tenement. Is there anyone else in your apartment, Divesh?”

“I live alone.”

Margaret elbowed her squad leader. “You sure about that name?”

“Why?”

“There was a newspaper article about a guy who jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge. Remember? The reporter tried to pin it on the hunters.”

“Yeah. So?”

“Well the victim’s name was Divesh Mintari.”

Wilhelm narrowed his gaze at the big man. “You sure, Margaret?”

“Yup.”

“Hold your horses! Looks like we uncovered a miracle,” Wilhelm said as he stepped right behind James and Albert. “A genuine, bona fide, resurrected man.”

“We seem to be finding a lot of them these days,” James said.

“You’re coming with us,” Albert ordered.

“I swear, the papers are mine!”

Wilhelm glared at the big man from the other end of the corridor. “How is it that you’re in possession of a dead man’s papers?”

“It is a common name in my sector.”

“You expect us to fall for that flam?” Margaret said.

Divesh pleaded, “The newspapers never get our names right. How do you know the reporter didn’t make a mistake?”

Wilhelm raised his dynatron. “Because you’re acting like a demon who’s bitten off more than he can chew.”

“I came to your sector to find a better life, and instead your kind treats me like a criminal. I’m an honest man trying to make a living so I can bring my family across. Why won’t you leave me alone?”

Wilhelm waved the pistol in the air. “Because one of your kind attacked Devil’s Island. Come along.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Take you in for questioning.”

The giant charged the group. Though massive, the Dimensional was nimble. Albert fired. The energy bolt struck the Dimensional’s abdomen. His body lit up with electrical charges. He roared in pain but remained upright. James took a shot, but to no effect. Wilhelm fired his pistol. The Dimensional howled and ran headlong at the group, lowering his horn to impale Wilhelm.

Margaret grabbed Wilhelm by the collar and hauled him back into the closet as the behemoth tackled Albert and James. He drove the two hunters down the flight of stairs. Divesh lumbered down the steps after their tumbling bodies.

“Stop him,” Wilhelm ordered.

“On it,” Margaret holstered her dynatron, unslung her teslatron rifle, and pursued the titan down the stairs. Wilhelm followed after her.

Arcs of electricity filled the air as she shot three times into the man’s broad back. Her two fellow squad members lay limp on the bottom of the stairs. James’ leg was bent at an awkward angle while Albert’s arm was covered in scrapes and bloody cuts. Only Gino stood between Divesh and freedom. Gino fired, but the Dimensional didn’t stop. He slammed Gino into the wooden door and shattered it into a thousand splinters. The unconscious boy slid into

the street.

“Enough!” barked Margaret as she stepped out of the tenement. “Surrender!” She raised her teslatron and took aim at the back of the titan’s head.

Divesh spun around. He assessed the situation and raised his hands.

“Your choice, demon. I can fry you right here and now, or you can go down on your knees and live to tell your kids about tonight.”

“I’d do what she says,” Wilhelm said, emerging from the building with his rifle aimed at the horned man. “She doesn’t like repeating herself.”

Divesh complied, lacing his fingers behind his head and shifting himself onto one knee and then the other. As Margaret covered her prisoner, Wilhelm bent over to check on Gino.

“He’s okay,” the teen said.

Margaret said, “What about Albert and James?”

Wilhelm shook his head. “Albert looks a little banged up, and James won’t be dancing any Irish jigs in the near future.”

“We need medics,” she said.

“Cuff the gorilla first. I’ll cover you.”

Margaret reached behind her back and pulled out a set of Darby leg irons and Irish 8 handcuffs. The D-shaped cuffs barely wrapped around Divesh’s thick fingers let alone his massive wrists.

“He’s too big,” she called back. “They won’t fit.”

Wilhelm waved his rifle in Divesh’s face. “Then he’s going to have to be on his best behaviour.”

“Where are you taking me?”

“Devil’s Island with the rest of the demons,” Wilhelm spat. “Move.”

The giant refused to budge. He crossed his legs and sat on the cobblestone road.

“You want another zap?”

The titan gritted his teeth. “Help! They’re going to torture me!”

Wilhelm shoved the man, but he didn’t budge. Margaret joined him. They pushed to no avail. After several moments, they gave up. A crowd of gawkers had started to gather, brought out by the sounds of the Dimensional’s shouts.

Wilhelm glanced around the narrow street. “We’re going to need some backup.”

She grimaced. “You think you can hold the fort?”

“No other choice. Don’t dawdle.”

She grunted. “I’ll be back faster than a fly can blink.”

She ran off as more residents of the nearby tenements filtered into the street. Among them were the big-nosed man and his bald companion. He swept the teslatron back and forth in front of the crowd.

“This does not concern you. Go back into your homes.”

No one complied. The cries of the titan had piqued their interest, and they weren’t about to walk away before seeing how this incident played out. Wilhelm began to break into a sweat as he paced around the Dimensional. He checked over his shoulder in case someone tried to slip behind him.

“What are you going to do with him?” the old man with the bulbous nose asked.

“Demon Watch business,” Wilhelm said. “Now all of you, move along.”

The German boy backed against the wall of a nearby tenement so that he could keep the suspect in sight and ward off the crowd. The standoff stretched on forever. Wilhelm’s finger

twitched on the trigger. He wanted to shoot, but he elected not to—at least not until he had some backup.

“Back to your homes,” Wilhelm ordered.

The crowd advanced on him. He had no choice. He fired into Divesh’s thick neck. Electricity danced up the man’s face as he howled in pain and collapsed.

“You didn’t have to do that!” the big-nosed man shouted. “He wasn’t a threat.”

Divesh moaned on the ground and rolled around, his horn scraping against the cobblestones. The crowd surged ahead. Wilhelm walked up to the big man and pointed the barrel of his rifle at the man’s face.

“You are all responsible for what happens next,” he yelled. “We intend to bring this demon in for questioning, but if you make that difficult for us, then I will have to take more forceful action. It’s all on your shoulders.”

His threat quieted the mob. A few people began to back away. Only the old man and his companion were defiant.

“This is beyond your scope,” the old man said. “What good is all this violence against an innocent traveller?”

“We’re seeking the ones responsible for the attack on Devil’s Island a few months ago. A young man, Ehrich Weisz, is a human who would be among them. Short fellow. Curly brown hair. If anyone of you know where that traitor is, give him up, and I won’t have to make this demon suffer any longer.”

“He’s a hero if he stands up to your tyranny,” Divesh said.

Wilhelm pressed the barrel of his rifle into the Dimensional’s temple. The bald man waved everyone back.

“Son, these people are scared. You don’t want to frighten them anymore. No telling what they might do out of fear.”

“Want to take his place?” Wilhelm threatened.

The bald man fell silent, but his big-nosed companion spoke

up. “There are many eyes here and half as many mouths. I’m sure one of them might whisper in the ear of a newspaper reporter that the Demon Watch is now willing to torture New Yorkers.”

Wilhelm raised an eyebrow. “We have ourselves a highfalutin’ Bohemian in our midst.”

“We are better than this, young man. You can set an example for others.”

“Do you see what he did to my hunters?” Wilhelm shot back.

“Easy there, young fella,” a new voice said. “You poke the bear, sometimes it swats back.”

A thin gentleman with a charismatic smile and intense gaze approached the group, flanked by Margaret and two squads of hunters. Thomas Edison had arrived. He wore a top hat, a frumpy tweed suit, and an opened Norfolk jacket that hung down to his thighs. A piece of flexible tubing extended from his ear to the hatband, where a gramophone horn stared out like a cyclops’ eye.

“For heaven’s sake, put the gun away,” Edison said.

Wilhelm snapped to attention. “Sir, this one has papers, but we think they are forged. He might own up to knowing something about the attack on Devil’s Island. He might have information about where Ehrich Weisz is hiding.”

“Then we will interrogate him. Not torture. Interrogate.” The commissioner then addressed the remaining gawkers. “My hunters have been overzealous in their hunt for an individual. I assure you, I will remedy this, but we cannot abide all of you on the street.”

Wilhelm waved at Divesh. “Sir, what about the prisoner? I don’t think he’s going to cooperate.”

Edison glanced at the man seated on the ground. “To

paraphrase Victor Hugo, 'If you speak, you are condemned. If you stay silent, you are damned.'"

"Then I'll be damned," Divesh said.

"We have better means of interrogation on Devil's Island. I suspect the quality of our conversation may improve under more favourable circumstances."

The squad members hauled Divesh away. He resisted every step of the way, but the hunters outnumbered and overwhelmed him.

Edison turned to the crowd, reaching into his jacket and pulling out a large rolled piece of paper. He unfurled it before everyone, revealing a sketch of a curly-haired teen with an anchor nose. "We are searching for this young man. If you come forward with any information, there is a reward. If you have information and fail to come forward, then I wouldn't want to be you."

He handed the poster to a hunter, who affixed it to a nearby brick wall.

"Now unless you want to join the big fellow on Devil's Island, I suggest you all go home and give some thought to the whereabouts of the fugitive."

This was enough to send the bystanders on their way.

Back in the tenement, the bald man knocked on the closed door at the back of the closet.

"It's safe," he announced. "Amina. Ning Shu. You can come out."

The old man took off his spectacles and rubbed his eyes. An ebony girl with a purple corset over a linen shirt emerged from the other room. Her skirt was cut up both sides of her legs to reveal thigh-high boots. Behind her followed a red-skinned woman wearing a wide-sleeved emerald robe that hid her hands.

The old man ripped off his disguise.

The bald man said. "The hunters will come back soon enough."

"We'll need to find another haven," Ning Shu declared.

"You're right." The bald man massaged his scalp. "Anyone have any ideas? Amina?"

The ebony girl stroked her chin. "Are you sure we need to move? We're running out of places to hide."

"I heard the hunters," the bald man said. "They aren't going to stop until they find Ehrich Weisz."

The old man scrubbed the spirit gum off the sides of his anchor nose. Without the disguise, the old man now appeared much younger with his mass of bushy brown hair and fresh face. He surveyed his companions with his intense brown-eyed gaze. "Then I suppose I had better not be where they are searching."