

The Proginers



By wwwolf

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Chapter 15: The End of an Era

Gods, had time gone that fast?

It was only yesterday we'd celebrated Ging and Beth's fifth birthday. The two of them were growing faster than the most tenacious weeds. Ging had demanded a set of science books as a gift and Beth got a new pair of hiking shoes – only the most expensive she could find, of course.

English, Rebecca, Jon, and I were seated around our normal table at Café Bristol. The sun was out and it was looking to be yet another wonderful day. The storms we'd had over the last little while were long gone, swept clean from the clear blue of the sky.

We were lucky to have our spot in the café. All the other tables were full, the place was running a booming business these days.

“All I had to do was dumb down the menu,” the lion had muttered. “These people wouldn't know fine cuisine if it bit them.”

And speaking of other dinners, Amstys and Molly were seated not too far away at another table. Ging and Beth were playing with their kids – all four of them – off in the corner. A couple of dalmatians and their own pup were seated nearby, the Fire Chief and his wife – Neither had aged a day.

We had enough trouble with two kids, I hadn't the slightest how they managed to look after *four* little wolves.

“Hey, Jon,” I said, glancing over to the dog. “We know the lug is a lost cause, but when are you going to settle down?”

A smile slipped to his lips, but all he did was shrug.

Heh. I think Jon was already married to the force.

I was just starting to relax into an inviting sunbeam, with Rebecca curled at my side, when the distinct footsteps of a messenger came to my ears.

I groaned.

Opening my eyes, a rabbit was standing in front of me, dressed in a government uniform.

“For you, Sir,” he said, holding out a small envelope. “It arrived on the last ship from Japan.”

I cocked my head as I took the letter. I didn't know anyone in Japan.

The front of the envelope was addressed with my name and nothing else. The penmanship was impeccable.

I glanced over to English as I slit it open with a claw. The lion, now well on going grey, shrugged.

Dear Mr. Taggert,

I thought it best I should contact you. It's been sometime, but I am once again working in the best interests of Vancouver and those who live in it. I don't think that's something I'll ever be able to stop.

I am currently in Chiba City. I've been having meetings with a most agreeable company here. It seems they are familiar with your lion. Especially the lady that runs the organization.

I've been able to reach a trade agreement with them, most favourable – please see attached. They are under the understanding that I am an official representative of the city government.

Anyway, I'll be off in a few days, heading west. From here on in I'll be making my way through China, then India. Who knows, perhaps I'll pass through Africa as I follow the setting sun.

God willing I might just make it all the way around. It could take me eighty years, but I might just cross the Atlantic and walk the parries to see you again.

I'm not the wolf you knew, Tommy. Neither one of them. Some days I wonder what it would have been like if you hadn't thrown me from my home.

Respectfully,

Brian Ferguson

There was something to the hand of the writing. It was the one I remembered, but at the same time it was looser, calmer, more relaxed.

"Heh. Well, I guess some time away has been good for him."

I handed the letter to Rebecca. Her face paled as read it. Until she got to the end and laughed.

"You might be right, Tommy." She handed it on around the table.

Sitting back for a moment, I took a look at the city spreading out around us in all directions. We'd had enough time now to truly see the difference Brian had made, for better or for worse.

The city was growing now, far more organic and alive than it'd ever been before, more *open*. Though that's not to say that everything was going perfectly. We'd had some more riots, one good one a year ago, but things did seem to be getting better.

"Hey, Jon," I asked lazily as I leaned back and let the sun hit me flat in the face. "What's the word on the great and grand Prometheus project?"

He didn't even bother to straighten as I said the name. We'd unveiled Prometheus to the public a good two years back. Just as soon as they'd gotten it working again. You have no idea how temperamental those computers were.

A smile edged onto the dog's lips.

"Moving along at about the same speed it ever was, Tommy. There's a waiting list a good six months long to get transformed. So far we've been able to keep the system working well enough to do a group every week or so." The smile bloomed into full force. "Last I heard people were coming literally from the other side of the planet to go through it. You'd never think there were so many humans wanting to feel more normal or so many of us wanting to leave our pelts behind."

"Yeah. But what about replicating it?"

His smile faltered for a moment.

"We're still working on that. We're not going to be able to make new computers at anywhere near that level of complexity until we've managed to recreate almost all the technology from before the Cataclysm."

“What about the messengers sent out to Japan and beyond?”

He shrugged. “We’re working on it. Everyone *wants* it, but it’s going to take a long time, and quite possibly the resources of the entire planet.”

English yawned from across the table.

“So you say, friends. I’ve seen that world. People are people. Give them a goal, something they want and can strive towards and you’d be amazed what they’ll pull off to get there.” He grinned. “Just look at us. A scrawny little wolf, a homeless human, and a street starved dog.” The grin grew wider. “And me, a prince.”

A lazy hour or so later Rebecca and I were ready to head off. But not before giving English a hug. The lion’s golden pelt was still the colour of the sun, but it was now mixed with the silver of the moon to even it out.

Wrapping my arms around the man, I could feel just how much weight he’d lost over the years. He felt smaller now, more brittle.

But yet calmer.

We were heading back to the apartment, but as anyone with kids knows, you can’t just go in a straight line when you’re being pulled in every direction.

“Not too far out!” Rebecca called as both Ging and Beth made a break for the shore. The kind august sun had warmed the sea enough for them to go swimming.

Sitting in the sand with Rebecca in my arms, we looked out across the waves at the endless parade of trade ships passing through the harbor.

“Is Salt Spring Island still out there, Babe?” I asked.

She nodded. “Last I heard they were still keeping any nonhumans out.”

I sighed. “Any regrets?”

“With you, Tommy?” She laughed. “No. Not one.”

We sat there and watched. The kids splashed in the shallows, the ships moved in the distance, and somewhere, off beyond the horizon, a particular wolf was working his way west.

The one thing that wasn’t to be seen were any guards. We didn’t need them anymore. There hadn’t been a threat on our lives in years.

Returning to the apartment, carrying an exhausted and dripping Ging and Beth in our arms, I waved at Pine as we made our way down the street.

The dog had lost his ear, giving him an off balance appearance. The force had tried to transfer him to another position, and that’s why he didn’t work for the force anymore. He worked for the government. Now he really was my attaché. His office was in the building next door.

“Good night, darlings,” I whispered as I tucked the kids in.

Walking back out into the hallway, I glanced over to Rebecca. She was reading one of my old history books.

“You okay for a while here, Babe? I going for a shower.”

She glanced up at me and smiled.

“Sure, Wolfy.”

The warm water soused over me as I stepped into the large shower stall. It immediately turned grey as it fell down around my feet.

This was... it was the same shower Rebecca and I had been in the second time we'd been tougher. And the same place I'd fled to years ago after I'd almost killed a hoodlum on the street. And the same place Rebecca and I helped the kids get cleaned up in every day.

Out in the hallway, and beyond it, I could hear the sounds of the city at night.

It was the peaceful calamity that we'd all gotten used to living through everyday.

Silently, among the countless drops of water that fell around me, I cried.

Beth wanted to be an explorer, climb the Rockies, and Ging wanted to be an author, record the history of V-town.

The world was carrying on and I cried.

"Tommy, are you alright in there?" Rebecca asked softly from the hallway.

Holding back a snuffle, I raised my head into the warm spray.

"Yeah, Babe. Everything's fine."

Author's Note

First, something to set the mood: [Try this](#).

And here, folks we are again! Welcome to the fifth, and penultimate, book of *The Hunters*.

Once again there's a lot going on. This book is kinda, sorta (but not quite!) the ending to the series. A number of plot threads that have been kicking around for a long time are going to be brought back together, and the main theme of the story will come to an end. That's not to say it's *over*, but simply that you're going to get some conclusion with this book.

I'd like to thank you all who have read this far. *The Hunters* has been an awesome ride, and I hope you've enjoyed it as much as I have.

An interesting piece of trivia, this book was planned way back when I first started writing the series. Before I'd even finished the original book, *The Hunters* I knew it was going to be the first in a series. I made it sextology (six books) because... well, frankly, because I wanted to be able to say I had a *sextology*!

All of our major character have had their character development by now, Tommy, English, Rebecca, Jon. Even Amstys and Max got a little bit. The *big* difference is that the political landscape of V-town has changed as of the ending of the previous book. Two major powers have shifted with the deaths of Sayer and Griss. Here's hoping Tommy's strong enough to keep things together!

Whew! Well, that's that. I'm afraid that things make have become a bit stereotypical and predictable with the birth of the twins, then their kidnapping, but I like to think that the police department's little side project kept the plot a bit off-balance.

Anyway, what's next? Well, first a bit of a break. I've got one final book left to post, then I'm out. Not sure if that's a good thing or not, but it'll certainly be a change. There will be a break of a month or so with no posts except for a short story or two. I don't have any remaining non-Hunters books to put up, so I'm going to have to spend that time getting the final adventure ready. And a small warning: If you want the series to conclude with a fairytale ending, this is where you should stop reading.

As for what that adventure will be, well...

The Mourner.

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