

Her Most Precious Treasure

By Xenny Diemes

The deceptively beautiful but deadly island of Theraaus is a place where nor mortal or monster dares to tread and no one knows why. There are rumors of monsters and more powerful jungle beasts that roam this land that would kill the strongest brute or weakling seconds before they can even set foot on shore. No privateer would put that landmass on any map and only several island tribes use it as a test of manhood to which none have survived. It is a land of the damned and the damned call home. Why would anyone go to that accursed island? Darquebane has such an answer.

Rowing non-stop for hours, the giant, dark lioness arrives on the shores of the island and sets foot upon the black, volcanic sands. Not taking a moment of breath or even notice her arms might have grown since her marathon voyage to the island. Even relaxed, her mere cloth can't hide the thick, pulsating veins underneath and those tree trunks for arms. She sniffs the surrounding air, sensing that something is far off and then out of nowhere a gigantic black beast pounces on top of her and the two stumble into the bushes close to the shore. It is a panther, but four times its size and even many times stronger as well. Darquebane fights the gigantic, muscle-bound hulk of a cat down to the ground and grabbed it by its jaw. Try as it might, it did not stand a chance against her as the sound of a brutal crack brought the beast down for good. With bloodied hands, she wipes the blood off and continued on her journey.

Days earlier, Timothy wakes up and gets the kings of waking up off of him and gets ready for the daily duties on the ship. When everything is done, he thought going to the captain's quarters would do him some good, only to find out that she is missing. Searching high and low, Timothy wonders how can someone that big be missing on the ship. He then turns to Toruga, to know where she went off to. His answer: the captain is off to get one of her most precious treasures. Timothy then asks why she went off alone and not with a party even more so after what they have gone through in

the past months of their journey. Hell's own objects and demons keep appearing one by one.

Mountains of fire propped up in the middle of nowhere the first week and having to save towns and villages from a demon onslaught the next, and the only thing the captain does his head out to find treasure? Toruga's answer is questionable but he has faith she has her reasons even she doesn't divulge what is most of the chest's she's buried but whatever it is, Timothy hopes that can help them in their ongoing battle.

Back on the island, Darquebane uses her sword to cut down thick vines and other blockages that are in her way to make a path where the chest is buried. Off at a distance, she lays witness to another reason why the island is so dangerous. She watches a hungry monkey with a ravenous appetite eat a mango from a tree that looked innocent enough. Until the monkey suddenly grabbed its throat, coughed and gagged as its body rapidly swells up and then shrinks down, reducing it to a mere skinned skeleton as it falls dead on the ground. Darquebane sighs and looks onward to the path only uttering under her breath of how much of a fool it was.

A long, glowing crack appears in a wall somewhere between realms. One to a world a pure light, peace and serenity and the other a world of pure darkness, war and unspeakable horror. However this crack is neither the creation of both their masters, it is in true essence an anomaly. Discovered in part by a lowly angelic guard who fell through it and into the depths of Hell. Normally any angel or demon caught in those places would be dealt with to the extreme without any help as it would break their uneasy treaty. However he didn't get the warning of his presence of this realm. He even trekked deeper completely undetected by the higher demons until he was discovered by a female guard who interestingly enough wanted the same ambitions as him. She toured heaven without being detected as well. That's where their ambitions grew into an all out way to take over the mortal world when they both realize that travel to their world would not sound off the alarms of Heaven and Hell. This is the plan of the archangel Marmaroth and the demoness Astera.

Over the past weeks, they sent many of Hell's objects through the cracks in an effort to drive

the mortals into a state of panic and disorder with no one to turn to. Destroy any means to warn both their worlds of their plans. But then came the Dreadnought incident and their attention to the pirate. Astera has heard stories of the demon and her rampage across hell, even to nearly slay the Devil himself which Marmaroth never thought it was even possible. She even told him that she was banished to the mortal world as a last resort. Marmaroth in shock asks if she was sent in that state, Astera tells him that the devil weakened her powers enough to not do much damage to the mortal world and is banished from Hell. He wonders who this could have happened. Astera is willing to show him. But before they can deal with that prospect, it is time that they deal with the pirate for it will be the last time she will interfere. It was time for them to strike.

Darquebane arrives at a cave with long caverns and dusty trails that lead into a great central chamber and in the center lies her chest. But before she can approach the chamber, she hears a loud, rumbling growl coming from the shadows. Darquebane readies herself for what is about to come and it did. It is a beast, another panther but much bigger and stronger than the one she killed earlier. The great dark beast slowly walks up to her and displays its dominance over her as if he's giving her a chance to leave. But Darquebane cold stares it down, she growls and flexes her muscles out close to the tearing point as a show of force daring it to make a move. It was sure enough the giant panther beast easily submits and kneel before its master. Darquebane walks past him giving it a soft pat on the head. She speaks telling the creature that she has done a good job protecting the chest. Even the scattered bones of past, often fresh "trespassers" are a sign of his duties fulfilled. But its submission is a reminder of who its real master is.

As she carries the chest over her shoulder, she does take a moment to notice how huge her arm has gotten from all that rowing to the island, watching that bulked bicep under the precious cloth. But then her attention is quickly turned away as the giant panther growls, leaps and blocks her path out of the chamber. Darquebane demands to know what is the meaning of its disobedience until she discovers the dark red of its eyes. Quickly the panther changed into its true form before Darquebane,

It is Daron of the Dreadhounds. Shape-shifting demons who roam the valleys and pits of hell hunting down any who would escape their torture. Walking up slowly with a gum-lined snarl and talks to the lioness. Greeting her by her real name because he did encounter her before becoming demonized, she remembers as well as she was being mauled before being taken back.

Not having time for this she demands of what they have done to her original guardian. Darou and his pack had a little “chat” while filling its mind with all the wonderful things that his soul just can’t take and ran out in a psychotic attack just before her master put him out of its misery that is not before making changes to his body so to not make him recognizable. It was there, she realized the beast she killed was the guardian. Darou and his pack will enjoy going after the lioness again but Darquebane reminds them that she is not the small woman they mauled many years ago. He is familiar of what has happened but also knows she is less of what he used to be and will enjoy a second helping with no idea of what they are about to face.

Back on the Night Splinter, Timothy and Toruga, tend to the ship to get their minds off of the captains whereabouts until dark clouds suddenly swirl and churn over them. Timothy often sees this sight many times before as Hell tries to place their mark on this world and quickly orders his men and Toruga to get ready for their attack. He knows that they have been caught up in their plans since Dreadnought and they are ready for when they will come and stop them. But what is expected to be a full onslaught is really only two who land upon the deck. Mamaroth and Astera demand the presence of the Captain so that they will deal with her once and for all. Timothy refuses but is smacked down by Astera for his insolence. Getting back up the cat aims his sword telling them to get off the ship. Mamaroth walks up carefully telling him that there is no way he will get out of this alive and asks again of where the captain is. Timothy refuses and lets him know that he has been through worse and has no idea why the captain is so important to them. Astera does but for now it’s time for them to leave a “message”. Timothy orders an attack but the angel and demon only smile as they charge in.

They are the Dreadhounds, once Hell’s mightiest demons are now reduced to a broken,

battered mess as they have underestimated the raw power of the black lioness as she breaks them leaving them near death. Darquebane in tatters, restores her clothing with her powers and spares no time to grab Darou by his throat. Angrily demanding of why the onslaught of all of hell's demons are all over the world. Darou's only answer is that a new hell is coming and there is nothing she can do stop it. This leads to more to ask of why the Devil is allowing this to happen. Darou laughs at that assumption to think that the Devil would do this without Heaven knowing about it. It is really the work of two lowly agents from both sides and still stands by his word that there is nothing she can do to stop it. Darquebane dares to try before breaking its neck. Moments later, she has left the cave only to be struck by the sounds of angered screams and the vision of two faces charging at him that brought her down to her knees.

Realizing in horror, it was the crew in trouble, but she is days away from the ship to be of much help to them. The only images that flash in her mind where of two beings before it blacked out. Taking more days, her boat is eventually intercepted by a badly injured Leviathan who she then urges her to get her faster to the ship. When she finally arrives, she sees the Night Splinter badly damaged even some in flames. Darquebane with her small ounce of strength leaps onto the deck and searches for any survivors, at least to her. She finds Toruga badly injured and with little strength to talk but tells her that they fought bravely against those monsters. Darquebane wishing to not mention it wants to know what happened to Timothy. They took him, to hell with them, he doesn't know why but they have to be stopped. All they ever talked about is bringing about a new hell on earth. Darquebane will stop them and save Timothy and wastes no time to get her plans going and the chest is the key but before she can do anything, she is struck by a sudden pain so great, she can't even scream.

Falling to her knees, she sketches her chest underneath the heavy bosom and falls to the ground watching everything around her go completely black. Upon waking up, she sees Toruga barely standing but looks at her with curious eyes and wonders of what is wrong. Then she looked at her hand. It is no longer thick, hulking and black with devastating claws but small, dainty and golden.

Her whole body aches and feels as if it was draped in giant cloth but its really her own clothes.

Darquebane has been reverted back to her original self, as the mortal Jaqueline. Toruga asks of what has happened to her, her only answer that the unthinkable has happened. The dark clouds form, not just over the ship but soon over the great expanse of the ocean. Jaqueline knows from what the Dreadhounds told her that a new hell is coming and there is nothing she can do to stop it. Those who doubt her don't know what she's truly capable of. It all has to do with what is inside the chest.

Years since the day she was driven to the village she once called home. The Heart of Demons has been keeping a close eye on her since as guidance and to keep tabs on her since. That is until days ago, it called out to her with a dire message: It was going to die in the first stage of a seizure of the Earth. All a move to drastically change Heaven, Hell and Earth forever. There is nothing Darquebane could do about it but there is a way for her to endure and win the inevitable. Under the guise of a typical pirate raid on an island. Darquebane encounters a shaman who is actually a demon who lived among mortals for a long time. When told about the voice, the demon knows that she is the one who will bring an end to this plot. He then points to a chest that would contain the tool to put a stop to the oncoming carnage: A dark red crystal that barely fits in the chest, it is the tool she needs to bring an end to what is to come.

Now that time has come in the worst way imaginable. Darquebane, now back as Jacqueline will use the crystal, what will happen next will change everything and hopes she can save Timothy as well. Meanwhile in Hell, the shattered remains of the Heart of Demons scatter under the feet of a new army of more powerful demons and angels, now with dark wings that were once white. Stronger than before and ready to bring hell to the Earth and endowed with the energies of the phenomenal crack between worlds, Astera and Marmaroth's plan is soon come to life. An injured Timothy sits in a hardened cage watching as all of this world's denizens are dead or dying as a result of their dependence on the heart. He looks in fury at the two masterminds and swears that Darquebane will stop them. The two of them laugh as they see that futility in his niece's sense of hope. They both tell

him that by the time she makes any move to save the day, it would be too late and there will be a New Hell on Earth and both the original worlds would fall leaving them as the new supreme leaders.

As the reign for a new realm on Earth begins, the only one who can stop it now is the mortal with the crystal in her hand. What she did not anticipate is that it would bring her back to where she was banished and if Heaven and Hell were to survive. The Devil would be forced to do the one thing that nearly brought his realm to destruction in the first place.