# Bounty 1

“You fool!” Qormus snarled at the creature in front of him, writhing in pain.

“Phox is sorry, master, please!” The pathetic creature begged for relief from the waves of pain wracking his tiny body.

“You have failed, and now you will pay,” Qormus said coldly.

He extended his arm and raised it up. At the same time, the tiny creature mimicked his movement. He let the limp creature slowly flail about in mid-air for a few moments before he closed his fist tightly.

A sickening crunch of bone could be heard followed by a shriek of pain and then nothing. The creature fell limp, and Qormus dropped him to the ground. He turned to another of the creatures.

“Clean this up, and remember, do not fail me again.”

The creature bowed deeply and summoned several other terrified creatures to help him take their now-dead companion away.

“Pathetic creatures,” Qormus said muttering to himself.

He headed out of the dank cave that served as the creature’s home, passing three human men, their hands and feet bound, some sort of dirty fabric stuffed into their mouths and a strip covering their eyes. They followed the sound of his footsteps as he walked past.

Qormus emerged into the cold night. He wrapped himself tightly in his cloak and began walking down the hill toward the town he called his home. Smoke from the town’s chimneys pointed him in the right direction.

He wanted to head to the tavern before going to bed but as he entered the town, a nervous-looking man in fancy clothes waved a hand in his direction and moved hurriedly over to him.

“Ahh, Qormus,” The man said after coming to a halt in front of him.

“What can I do for you, Mayor Stevens?” Qormus asked.

“Did you hear of the attack? What will we do Qormus? The town needs that mine, and every day that it is out of commission is less money for all of us.”

“Yes, I did. Terrible business. Perhaps it is time to call in the sheriff? I am sure he would be willing to take care of this for you.”

The mayor gasped, giving Qormus an incredulous look.

“Surely you jest Qormus, you remember what happened the last time I gave that lunatic free reign in this town.”

Qormus chuckled softly to himself. He did indeed remember those events fondly.

“Then what are you going to do about it?”

The mayor was taken aback a little by Qormus’ chuckle. He didn’t think it was funny at all. It had been a deeply traumatic event. The sheriff and his men ran roughshod over the town’s citizens, interrogating all of them, some roughly. And in the end, he did nothing. He didn’t fix the problem it just … got better all on its own. He shook off the thought he would worry about it later. For now, he had more important things concerning him.

“I have come to you Qormus, to ask for a favour. I know that you told me that you had no interest in helping us again, but I am desperate! We need you, Qormus. I need you. Would you please help us?”

Qormus knew this was coming. He had carefully arranged events for quite some time to reach this exact moment.

“Don’t go to pieces on me mayor, get a hold of yourself. Of course, I will help, but it will cost you.”

“You will? Anything, Qormus, we’ll give you anything! Just please help us.”

The fool, Qormus thought to himself, He truly has no idea.

“Of course, leave it with me, mayor. I will return to you once the situation has been resolved.”

The mayor, ecstatic, bowed to Qormus and muttering his thanks, turned around and scurried off.

Qormus turned around and headed back up the hill towards the cave. Two of the small creatures were standing guard outside, and he sensed the presence of two more in the shadows. Good, they are finally getting the hint, he thought.

As he approached, they stepped aside, and he walked deep into the cave.

“Brax!” He yelled into the darkness.

A moment later, one of the creatures ran into the room, panting.

“Yes, master, Brax is here. What can Brax do for you?”

“Prepare the prisoners for transport. I am ready to proceed with the plan.”

Brax bowed deeply, continuing the action until he had rounded the corner and was no longer within sight of Qormus.

A short time later, the three men, their feet no longer bound, but the rest of their restraints still in place and a rope connecting them came shuffling in. Qormus, keeping silent, nodded at Brax. He took the rope and pulled them towards the cave exit.

Emerging back into the cold night's air, he led them back towards the smoke rising above the surrounding forest. One of the men tripped and fell prone. This frightened the other men, but Qormus grabbed the prone man by his collar and dragged him to his feet.

He reached the edge of town and came to a halt.

“Mayor!” He yelled into the night.

He waited for a few moments until he spotted the familiar figure of the mayor come into view. He turned, making his way towards the mayor’s office, the mayor himself changing direction to catch up with Qormus.

“You did it!” The mayor cried in relief, not wondering why the men were still bound.

Qormus didn’t say anything. He kept walking until he reached the small timber building, the sign on the side indicating it was the mayoral office. He waited for the mayor to fumble with his keys to unlock the door before they all stepped inside, away from prying eyes.

“Thank you, Qormus, you did it. And so fast! I thought it would have taken longer, even for someone of your immense skill, to take on that many goblins.”

Qormus turned to face the mayor and waited for him to shut the door behind him before he spoke.

“Yes, well, I am very talented. Now, about that payment.”

The mayor almost jumped as he remembered. He ran through the outer office into his office and came out with a small sack filled with coins. He outstretched his hand, offering the sack to Qormus.

“Here you go. Thank you for you what you have done for our fair town, Qormus.”

Qormus eyed the bag. He had no intention of accepting this trifling amount of money.

“I am sorry mayor, that is not the payment I had in mind.”

The mayor gave Qormus a quizzical look. He couldn’t comprehend why this wasn’t sufficient. It was enough money for the common person to live on for a year after all.

“B-b-but, what? I don’t have any more money on me. What other payment do you want?”

Qormus raised himself to his full height causing the mayor to cower. He had never seen the real Qormus before, and he was suddenly frightened.

“You and this town are now, mine,” Qormus said, a hint of menace in his voice.

“W-what? What does that mean?”

“It means that this town, the inhabitants, the mine, all belong to do. You will do as I say, and I will punish, severely, any who do not accede.”

The mayor was now panicked. This had not gone as he had accepted. His predecessor had warned him that Qormus was dangerous, but he had not seen it himself until now. Finally gaining some courage, the mayor stood straight. Who was this man to tell me, the mayor of this town, what to do!

Qormus sensed the resolve in the man, and before he could even speak, he pulled out a dagger hidden in his robe and slit the throat of one of the men. Blood spurted from the open wound, and the man spluttered for a moment before falling to the floor. Hearing this, the other two men backed away, but both tripped over the blood on the floor and fell themselves.

The mayor screeched in terror. He looked at Qormus, his eyes bulging. He looked down at the dead man and back up at Qormus.

“Why did you do that!” He managed to choke out after a moment.

Qormus merely smiled sweetly at the mayor.

“I warned you of the severe punishment that would result from disobeying me.”

“B-b-but I never accepted your terms!” The mayor said, shaking his head.

Qormus laughed, What a fool, he thought.

“Your acceptance was not required, nor is it sought, mayor.” That last word was almost snarled, the malice in his voice clearly evident.

The mayor took another step back and didn’t say anything.

“I see you require additional proof of the seriousness of this situation, mayor.”

Qormus bent down to one of the prone men. Grabbing him by the hair and pulling his head back, he brought the dagger to his throat, but as he was about to slit the man’s throat, the mayor spoke up.

“Wait! I’ll do it, Qormus, whatever you want. I’ll do whatever you want. We all will, I’ll see to it! I promise!” The words came out in a rush.

Qormus smiled and proceeded to slits the man's throat anyway. He gargled for a moment, and Qormus let him fall dead to the floor.

The mayor began to weep.

“I said I would do anything! You needn't have killed him!”

“I didn’t have to, but I need you to understand the consequences for failure or disobeying me.”

The mayor sat down in a nearby chair, his eyes flicking between the two dead men. His head dropped into his hands as he continued to weep. After a moment, he looked back up at Qormus, his face wet with tears.

“I am sorry Qormus … master. Please, master, forgive me.”

Qormus smiled malevolently at the mayor.

“I forgive you. Now, let us discuss the new arrangements.”