

Bounty Board

Submission for the fiction competition: "Bounty Board Questing - Bounty 1"

Written and Submitted by Adapt Kamjin "Maverick" Lap Lamiz

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Kamjin exhaled a long sighing breath. *This happens every time I enter a town. Just smile and answer politely so they don't run you out of town like the last village*, he thought. Kamjin pulled the oversized hood off his head and smiled politely at the gawking faces of the townspeople. "Greetings friends, where might I find the local tavern to quench my thirst?" Kamjin looked around him at all the shocked faces and gaping mouths. *This village does speak the Queen's tongue does it not?* Clearing his throat, "I don't want to cause any trouble for you. I'm just looking for a place to grab a bite to eat and drink. Is it perhaps that building on the horizon with the large sign shaped like a pot?" The crowd had started to mutter to itself as those further back jostled and pointed.

Finally, a little girl squeezed out of the throng of people and stood before Kamjin. She looked up with bright blue eyes, dazzling in the autumn sun. She brushed a strand of loose hair back behind her ear having been pulled out of place by the crowd. After a long pause, she pointed at Kamjin and screamed in the high pitch voice that only a young girl could possess, "IS THAT A BEAR?"

Everytime, Kamjin thought. *Doesn't matter that I'm a renowned sorcerer and swordsman. Doesn't matter that I've rescued dozens of villages from demonic forces. Never a 'Hey, that's Kamjin the Scourge of Zoraan'. No, it's always about the damn bear first.* He brought his worn leather gloved hand up to his temples and rubbed them slowly. Taking as much time as possible before replying to the obvious question. "Yes, it's a bear. His name is Howie, would you like to pet him?" Kamjin finally replied.

The girl started nodding her head vigorously up and down. Kamjin motioned the girl towards Howie's head. The girl gingerly reached out and scratched Howie behind the ear. Howie let a pleasurable growl escape his lips and turned his head into the girl's scratching fingers.

"See, he's quite tame," Kamjin said. "Now, about that drink?" As the townspeople took in that the bear was obviously under control and not likely to maul them they replied that Kamjin was right in suspecting that the building with the pot sign was indeed the local tavern. Kamjin bowed his head in appreciation and smiling down at the girl he patted Howie on the neck and they were off. The crowd parted quicker as Howie reluctantly moved on from the girl who had worked up the courage to scratch both sides of his massive jaw.

As they came to a stop outside the tavern, Kamjin dismounted from Howie. The massive black and white bear was easily twice as tall as Kamjin if he stood on his hind legs and could easily support two to three riders. Relieved of his burden Howie rolled onto his side in front of the tavern. His massive frame shook the foundation.

"Good job, Howie. I'll bring you out a bowl of ale," Kamjin said as he entered the building. Just like the townspeople outside, all the patrons had packed against the windows of the tavern to stare at the bear now rubbing its back against the wood slates exposed from the stucco. Kamjin sighed again. *Every bloody place. I seriously cannot be the only person to ride a bear?*

Clearing his throat, "What's the price for a bowl of ale, a tankard of ale, and whatever the food of the day is?" As he expected, no one moved or answered. All that could be heard was talk of Howie. Kamjin walked up to the bar and sat on one of the tall chairs. Looking around he noticed the tavern keeper was still behind the bar but was at the far end trying to get one of the patrons to update him on what was happening outside. Not willing to wait, Kamjin picked up one of the shelled nuts sitting in a bowl and chucked it at the tavern keeper's head.

"Ow! What was that for?" he said, turning to look at who had thrown the nut.

"Hi," Kamjin started politely. "Can I get a bowl of ale, a tankard of ale, and whatever the food of the day is?"

"A bowl of ale? What'da need a bowl of ale for?" the tavern keeper inquired.

Kamjin gestured towards the window, "For the bear."

The tavern keeper's eyes went wide, "So it is a bear?!" Taking a moment to compose himself, "Well, for something that big it'd be nearly a whole barrel. That'd be five gold pieces. Then silver for the tankard and we just have stew today which is a couple bronze bits."

Kamjin reached into his traveling poach and counted his coins on the bar top. Two gold coins, about a dozen silvers, and a nearly matching number of bronze bits. It wasn't going to be enough. Even if he put it all together he wouldn't be able to get enough ale to sate Howie and he wasn't going to deal with that again. He scooped the coins back into his poach and was just about to begin negotiating when a man came barraging in from the rear of the building.

"Goblins!! Goblins have taken the mine!!" he coughed out between labored breaths. The man was sweating profusely and was covered in dirt. He collapsed to his knees. No one turned to look at him save for Kamjin. Struggling for breath, "They've taken the other miners. I only barely escaped with my life." Still no one bothered to look at him. He locked eyes with Kamjin and they pleaded to know why no one was caring.

Kamjin shrugged, "There's a bear outside."

"A bear!" the man exclaimed before breaking into a coughing fit.

"It's okay. What mine was taken over by goblins?" Kamjin inquired.

"It's the gold mine. It's the main source of gold for this region," the miner responded.

This gave Kamjin an idea. "I assume there would be a reward for clearing the mine of all these goblins?"

"I don't...I mean, I'm sure there could be?" the miner gave a less than convincing response.

Beggars can't be choosers, Kamjin thought. "Alright, I'll clear the mines but you're going to have to provide a sizable reward. Enough to keep that bear in ale for a week at least."

Kamjin picked the miner up off the floor and throwing his arm around him helped him through the tavern. "We'll be back shortly, make sure there's still meat in the stew," Kamjin called to the tavern keeper as they walked out the door.

"By the stars of Cathula. That really is a bear!" the miner gasped in shock.

"Yes it is and he's thirsty. Come on, get on his back and we'll be at the mine in no time." Kamjin said, helping the miner up onto Howie. Jumping lightly up himself, Kamjin made sure the miner was holding onto him. "Come on, Howie. We've got a job to do and then you can have all the ale you want."

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The mine was a surprisingly short distance outside of the town. Kamjin could still see the taller buildings from where they stood facing the entrance to the mine. They had dismounted from Howie and walked the last few yards to the edge of the forest. There was maybe fifty yards separating them from where they stood to the gaping hole in the size of a small mound. It must lead down deep underground given the wealth in the town.

"Sir, I know you must be very brave but you cannot possibly take on all the goblins by yourself. There were at least two dozen if not more," the miner said.

"That's okay. I'm not going to fight them," Kamjin replied.

The miner was shaking his head in disbelief. "You're not..." he couldn't get the words out. "If you're not going to fight then why did we come here?"

"I said I wasn't going to fight them. I didn't say anything about him," Kamjin jerked his thumb towards Howie. Walking over to Howie, Kamjin spoke softly into his ear. "Do you see those goblins over there? They're preventing you from getting ale. If you get rid of the goblins you'll have enough ale to keep you happy for a week."

Howie gave a mighty roar and bounded from the tree line. His massive paws tore up the ground as he sped towards the mine. Two goblins came running out of the mine with their polearms at the ready. As they looked around to see what had made the noise Howie connected with the first one. His massive jaws closed around its head and ripped it clean off. He spat out the head and with his forearm he raked his claws down the front of the remaining goblin. Two inch long gashes tore into the Goblin's body. It fell to the ground convulsing as it bled out. With the entrance cleared Howie disappeared into the mine.

The miner stood agap at the scene. "Aren't you going to help him?" he asked?

The sound of chaos erupted from the mines. Screams of panic issued forth between the sounds of armored bodies being torn apart. "No, he's got this handled," Kamjin replied. The two of them stood at the tree line listening for what seemed like an hour. The screams never abated. Then suddenly, silence.

Then Howie emerged from the mine. His fur was matted with the disgusting greenish-yellow blood of the goblins and their tattered remains. Kamjin greeted him warmly, "That's a good Howie!" The miners soon followed after Howie. While most showed some signs of abuse they were all whole. Kamjin couldn't tell if they were more in shock from the encounter with the goblins or seeing a bear.

"Gage," one of them yelled to the miner behind Kamjin. "Did you see this bear?!"

Kamjin pinched the bridge of his nose. *Of course, it's the bear*, he thought.

"Conner, I know. I hired them to save you all," Gage replied.

"And I'm quite pleased to see you're all doing so well. Now, Gage was it, I believe there's a matter of settling the tab," Kamjin said.

"Of course, of course," Gage replied. He rushed into the mine and returned a short while later carrying a large heavy sack. "It's today's refined gold. It's not been minted yet but it's all yours."

Kamjin took the bag and had to grab it with his other hand. It was extremely heavy. There was enough gold here to keep them fed for weeks. Howie roared in approval and began rolling on the dusty ground, cleaning the goblin remains from his fur. Kamjin sighed, *or it'll keep Howie in ale for the week.*