

The Twins Part 1

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A trio of demons embark on a trek as bounty hunters killing dragons.

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The year was unimportant, but the age was. It was the age of mystics, magicians, dragons, demons and other beasts. Dotting the countryside were many small villages with surrounding farms. The crops and herds from these farms fed the nearby families and kept the castle of the lord stocked. Every village had an inn where travelers stayed and drank their fill of local ale. The local inn was the place where travelers stopped and brought news of the outside world. These travelers took away news and spread it across the miles. Typically, the inn was the central point in every village. Today was different. The smell of sulfur permeated the air along with smoke from the burning buildings and crops. The village was a pile of rubble from the battle to subdue and remove the dragon, which ravaged the countryside. The battle to subdue and kill the dragon raged on for several days taking its toll on villagers and travelers alike. The dragon was dead, the village saved and the lord was happy. The local inn survived with one wall caved in from the battle, but the travelers sat eating and drinking. Outside piles of rubble covered the streets. The crackling of burning wood assaulted the ears of the villagers. The residents wandered in shock through the remnants of the village. Three mercs (mercenaries) sauntered through the village with clinking purses. They came from the castle after collecting the bounty for ridding the countryside of the rogue dragon. These mercs were demons, who appeared to the villagers as common folk. They changed their appearance to prevent a mass panic among the villagers as they approached. The walk through the village was fraught with danger. Stone rubble littered the roads, walls still standing fell as they lost support falling on some villagers. People wandered aimlessly around the village gathering their belongings and rebuilding their lives and homes. Several stone buildings lay in piles with dogs and children combing through them. Fires still raged among the village spewing smoke to cause difficulty breathing and seeing. The mercs headed to the inn to whet their whistles with the local ale and eat a hearty meal. They secured a room for the night where they could rest and recover from two days without sleep. The inn seemed to be one of the few buildings that sustained minimal damage in the battle. They stepped over the rubble of the damaged wall, pulled up chairs, and sat at one of the few remaining empty tables. Demons usually

traveled alone leaving a path of destruction and desolation behind, taking what they wanted. These demons were different. They joined forces and traveled the countryside collecting bounties ridding humanity of dragons and monsters. Now it was time to celebrate. "Now tell me, when are we ever going to have a scrap fight with a knucker dragon again? Because when we do, we demand three times more than we got for this job!" Husky proclaimed angrily. "I'm fine with just declining the job. Let the damn castle guards handle those jobs for once! We're bounty hunters, not dragon slayers," Tiger concurred. The third merc, Slim, reasoned, "Unfortunately the only bounty jobs are hunting down dragons and rogue demons nowadays. And it's not like we know their power level beforehand to charge for each job accordingly." Both girls glared at him. "He's right," Husky replied distastefully. "We should charge them the bounty after the job!" "They would not pay us then, idiot. They'd try to spin it as if we did it for free," Tiger yelled at her. "Well, maybe we could get a price agreed upon, before we get into a mess like the one we just had." Husky retorted. The three mercs sat at the table drinking the local ale from clay tankards. They joined forces several years ago and were a good match that complemented each other. The leader Husky specialized in close combat, hunting and tracking. The second member Tiger specialized in long-range attacks, healing and communication. The third member Slim specialized in demolition and survival training. Currently, they exhausted all the bounties available in the surrounding countryside. They heard of a large flying dragon 10 leagues away in a new kingdom. They sat talking about the bounty for this new dragon. "What is with the dragon population these days?" Tiger asked as the idea further annoyed her. "Who cares, it's still money, and it's a flying, fire breather. I hope it is not a wyvern though. Those things are huge!" Husky said looking at the map over her tankard. "At least it's not another one of those elementals, girls. A dragon is a big easy target, be grateful." Slim haughtily digressed. "Oh here we go! You are never going to let that one go, huh. Sorry, that demon had a swarm of fire elements that I didn't know about!" Husky huffed. Behind the mercs was a spice merchant from the east, who was drunk and loud. He complained about the battle between the mercs and the dragon. It was spectacular to watch, but cost him a lot. The dragon burned the warehouse where his goods were stored. He lost everything. He mumbled about the east and the mystics who could have killed the dragon by snapping their fingers. There would not have been any damage done and he would be a wealthy man. "He is starting to get too drunk. He's no longer subtle about his intentions to ambush and rob us later," Husky muttered quietly. "Heh, I guess it doesn't take a mind reader," Slim concurred. "He's planning on waiting until we're drunk before he strikes." Tiger snickered, "fool." The man continued his drunken rant, "Those two young kids wouldn't even have to fight the dragon! In fact, they could have just convinced it to leave peacefully, no bloodshed, no loss of customers and merchandise! Everything would be perfect and normal!" "I'm rather surprised, his words hold truth," Husky whispered. "Should we... interrogate him then?" Tiger smiled wickedly. "Do it later, Tiger! Just finish your drink for now," Slim told her. The spice merchant kept drinking and ranting for a little longer, until his head laid down on the table in a drunken stupor. The mercs looked over and finished their tankards. Tiger got up, went over to the merchant and poked him hard. He was dead drunk. Slim and Husky grabbed him under the arms and dragged him out into an ally. Tiger touched his brow and he

awoke slurring his speech. The interrogation may not yield much useful information tonight. In the morning, the merchant will be hung over, but still unaware that he told the mercs anything. Tiger probed his mind and found out about the twins on an island country east of China. The twins controlled the balance of power around them. This control yielded phenomenal results with weather, volcanoes, earthquakes and other natural disasters. The control or lack of it if focused, forced the countryside to fall into chaos creating massive desolation. They had a 'nanny' who taught them and protected them until they came of age. There were forces afield that wanted to capture the twins and control their power. An emperor of a province in China posted a huge bounty for the person or persons who brought the twins to him unharmed. "Some rich guy wants the two demon children so he could take over his neighboring countries, another ruthless dynasty in China. Well, at least he's rich." Tiger sighed removing her hand. When Husky heard the word bounty, her ears perked up. She thought, 'how hard can capturing two children be? This will be the easiest bounty they ever earned.' Tiger got the information about the emperor and the location of the twins and let the merchant go back sleeping on a dung heap. She reasoned that it was a reward earned for planning to ambush the mercs. The mercs found a safe place in the inn and bedded down for the night. In the morning, they were off to kill another dragon and collect another bounty. As the demons left the village, their visage changed back to being demons. What once were two girls and a guy now stood as a kirata, a gwylygi and a kitsune. The advantage of this change became apparent as their step speed increased and they covered the ten leagues in half a day. As they approached the castle, they changed back to normal bounty hunters and mingled with people entering the castle. They found the captain of the guard in charge of the dragon bounty and used Tiger's mind-bending ability to increase the bounty they would get, based on the dragon killed. With the bargain struck, they left the castle in search of the local inn to get a bed for the night. They found an inn nearby which served hot meals and tankards of the local ale. As they ate, they heard tales of the local dragon and its abilities. So far, nothing they heard was out of the ordinary. It appeared to be an easy task to dispatch this dragon, until a local farmer entered. His tale told of a dragon, which flew fast, and high. It swooped down, picked up his prize bull in one claw and grabbed his cow in the other. This sounded too fantastic to be true, but a friend of the farmer confirmed the story later. Now the trio felt better about getting a larger bounty. "Looks like our work's cut out for us," Slim muttered smugly. The girls remained silent. After eating, the trio went in search of the local blacksmith to get their knives and swords sharpened and cleaned. While at the blacksmiths, they inquired if anyone in the village knew where the lair of the dragon was. They learned about a large cave at the base of a huge mountain a few miles south of town. With the swords and knives sharpened, they left to go back to the inn and get some rest until morning. They negotiated a price for a single room for the trio to share. Slim led the trio to the room and opened the heavy door. "Early bedtime for we must rise early," Slim instructed. "Sometimes, I wish I was a normal teenage girl..." Husky fantasized. "Then I wouldn't have to hear your advice anymore." "Don't be hurtful Husky, but ignore your instincts for once and sleep now." Tiger whined and collapsed onto a bed. Husky curled up and glared at the window a moment before shutting her eyes. "Girls..." Slim muttered leaving the room. Just after midnight, a loud scream filled the air and

woke the bounty hunters. The dragon flew over the village spraying fire, as he swooped down setting several buildings a fire. Scared villagers ran everywhere looking for shelter to hide. A few villagers fell and the dragon grabbed them up in his claws and flew away. "Oh what the hell! Now we have to get up!" Husky shouted bounding out the door in a fit of rage. Tiger calmly followed letting her anger simmer in silence. The girls met up with Slim outside. Their sleep interrupted, the trio spouted their anger. They grabbed their swords and chased after the dragon as best they could. Outside the village after they changed to their demon form, they caught up with the dragon easily. Stealthily they followed it to its lair. They waited until it landed and went into the cave. They waited a few hours and soon heard the snores of the dragon. They went into the cave and saw piles of treasure and bones of dead victims. Behind all this slept a very large dragon. Just as they crept up, it opened one eye because it smelled something unusual. It looked around, but did not see the demons, as they turned invisible. The dragon fell back asleep and snored very loudly. Husky crept up, swung her sword over her head and brought it down on the dragon's neck severing it halfway. Tiger and Slim followed Husky's lead and hacked the dragon's head completely off killing it instantly. "Now you know not to wake me up!" Husky whispered coldly. "Get over yourself already," Tiger sighed. "That was too easy," whispered Slim. As he finished whispering, a very loud roar echoed through the cave. "What the hell was that?" "I think we pissed off something else here. Maybe we better get out before we find out," Husky hissed. "I think it's too late," Tiger injected, as two glowing red eyes appeared behind them deeper in the cave. A much larger and older dragon appeared walking up behind them. This dragon awakened when it smelled the blood of the freshly killed dragon. The trio changed form and fled the cave closely followed by the angry dragon. Once outside the trio turned with swords drawn to face this new threat. A huge old dragon with missing scales lumbered clumsily out of the cave. Its wings were torn and worn so it could not fly. It closed its eyes as the rising sun momentarily blinded it. The trio attacked hacking and stabbing at the huge body. These little forays irritated more than hurt the dragon. The dragon swung its massive tail swatting at the little pests. Husky ducked under the tail and stabbed up at it as it passed by. Her sword locked between two scales and dragged her upwards toward the dragon's head. When she landed on the dragon's neck the sword wrenched free. Sitting astride the neck, she found a bare area of the neck and hacked at it. Blood spurted out all over her and she sputtered in disgust. Tiger and Slim soon joined Husky on the dragon's neck. Three swords hacking at the vulnerable spot made short work of the dragon's neck. Blood flew in all directions, as the cut grew deeper. Blood soon covered the trio and made footing treacherous, but they kept hacking and stabbing. As the dragon's head fell off the body rolled throwing the trio to the ground. The trio rolled in the loose dirt and escaped the falling body. They stood up happy to be alive, but covered in muddy blood all over their bodies. They looked at each other and burst out laughing so hard they fell down. "You both look so ugly now and in need of a good bath," Husky roared. Tiger sputtered, "I hate getting covered in blood but mixing in the dirt makes it doubly gross." "You girls stop your belly aching and let's get out of here. We can find a stream where you can make yourselves pretty on the way back to the village. We have a bounty to collect," muttered Slim. A short trek from the cave was a gently flowing stream where the trio washed off the blood and dirt. They got out of the

water and sat drying off. "We need to remember this cave," Slim said. "There is a lot of treasure stored there we could use." "Yeah, at least we got a good bounty for the dragon," Husky added. Tiger whined, "We don't have our bounty yet. Let's get going and get the bounty. Then we can count our treasure as a bonus." They got to the castle, met with the captain of the guard and collected their bounty. They went back to the inn, sat at a table, ate and drank their fill. They spent another night there and went back to the cave in the morning. They got to the cave, walked in picked up what coins and treasure they could carry and left the rest. Now they were on their way to China and the emperor who wanted the twins. This story and future parts are a collaboration by frogprince and 3rebels4