

# Scarlet Arcana Ravenswood

By

Xelica Cxryillia



## Chapter 1

“Catch!” The shout came with something being thrown across the theatre, the slightest flash of silver caught in the dim light.

Scarlet didn’t have a moment of thought to waste on the terrible throw, her body acted on an instinct she had thought long forgotten, catapulting herself past the creature, inches away from its claws. She twisted mid-air, her body landing none too smoothly on her back; her momentum sliding her across the stage and directly into the patch of the projectile. She snatched the gun out of the air before it hit her in the face and in one smooth motion pointed it straight at her enemy. The problem was that even though her little stunt had only taken a few seconds, it was enough for the creature to recover from the fake attack, find its target, and attack. So when she pulled the trigger, her target was barely an arm’s length away from the barrel, and moving at an inhuman speed directly towards her, fang-studded mouth first.

The whole situation would have ended painful either way, but Scarlet had known from the moment her hands had touched the silver metal that this was no ordinary gun. An ordinary gun would have been no use to her, but one magically charged and designed especially for eliminating monsters was. She felt the magic as the gun fired, the uncomfortable tingle travelling down her arm, but it was the lesser pain. The creature on the other hand was hit straight in the head, with a force that launched it out of its attack path and sent it slithering over the floor, dead.

Scarlet didn’t move; her grasp firm on the gun even though it was the very proof of the occurrence she was trying so hard to deny. She yearned for it to be a dream that she would awaken from any moment, but she wasn’t a delusional person. And when it became clear that this wasn’t a dream, and that the world wouldn’t wait for her to come to grips with it, she forced herself back on her feet. She expected herself to be unsteady, seeing the world through glazed eyes and watching as more and more people walked into her field of view, none of them civilians. But instead she was unnervingly calm, sure she was angry and in denial, but that was because she had thought that she had left all this behind her. The fact that she had just witnessed the mauling of a college by a monster, been attacked herself, and then killed it, didn’t faze her at all. She knew that it was the remnants of her training that kept her so calm, but the inhumanity of it made her shudder.

“It’s good to see that you haven’t lost any of your skills.”

“I see that you have,” Scarlet snarled, turning to face her addressor, anger laced into the annoyance of her voice. “Dorian. How else could something like this manage to kill someone?”

Everyone close enough to hear her, and she hadn’t kept her voice low, turned to stare. But she didn’t care in the slightest, she had just done their job and had lost a college to their incompetence, she owed them no gratitude or respect. Thrusting the gun back into the hands of their owner, she strode to the edge of the stage.

“Scarlet!” He called after her, but she ignored him, stepping off the stage and making her way through the seats towards the exit.

She didn’t make it very far, as two men stopped her from passing through. They didn’t look like much, but she knew that if they were working in this line of work, then they were good. The old her wouldn’t have even stopped walking, but that was a lifetime passed, so instead she was irritated.

“Seriously?” She asked, turning back to Dorian.



Dorian, formally known as Lord Dorian Coisean, Captain of the 7th squadron of the specialized military division to combat monsters, known off paper as the Hunters, looked dead serious. He was tall, with slanted smoke coloured eyes, and short golden hair set off by his light-coloured skin. His good looks weren't what had driven him from the privileged life of aristocracy, but they fit perfectly to the dark sleek uniform of the Hunters.

"You can't just leave like that." He said as he had caught up.

"Yes. I can. That was me, trying to leave, and be civil about it." She replied. "This isn't my life anymore, I'm done and over this crap."

"You can't be serious."

"Yes I am Dorian. All of this, the Hunters ruined my life, and I'm only just beginning to piece together the fragments of my shattered life."

"Things weren't perfected but you didn't have to leave."

"Don't give me that." Scarlet snarled. "I had to deceive everyone, my friends, my colleges, and my family. You expected me to live a normal life while I hunted down monsters in secret, unlike you. What do you think that does to a person?"

"It wasn't my decision." He replied sympathetically.

"I'm still not going to do the same crap again and expect the results to be any different."

"And I don't want to ruin your life again, but you said it yourself, we're not doing so well."

"That's an understatement." She snorted.

"Strange things have been going on, you know yourself that the monsters don't normally appear at day time in places like this, they have been changing, and not just their habits." He answered with a serious expression. "You are one of the best, and we need the best at the moment, if you could just take a look."

Scarlet considered what he had said, and what she had seen. The hunter in her was desperate for just a taste of her old way of life, and her rational mind couldn't deny that there had been something different.

"Fine, but don't think I'm coming back." She added when she saw the relief in Dorian's face.

"Of course." He replied, notably happier than before, before leading her to where the body was already being transported out. With a wave of his hand, the soldiers stopped and removed the sheet from the body.

Scarlet stepped closer, eyes skimming across the monster before her. Now that it wasn't trying to kill her, she had a moment to see it clearly, and Dorian had been right when he had said that something had changed. The monster was humanoid in appearance, but one distorted into a ghastly form that should only be found in horror stories. Its limbs were elongated, patched in muscle where no human would ever have, or need, them. Its whole body was covered in a reptilian like skin, with scales the size and shape of small daggers, and just as sharp. Both its arms and legs were studded in razor sharp claws, and its rib cage had evolved so that the bones broke through the skin to create an exoskeleton.

"Measurements?" She asked the room, knowing there would be a scientist on hand to do the preliminary examination of the body before it returned to the lab.

"It has a height of two sixty-five, with an arm length of one sixty, and tail length of three meters." A young man with glasses hurried with the explanation after a glance to his captain.

Scarlet cast him a glance, he looked way too young to be out in the field already, but didn't have any thought left to waste on him. His words had been of more significance to them.



"Temperature?" She asked.

"130 degrees." He replied hurriedly, almost like a child trying to impress their teacher, Scarlet mused.

"And?" She asked when he didn't continue. Her question caught him by surprise, and she saw that he had no idea what she wanted. "What's its negative core temperature? Please tell me you know what that is." She said with an annoyed glance to Dorian, she was starting to understand why they had seemed so incompetent to her.

"Of course, the monsters have a store low temperature fluid stored within the body which they can diffuse into their blood stream to regulate and lower their body temperature."

"Well done." Scarlet replied sarcastically to his textbook answer. "Then would you be so kind to take the temperature?" There was a pause.

"I don't know how." He replied meekly.

"Seriously?" She asked in disbelief, turning to Dorian who only shrugged his shoulder. "Well then, pay attention and you'll learn something new."

To his credit, he did lean in attentively, watching her closely as she let her fingers slide across the creature's rib cage, pressing against the skin to find a break in the rib cage. Finding one, she pulled a knife from her pocket, and stabbed forcefully into the flesh.

"You have to break the open the organ that contains the fluids with a knife that it made out of a material hard enough to break through the tough skin before you can take the temperature." She explained as she opened a path through the flesh, and when she reached the organ broke it open with a jab of her knife. "There you go, now I hope you know what to do from here." She asked and he was quick to comply.

She turned her attention back to the rest of the creature as she cleaned her knife and hands with the cloth that had been used to cover the creature.

"-89 degrees" He announced and she frowned.

"Strange."

"How so?" Dorian asked.

"It's abnormally warm."

"But that it far beyond freezing." The inexperienced scientist remarked.

"But it's not cold enough for the creature to be able to regulate its temperature enough, let alone disguise it." She replied absently, her attention having turned to the creatures head.

It was slim and elongated, with a deformed skull covered by stretched skin, and a mouth too large to seem natural. Scarlet wasn't skimpy as she pried its jaw open, revealing an impressive set of teeth that she had already seen enough of for the day. She inspected it closely, careful to use the knife instead of her fingers, because she knew that even in death these creatures could still be dangerous. There seemed to be too many teeth to be of any use of the creature, and its throat too was covered in muscle that would force its food down its throat.

"Since when have these anomalies started appearing?" She asked.

"Five or six months." Dorian answered. "At least those we know of." In other words eight months, Scarlet thought to herself.

"Odd." She said absently.

"How so?" He asked.

"It's almost as if they are devolving."

"How so?" The young scientist asked.



"They were close to being the perfect predator." She said shaking her head. "This seems like a step away from perfection instead of towards it."

"But that's normal isn't it? Evolution doesn't always better the creature, look at humans for example; many potentially useful evolutions were discarded." The scientist inserted.

"That's because humans are stupid, they chose to reproduce by society induced preferences. Not these creatures, their purpose is to further their species."

She tapped the knife against some of the teeth, looking for a special point that didn't seem to be in its usual place. She was quick to find it and in response a set of six fangs clicked into place, four on the upper jaw, two on the lower, and each with an overflowing supply of venom. She was careful not to touch the cutting edge of the teeth as she used her finger to collect a drop of the venom; it was dark brown in colour, much like the monsters blood. And she knew those two to not be so different.

"What are you doing?!" The scientist yelled as she licked her finger, the stingy taste of the venom spreading through her mouth.

"Relax, Samuel." Dorian said, but the scientist didn't seem convince.

"Relax? That's venoms deadly; she needs a doctor right away, and a psychologist right with it."

"Don't fret, the poison doesn't affect her." Dorian replied, and the Samuel wasn't the only one to stare at Dorian like he had gone crazy.

"That's impossible." Samuel said, looking at Scarlet like he expected her to fall over convulsing, with foam at her mouth. "How is that possible?" He asked when he saw that nothing was happening.

"Because Scarlet here was bitten by a Reaper." Dorian explained.

"What?" Samuel exclaimed, or it could have been one of the other bystanders, all of those who hadn't known Scarlet it her Hunter days stood there in disbelief.

And they had a right to be, reapers were rare, and few ever saw them, or in other words few who ever saw them lived long enough to tell the full tale. They produced a poison to toxic that there was simply no cure, and it had the charm of letting the victim live long enough to get to a doctor, only to have the doctor tell them that there was nothing they could do. The toxin would burn itself through the victim, in a way that left scars on their skin, and eyes as black as death. No one survived, but no one here would dare call their captain a liar.

Scarlet had completely ignored the conversation going on around her, and instead had moved onto what she thought was the most important part of any living being, the eyes. They were closed so Scarlet had to force them open to be rewarded with an eternity of darkness that stared back. She had looked into eyes like these often in the past, always finding something that would sooth her mind. But this time her unconscious mind found something that only fuelled the fire of her thoughts. Her lips tightened ever so slightly, her teeth clenched at an unheard sound that was making her whole skull vibrated. Her half closed eyes were locked in a staring contest that she couldn't win, and yet she was getting so much more than she ever wanted, especially now that she was just starting to get her life straightened out. It seemed like such an unlikely coincidence that her past would come to haunt her. She was battling out a war with herself, to silent to be noticed by anyone other than the ever watching of the eyes of the universe. But the universe wouldn't say a word, and not because she begged it to keep out of it.

She straightened up slowly, the image burned into her mind, not trying to draw any attention, but at the same time not making the mistake of acting to normal. But it was enough for Dorian to notice.



“Well?” He asked, and she turned half way to him. Not completely facing him because that would be giving in to something that she didn’t seem to have a chance of winning against, and not facing away because a part of her wanted it.

“I can't help you.” She replied, attempting to once again walk away from it all.

“Scarlet.” He stepped in her way. “Anything you can tell us would help, we’re at a loss here, and if this continues then we will have an outbreak.” He said in a lowered voice, trying to hide from his team what they already knew, because that was what a good commanding officer did.

Scarlet gazed into his eyes, seeing the proud man she once knew very well, desperate and tired. And at that moment she knew that if she didn’t help them at least a little, there would be trouble, and worse death. And she knew that she didn’t need the guilt of his death weighing down on her soul when she was living her new life.

“With all devolution of their physical form, I would start looking into how their mental state changes.” Scarlet finally said.

“Thank you.” Dorian said, meaning every word.

“Find some proper scientists and then you won’t have to thank me.” She replied, before walking away, and this time no one stopped her as she left the theatre.



## Chapter 2

The Hunters headquarters wasn't located in any of the military forts or divisions. Not because it was once of the greatest secrets in the country; there had been too many sightings to deny that, no, it was because it was a gruesome and dangerous situation that no one wanted to be close to. Ironical was that whenever there was a problem of unnatural origin, the militants always came to the Hunters for help. But in return they were regarded with an awe that bordered on fear. And the Hunters were left to fend for themselves.

Luckily not all of the people who had the power to help chose to be blissfully ignorant to the truth. Lord Cyrus R. Despard had been born into high society; brought up since his childhood by the beliefs of the church. But somewhere along his life line he found a new interest that brought him further away from God than any sin ever could. He found science and magic, and worse, he found a connection between the unlikely pair. He had become something of an enigma to the rest of society. He was also one of the people who had convinced the state that the horror stories were much more than the hallucinations of a drunkard; which ultimately ended up in the founding of the Hunters, who were now based inside Lord Despard's estate.

It was made up of a group of buildings, some centuries old, others built to accommodate the peculiar nature of the Hunters. It was not just a place of research and militant but also had become a home for many. And as the truth about demons became more of a harsh reality, people dared venture into the Hunters base. For reassurance or support, the reasons varied, but the Hunters were determined to keep up a good appearance, because once the people realized that they were on the side of good then they would be of more help to them, rather than, as so often, a hindrance.

The more important part of the organisation though, was based underground, hidden from prying eyes. Simply because not everyone was just curious, and on the other side, it really was the stuff of nightmares. This included the morgue, the first place that any demon went to when it had the privilege to enter. Unfortunately it wasn't just demons that ended up here. And as if to prove the fact, Lisanna had indeed been having more human patients than monsters.

Lisanna Hartworth was an expert on most things demonic, she didn't possess the official title of doctor, but then again this wasn't the usual work of one in the medical profession. She had though studied medicine before her life took an unusual turn, as it does with most people who work as Hunters. So instead of finishing her studies she ended up learning from first hand experience how dark the world was. She had ended up serving in the same unit as Scarlet and Dorian, and as a harsh life often drives one to, they became very good friends.

So when the body of a demon with a peculiar cut in the chest ended up on her slate, she knew exactly who was to blame.

"Samuel!" She barked, having spotted his name on the report.

"Yes Doctor" He replied, appearing from one of the other rooms.

"Come here." She said, noting his nervousness, anyone could see that he had had an eventful day.

He complied, walking hurriedly to her side, and when he saw which demon she was examining, visibly folded in on himself. Lisanna had to suppress a smile, she knew that the peculiarity of Scarlet could really be nerve racking and exhausting.



"Would you care to explain the state of this body?" She asked.

"It wasn't me," He replied defensively, "There was this strange woman; Captain Dorian seemed to know her." He continued cautiously, knowing that Lisanna and Dorian were good friends. "He called her Scarlet."

"Scarlet." Lisanna whispered with a smile, her suspicions confirmed.

"You know her?"

"Yes, very well." She answered, with the hint of a sad memory flitting over her face. "But either way, it seems she took the negative temperature." She continued with a hint of disapproval at the methodology.

"Yes, I didn't know how," He said, more than a tad embarrassed, "so she showed me how."

"Did she now?" Lisanna sighed. "Remind me to teach you the proper way to take the temperature."

"Yes Doctor." He answered, and taking it as a dismissal returned back to whatever part of the underground maze full of dead he had come from.

Lisanna turned her attention back to the body, yet another oddity to pass over her table. And yet she couldn't quite focus on the matter at hand. Her mind was clouded with memories, and worry. She knew the past all too well to even hope that Scarlet had returned voluntarily, too much had gone wrong for that. The knowledge made her worry, worry for an old friend she hadn't seen in a long time and yet never forgotten. She was determined to find out what exactly had happened, and was just about to go looking for Dorian when, as if summoned, walked right into her domain.

"Lis." He greeted.

"I was just about to go looking for you." She replied nodding towards the body. "I assume it was her."

"It was," A smile played over his lips. "You should have seen her, still the perfect Hunter."

"She's ok then?" Lisanna asked, and his smile vanished.

"The monster killed one of her colleges."

"Oh god. How did she take it?"

"You mean after she killed the demon? Not well. I don't think that she ever completely healed." Dorian answered regretfully.

"But she's back?" Lisanna asked but Dorian shook his head.

"She refused to help, I barely convinced her to take a look at the body."

"What did she say?" Lisanna asked, pulling out the initial report.

"That they were devolving." Dorian answered, hoping that Lisanna would better be able to understand what Scarlet had said.

"Hmm." Was the only answer; Lisanna was busy comparing the report to the body.

"You don't seem surprised." He noted.

"It's a suspicion that Cyrus mention, but the fact that the number of attacks have increased seem to dispute the fact." She pondered. "Frankly we've been stumped; it doesn't seem to make any sense."

"Perhaps the rest of her information will help." Dorian mentioned and Lisanna turned towards him. "Scarlet said to investigate their mental state."

"Ah."

"Problem?"





"Sort of" Lisanna stated. "Thing is, near the beginning of the Hunters, Cyrus started a project to establish the demon's intelligence, the results of which you know."

"Of course, every Hunter is required to have a MORI." He replied. The MORI, or M.O.R.I.D, was a device that was an essential tool for the Hunters. Its purpose is to Monitor, Observe, Record, and Identify Demons, hence the name M.O.R.I.D or sometimes MORI. In the physical sense, it was a not so small device that was mostly strapped to the Hunters wrist. Sort of like a bracer, except not so medieval. It was one of the creations of C.R. Despard, and was an ever growing database that contains information on demons that would be useful to a Hunter. So in other words, it contained all the information on demons; because no one was expected to memorise every single detail on every single demon. There are simply too many, and as mentioned, ever increasing. It was capable of identifying any demon and relaying the connected information to the hunter. It was also capable, in a limited capacity, of recording the demons habits and actions. Frankly it was a priceless device that made the job of the Hunters a lot easier and relatively safer. But as to how it worked, no one who wasn't specialized in the field knew, nor cared. It is a high-tech piece of machinery that was right up there with the airships and mechanical beings.

"How come I've never heard of the project?" Dorian asked.

"Because you never paid attention in the history lessons." Lisanna frowned. "And because it was completed soon after it began."

"Completed or broken off?" Dorian asked and Lisanna sighed.

"As you can imagine, it wasn't an easy job, and it cost a lot of people their lives."

"But it was successful?"

"To an extent," Lisanna replied. "We found that generally the intelligence level correlated to it physical form, to they didn't see the need to continue the project."

"But know?" Dorian asked, a creeping suspicion sneaking up on him.

"Now, I guess we will have to reopen the project."

"You don't seem to jolly." Dorian said dryly.

"Because we will have to catch a live one."

"You have got to be kidding me." Dorian exclaimed.

"I wish, but unfortunately finding out how intelligent they are when their head is separated from the body is kind of hard."

"No kidding."

"It would be easiest for you if you catch a youngling, that way we can also monitor its growth."

"Easier in the way that we'll not only be trying to catch one, but wading into a nest of them, fighting off some pissed off mother to catch a young one? Oh joy. I see weeks of dirty work in dark places coming towards me." Dorian sighed.

"Perhaps not." Lisanna murmured, inspecting the body once again.

"You've been in the morgue for too long, you've forgotten how hard it is to find them when they don't want to be found."

"Perhaps." Lisanna shot Dorian a friendly glare. "But my time in the morgue had taught me that running around blind won't get you anywhere."

"I thought I taught you that." Dorian joked and Lisanna only looked at him blandly.

"I would suggest you search in the sewers around where you encountered the Demon."

"On what grounds?" Asked sceptically.



“Oh, I don’t know, perhaps on the fact that this demon here is female, and recently had a litter.”

“And in the sewers...?”

“Because it’s dark, dirty, and it stinks.” Lisanna answered pointedly.

“Alright, alright.” Dorian said beaten, turning to leave. “This is payback for something, isn’t it?”

Lisanna only gave him a sly grin before he left, keeping it till she once again was all alone, with a dead demon. She couldn’t help but worry as she lost herself in the mindless run through of the examination. It was clear to her that Scarlet would have noticed that the demon was female, and she would have also made the connection.