

Tour Excerpts – WHERE THERE BE HUMANS by Rebekah L. Purdy

EXCERPT 1:

As we headed toward the large structure, Dorian leaned forward. “I heard the Council is coming in to speak to us during class today.”

“And on whose authority do you have that?” I teased.

“I’ve got connections in the palace.” He grinned.

“So what does the Council want?”

He leaned in closer, whispering, “There has been mention of a Mission.”

Blessed Hag! The Council hadn’t called for a Mission since before I was born. There were rumors that something happened in the human world the year King Starshooter and his advisors went, which was about seventeen or eighteen years ago, something bad enough they’d quit sending Goblins. King Starshooter’s father deemed them too dangerous. It was around that time, too, that he declared humans as fairytales and set laws against speaking of them or trying to search them out. Penalty being prison or possible death, depending on how far one went with their stories and ventures. Although, I knew there were people who worked in the Gob Hollow black market and still supplied information—for a price.

I chewed my bottom lip. If I were part of the Mission it could change everything. The Mission used to be a coming-of-age journey that consisted of royals, nobles, and a few select warriors trying to prove they were ready for leadership. The king would grant them a special task to test their abilities outside of Gob Hollow.

“Do you know who they’re going to choose?” I asked.

Dorian's hand tightened on my waist, pulling me back toward him. "I'm not sure yet. Father is being secretive. But I've put in a good word for you."

I peered over my shoulder and smiled.

"Prince Dorian and Lady Ivy, heads to the front and mouths shut," Kimblay barked. "One more word from the two of you will result in an evening in the gutters."

Eyes facing forward again, I sighed. Titles didn't mean a thing to the headmistress, and I couldn't be put on gutter duty tonight. I had plans and things to figure out.

First, how to get into the Archives.

And second, how to make sure I got on the list for the Mission.

EXCERPT 2:

I veered away from the palace and headed down a hidden path. Hedges lined either side of the walk, and statues holding lanterns stood every few feet. Tree branches hung over the path like a roof made of greenery.

My heart thudded in my chest as I approached the granite archway leading into the yard of the Gob Archives...and I gasped. The structure was built of white marble; twelve columns surrounded the whole thing, and lanterns hung from the ceiling, twinkling like stars. In front of each column sat a bench and a statue representing each of the Twelve Hag virtues: Strength, Power, Kindness, Purity, Wisdom, Stealth, Charity, Bravery, Dependability, Faith, Honor, and Loyalty.

The Goblin Hag was a goddess witch of sorts. It was said that when goblins first came to be, she'd bless them with certain virtues. She was the strongest being, but one day the

darkness had tricked her, killing her and sending her soul to the stars. Goblins still prayed to her, as she supposedly would give favor to certain goblins or even punish others.

I shivered at the last thought. When I glanced back to the statues, I noticed the one wielding a sword seemed to stare right through me, as though questioning my strength and courage. My blood thrummed in my ears. Then the statue's eyes opened, and I felt the flesh on my back burn.

Pain dropped me to my knees, the impact forcing the air from my lungs. "*Oof!*"

What was going on? Frantic, I searched the courtyard. When I looked at the statue again, its eyes were shut. "I must be imagining things," I whispered.

I climbed to my feet, the skin between my shoulder blades stinging like I'd just been flogged with Kimblay's switch. As I neared the Archives, I searched for Pudge, who was still nowhere to be found. He'd better not have bailed on me.

A rustling in the trees had me diving for cover, and then I heard the sound of groans coming from above.

"Ivy, is that you?"

"Pudge?" There he was, hanging from the tree, by a net. "How in the witch's tit did you manage this?"

"The King's Council has this place guarded by booby traps. I stepped into one."

They'd definitely caught a booby, all right. "Well, hang on while I cut you down," I said.

"I can't exactly go anywhere," he snorted. "And they call *you* the smart one."

My eyes narrowed. "It sounds like you're asking me to leave you up there."

“Sorry.” Pudge squirmed like a fish caught on a line. “Can you please just get me down before someone sees me?”

Once I made my way over to the tree, I searched for the rope, which was tied on a low-hanging branch. I unsheathed my dagger and cut it. Pudge fell to the ground with a *thud* and a yelp.

“Ow, could’ve been more careful—there are rocks down here.” He attempted to untangle himself from the net.

In the distance, I heard voices. We were going to get caught. I rushed over and tugged Pudge behind the bushes, where he fell in a heap, bringing me with him. “I can’t get this net off.”

“Quiet,” I hissed from on top of him, pointing to a guard making his rounds.

I covered his mouth with my hand, while I cut through the netting with the other, trying hard to ignore the increase of my pulse as our bodies pressed together.

Pudge stared at me, his gaze holding mine. His arm slinked around my waist, pulling me closer to keep me from being seen. His warm breath tickled my cheek as my head nestled down into the crook of his neck.

I shifted slightly, my lips accidentally brushing his skin. Oh, Hag, we were so close. I heard the sharp intake of his breath.

“Ivy, uh, you might not want to do that here. We’re friends, but even I’m not fully immune...” He grinned at me.

Blushing, I swatted his arm, pressing him further into the ground. “Shh...”

“Did you hear something?” one of the guards said.

