

Collecting Young Sorcerers

by Ms_Figg

A snapshot from the world of my original series, "The Protectors of the Realm."
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Chapter 1 of 1

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Five rather sleepy, anxious teenagers with backpacks sat quietly on the large, yellow bus that had picked them up last night from their homes for summer camp. Their parents had all been quite happy to see them off, unconscionably so. Norma Blatts couldn't believe it as she sat staring out the window. It was so dark she couldn't even see outside.

Her mother was notoriously strict about her going anywhere and doing anything. She wouldn't even let her join after-school activities. But ever since she received a letter stating Norma had been accepted to the "Greater Gains Summer Camp," it was as if it were all her mother could talk about.

"Mom, when did you apply for camp for me?" Norma asked.

"Why, I can't really remember, but I must have. All of the forms were filled out in my handwriting as well as the details about you. But don't worry. You're going to love camp!" her mother gushed.

Don't worry? But her mother worried about everything. If she were even a minute late coming home from school, Gladys Blatts was ready to call the police thinking Norma had been abducted. Besides, she couldn't find anything about the Greater Gains Summer Camp on the web, and that was weird.

The bus had picked her up last night, a young woman with long straight brown hair dressed in what looked like Army fatigues and a tall black man with an exotic accent coming to her door. It was nine o'clock and dark outside. They told her mother they came so early because it was quite a drive back to the camp and they had other children to pick up.

Norma couldn't believe her mom let her go with a black man. Mom was scared to death of black people, even nice ones. Norma didn't have her fear of them though. She went to school with black kids, and they were as regular as everyone else. She even had a black friend, Tasha, who was really nice. Norma had been sad she wouldn't see her over the summer, but there was no way her mom would let her go over to her house and she didn't allow visitors.

Norma couldn't help thinking there was something wrong with her mom. It was as if she wasn't herself. She was so agreeable as she kissed Norma good-bye and pushed her into Dahlia's arms.

She walked with them out to the yellow bus and climbed on. The first sight she saw was a man with longish dark brown hair sitting in the front seat with his back against the window and his legs stretched out. He wore a long black trench coat and dark sunglasses. His attire was strange because it was night and so warm out. He felt kind of

dangerous.

Artimus looked at her soberly, saying nothing as she walked to the back of the bus. There were two other teenagers there, a boy with red hair and freckles and a Spanish girl with wide dark eyes. Norma took a seat, but they didn't speak to each other. The man in the front seat watched her as she sat down, then turned away.

The woman entered the bus, sat down in the front seat opposite the man in black, looked back at Norma and gave her a smile as the tall black man sat down in the driver's seat. He pulled the door closed and started the bus. When the bus moved, everything outside went black except for the driver's window. Streaks of light seemed to be flying by.

It was now about four-thirty in the morning. Norma sat in a half-sleep state, her blue eyes widening now and then. Two more teenagers had been picked up, and they looked just as bewildered as she first did when they made their way to their seats.

Dahlia peered out of the window as Artimus sat across from her, nodding slightly. Andreas Mbutu looked from side to side, then reached into his shirt pocket and took out something that looked like a compass. It was a tracker.

"Well, Anthony Jackson is the last one we have to pick up. I think we're going to need you with us for this collection, Artimus," Andreas said in his soft African dialect.

Dahlia's stomach tensed as she heard that name. Anthony Jackson had needed the least protection of this year's group of young sorcerers. He had plenty. Any clerics that tried to get him were likely to come out in a bad way. Collecting him for camp was probably going to be an ordeal.

The bus got off on an overpass and headed for a rundown city. Abandoned buildings rose on either side of the bumpy, ill-kept roads. Artimus sat up, staring out of the windows. The kids also looked out of the windows. The outside was visible now.

"Ew, where are we? Did a bomb hit this place or something?" the redheaded boy said, his brown eyes narrowing as he looked at all the trash and beat-up buildings. A cat yowled.

Andreas continued driving, looking down at the tracker, then finally stopped in front of an alley. There was a single light over a green door halfway down.

"Why are we stopping here?" Clarence the redhead demanded to no one in particular. "It doesn't look very safe."

Artimus heard him as he stood up.

"It isn't. So just stay in your seats until we come back," Artimus growled at the youngsters before following Dahlia and Andreas off the bus.

He pulled out his wand and cast a protective spell around the vehicle before following his companions down the alleyway.

"Hey, what did he do that for? That was weird, him waving a stick at the bus like that," Clarence said, his face pressed against the window as were the other curious teenagers. No one answered him, but watched as the tall black man knocked on the door.

At first, they heard nothing, then a number of clicks.

Artimus quickly put a shielding spell around all of them. Those were the clicks of guns cocking.

"Who is it?" a male voice boomed through the door.

"My name is Andreas Mbutu," Andreas called back through the door. "I've come to collect Anthony Jackson for summer camp."

There was silence and then, "Man, get the fuck out of here. There ain't no Anthony Jackson in the 20 Street Blacks. Step off before I put a hole in your chest!"

"Mr. Jackson has been selected to participate in the Greater Gains Summer Camp program. It will be quite the experience," Andreas pressed. "We need to collect him. Now please, open the door and give the young man to us."

Then there followed some more murmuring. Dahlia held her wand at the ready and Artimus stood stock still, his wand in his hand and lowered to his side. He still wore the dark glasses. They were intimidating.

This was the first time Artimus had ever gone on a camp collection, and he did it primarily because of Dahlia, since she was his lover. Andreas invited him, saying this year's pickup could be a bit hairy and he might need a bit of help. Gregory normally went on the pick-ups, but he was at a big gaming convention. So Artimus filled in.

"Back away from the door, we're coming out," the voice said in warning.

The three backed away a bit, and the door slowly opened, the silver muzzle of a gun exiting first, held sideways by a firm black hand. A black man of about age twenty-two emerged, followed by several others, all with guns. They looked at the sorcerers and Dahlia, lowering their weapons somewhat when they saw all they had were sticks in their hands.

The first young man, who appeared to be the leader of the gang looked them over, his eyes drifting over Dahlia very slowly, a lustful look appearing on his face that made Artimus bristle as his gaze lingered on her hips for a moment. This hottie was bumping.

"Damn, baby, you look like you're ready for a war. Wanna fight me and my boys between the sheets?" he asked her as the others laughed.

"Ah, no. We're just here to pick up Anthony," she said to him, her hazel eyes cool. If he tried to touch her, she'd shove that gun straight up his ass.

"Don't nobody call me Anthony but my mama," a youthful voice said as a slim, tall young black boy pushed between the Blacks, "and my mama's on lockdown for the next six years. My street name's Lil Crunk. And I ain't going to no summer camp."

Dahlia thought Anthony was a bit big for thirteen, although he was skinny as a rail. He wore a white wife-beater and a pair of black pants much too big for him. A yellow bandana was tied around his head. In fact most of them wore yellow bandanas.

"But it is a wonderful opportunity, Mr. Jackson," Andreas said to the youngster. "You will learn marvelous things."

The gang members cracked up at Andreas' accent. Then the leader, whose name was Big Dawg said, "Listen, Kunta Kinte, Lil Crunk ain't going nowhere with you. Now, get the fuck out of here before we take your bitch and give you a beat down."

Artimus shifted slightly at this threat and insult as Dahlia's eyes glittered.

Big Dawg looked at Artimus with a frown.

"And who the fuck are you supposed to be? Cast member for the Matrix? Zero?" he quipped as Artimus' knuckles went white.

"I'm afraid we can't leave without Mr. Jackson," Andreas said, frowning now.

Big Dawg's face snarled up. Was this African Bambota muthafucker trying to pull rank on him? Aw, shit. It was on now.

"Well then, that's means ya'll won't be leaving," he said, then snarled, "Break 'em! Get the bitch!"

Suddenly the gang members tucked their guns away and swarmed over the sorcerers. In the bus, Clarence let out a yell.

"Oh shit! They're going to be killed! Did they leave the keys in here?" he cried, slinging off his backpack and running to the front of the bus, plopping down in the seat and looking at the blank dashboard in amazement. There were no gauges, ignition, brakes, gas pedals or anything. Just the pull lever to open the door and a steering wheel.

"How the fuck are they driving this thing?" he hissed, twisting the wheel and pressing his feet to the floorboards as if the pedals were there but invisible.

Dahlia was slipping and slinging gang members every which way as were Andreas and Artimus, who managed to punch Big Dawg in the face with a satisfying crunch. Suddenly all three of them disappeared, leaving the gang members startled.

"Where'd they go?" Big Dawg demanded, wiping at the blood streaming from his nose. Artimus had tagged him good. Suddenly, Anthony screamed and began to struggle before he just . . . disappeared.

"What the fuck?" Big Dawg said, his jaw dropping. Then he pointed toward the bus and drew his gun. "Come on, they got to take him there. Shoot it up!"

"What about Lil Crunk?" one of the gang members asked as they ran up the alley.

"Fuck him. We can't let no one come in our turf and dis us like this," Big Dawg snarled.

On the bus, the teenagers were all frozen with horror as the gang members ran toward them, guns pointed.

"Oh shit! Everybody hit the floor!" Clarence cried, diving out of the driver's seat and army crawling under one of the passenger seats. The others did the same just as the gunfire started, bullets ricocheting off the bus, not entering it.

"That shit must be bullet-proof. Try the wheels," Big Dawg yelled as bullets flew by him. It was a wonder they weren't shooting each other.

Suddenly a cry went up and the gang members dropped their guns. They had all turned red hot.

"What the fuck?" Big Dawg hissed as he stared at his smoking gun. Then he heard a desperate yell and saw Artimus and Andreas dragging a struggling Anthony onto the bus.

"Help!" the boy cried at his fellow gang bangers, who just stood there watching as he was pulled up the steps, Dahlia following but backing in, her wand pointed at the gang threateningly. There was some strange shit going on here. Lil Crunk was on his own.

Big Dawg watched as Anthony was slung down the lighted bus aisle by Matrix man, then charged him only to be hit by a right cross and fall from view, Artimus wringing his hand slightly. Andreas sat down in the driver's seat, and the bus pulled off slowly before disappearing completely.

The gang members ran to the top of the alley, looking down the street. There was no sign of the bus. Big Dawg shook his head.

"Man, those were fucking aliens," he said to the others. "Lil Crunk's gone to meet the mothership. Let's see if he left his weed behind."

Using their shirts and bandanas, the gang members picked up their hot guns and filed back down the alley. Lil Crunk was history now, and life in the hood went on. They'd spill a forty in his memory later.

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Artimus picked up the unconscious Anthony roughly and tossed him into one of the seats, his long legs hanging over the edge of it as the other passengers sidled by him, returning to their seats, wide-eyed and scared to death.

Dahlia tried to comfort them.

"We just had a little misunderstanding," she smiled at the stricken teenagers, "but everything's fine now. We'll be arriving at our destination just before sunrise. Just relax."

Clarence looked at Anthony's long legs sticking out into the aisle, then at Maria, who was sitting behind him, her dark eyes glistening with fear.

"Damn," he said to her in a low voice. Maria's eyes shifted toward him with a rather wild look. "When they say you're going to camp . . . they mean it."

Maria swallowed and nodded, then looked out the black window at her own reflection staring back at her.

After another hour, the bus began to slow and they could see outside. The grayness of dawn was rolling back the dark night. They were far away from the city now, the landscape low and rather featureless. They could see what looked like a lake ahead.

Suddenly, the bus veered and headed straight for the lake as the sun's rays broke over the horizon.

"Andreas! We can't pass through a lake!" Dahlia said, alarmed as the sorcerer stepped on the gas. Artimus sat calmly as they bounced along the landscape toward the large pool of water.

"That's not a lake. It's a reservoir. The biggest puddle there is," Andreas said as he floored it, and the bus leapt off an embankment and toward the water. A huge shimmer appeared, and all the teenagers with the exception of the still unconscious Anthony screamed with all their might.

"They're crazy! It's a murder-suicide! I told my dad I didn't want to go to summer camp!" Clarence screamed as they plummeted toward the water.

And then . . . they were through.

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A/N: This is a short about my characters from an original series/novel I'm working on called "The Protectors of the Realm." Here the main characters are collecting young sorcerers to train to use their magic. The way they pass from the normal world into the magical realm is to pass through natural pools of water or puddles at sunrise and sunset. The magical realm overlaps the normal world and shares the same space although on a different plane of reality. I hope you enjoyed this and you can read more about this world at ruthrsolomon.com. Thank you for reading.