

*From Night World 3  
A Sneak Peek from*

# Huntress

*Jez and Morgead Hunt*

“It’s simple,” Jez said on the night of the last hunt of her life. “You run. We chase. If we catch you, you die. We’ll give you three minutes head start.”

The skinhead gang-leader in front of her didn’t move. He had a pasty face and shark eyes. He was standing tensely, trying to look tough, but Jez could see the little quiver in his leg muscles.

Jez flashed him a smile.

“Pick a weapon,” she said. Her toe nudged the pile at her feet. There was a lot of stuff there—guns, knives, baseball bats, even a few spears. “Hey, take *more* than one. Take as many as you want. My treat.”

There was a stifled giggle from behind her and Jez made a sharp gesture to stop it. Then there was silence. The two gangs stood facing each other, six skinhead thugs on one side and Jez’s gang on the other.

Except that Jez's people weren't exactly normal gangbangers.

The skinhead leader's eyes shifted to the pile. Then he made a sudden lunge and came up with something in his hand.

A gun, of course. They always picked guns. This particular gun was the kind it was illegal to buy in California these days, a large caliber semiautomatic assault weapon. The skinhead whipped it up and held it pointed straight at Jez.

Jez threw back her head and laughed.

Everyone was staring at her—and that was fine. She looked great and she knew it.

Hands on her hips, red hair tumbling over her shoulders and down her back, fine-boned face tipped to the sky—yeah, she looked good. Tall and proud and fierce . . . and very beautiful. She was Jez Redfern, the huntress.

She lowered her chin and fixed the gang leader with eyes that were neither silver nor blue but some color in between. A color he never could have seen before, because no human had eyes like that.

He didn't get the clue. He didn't seem like the brightest.

"Chase this," he said, and he fired the gun.

Jez moved at the last instant. Not that metal through the chest

would have seriously hurt her, but it might have knocked her backwards and she didn't want that. She'd just taken over the leadership of the gang from Morgead and she didn't want to show any weakness.

The bullet passed through her left arm. There was a little explosion of blood and a sharp flash of pain as it fractured the bone before passing on through. Jez narrowed her eyes, but held onto her smile.

Then she glanced down at her arm and lost the smile, hissing. She hadn't considered the damage to her sleeve. Now there was a bloody hole in it. Why didn't she ever think about these things?

"Do you know how much leather costs? Do you know how much a North Beach jacket costs?" She advanced on the skinhead leader.

He was blinking and hyperventilating. Trying to figure out how she'd moved so fast and why she wasn't yelling in agony. He aimed the gun and fired again. And again, each time more wildly.

Jez dodged. She didn't want any more holes. The flesh of her arm was already healing, closing up and smoothing over. Too bad her jacket couldn't do the same. She reached the skinhead without getting hit again and grabbed him by the front of his green and black Air Force flight jacket. She lifted him, one handed, until the steel toes of his Doc Marten boots just cleared the ground.

“You better run, boy,” she said. Then she threw him.

He sailed through the air a remarkable distance and bounced off a tree. He scrambled up, his eyes showing white with terror, his chest heaving. He looked at her, looked at his gang, then turned and started running through the redwoods.

The other gang members stared after him for a moment before diving for the weapons pile. Jez watched them, frowning. They’d just seen how effective bullets were against people like her, but they still went for the guns, passing by perfectly good split-bamboo knives, yew arrows, and a gorgeous snakewood walking stick.

And then things were noisy for a while, as the skinheads came up from the pile and started firing. Jez’s gang dodged easily, but an exasperated voice sounded in Jez’s head.

*Can we go after them now? Or do you want to show off some more?*

She flicked a glance behind her. Morgead Blackthorn was seventeen, a year older than her, and her worst enemy. He was conceited, hotheaded, stubborn, and power-hungry--and it didn’t help that he was always saying she was all those things, too.

“I told them three minutes,” she said out loud. “You want me to break my word?” And for that instant, while she was snarling at him, she

forgot to keep track of bullets.

The next thing she knew Morgead was knocking her backward. He was lying on top of her. Something whizzed over both of them and hit a tree, spraying bark.

Morgead's gem-green eyes glared down into hers. "But . . . they're . . . not . . . running," he said with exaggerated patience. "In case you hadn't noticed."

He was too close. His hands were on either side of her head. His weight was on her. Jez kicked him off, furious with him and appalled at herself.

"This is *my* game. I thought of it. We play it my way!" she yelled.

The skinheads were scattering anyway. They'd finally realized that shooting was pointless. They were running, crashing through the sword fern.

"Okay, now!" Jez said. "But the leader's mine."

There was a chorus of shouts and hunting calls from her gang. Val, the biggest and always the most impatient, dashed off first, yelling something like "Yeeeeeehaw." Then Thistle and Raven went, the slight blond and the tall dark girl sticking together as always. Pierce hung back, staring with his cold eyes at a tree, waiting to give his prey the illusion of

escaping.

Jez didn't look to see what Morgead was doing. Why should she care?

She started off in the direction the skinhead leader had taken. But she didn't exactly take his path. She went through the trees, jumping from one redwood to another. The giant sequoias were the best; they had the thickest branches, although the wartlike bulges called burls on the coastal redwoods were good landing places, too. Jez jumped and grabbed and jumped again, occasionally doing acrobatic flips when she caught a branch just for the fun of it.

She loved Muir Woods. Even though all the wood around her was deadly--or maybe because it was. She liked taking risks. And the place was beautiful: the cathedral silence, the mossy greenness, the resinous smell.

Last week they'd hunted seven gangbangers through Golden Gate Park. It had been enjoyable, but not really private, and they couldn't let the humans fight back much. Gunshots in the park would attract attention. Muir Woods had been Jez's idea—they could kidnap the gang members and bring them here where nobody would disturb them. They would give them weapons. It would be a real hunt, with real danger.

Jez squatted on a branch to catch her breath. There just wasn't enough real danger in the world, she thought. Not like the old days, when there were still vampire hunters left in the Bay Area. Jez's parents had been killed by vampire hunters. But now that they'd all been eliminated there wasn't anything really scary anymore. . . .

She froze. There was an almost inaudible crunching in the pine needles ahead of her. Instantly she was on the move again, leaping fearlessly off the branch into space, landing on the spongy pine-needle carpet with her knees bent. She turned and stood face-to-face with the skinhead.

"Hey there," she said.

The skinhead's face was contorted, his eyes huge. He stared at her, breathing hard like a hurt animal.

"I know," Jez said. "You ran fast. You can't figure out how I ran faster."

"You're—not—human," the skinhead panted. Except that he threw in a lot of other words, the kind humans liked to use when they were upset.

"You guessed," Jez said cheerfully, ignoring the obscenities. "You're not as dumb as you look."

*“What—the hell—are you?”*

“Death.” Jez smiled at him. “Are you going to fight? I hope so.”

He fumbled the gun up again. His hands were shaking so hard he could scarcely aim it.

“I think you’re out of ammo,” Jez said. “But anyway a branch would be better. You want me to break one off for you?”

He pulled the trigger. The gun just clicked. He looked at it.

Jez smiled at him, showing her teeth.

She could feel them grow as she went into feeding mode. Her canines lengthening and curving until they were as sharp and delicate and translucent as a cat’s. She liked the feel of them lightly indenting her lower lip as she half-opened her mouth.

That wasn’t the only change. She knew that her eyes were turning to liquid silver and her lips were getting redder and fuller as blood flowed into them in anticipation of feeding. Her whole body was taking on an indefinable charge of energy.

The skinhead watched as she became more and more beautiful, more and more inhuman. And then he seemed to fold in on himself. With his back against a tree, he slid down until he was sitting on the ground in

the middle of some pale brown oyster fungus. He was staring straight ahead.

Jez's gaze was drawn to the double lightning bolt tattooed on his neck. Right . . . there, she thought. The skin seemed reasonably clean, and the smell of blood was enticing. It was running there, rich with adrenaline, in blue veins just under the surface. She was almost intoxicated just thinking about tapping it.

Fear was good; it added that extra spice to the taste. Like Sweet Tarts. This was going to be good. . . .

Then she heard a soft broken sound.

The skinhead was crying.

Not loud bawling. Not blubbering and begging. Just crying like a kid, slow tears trickling down his cheeks as he shook.

“I thought better of you,” Jez said. She shook her hair out, tossed it in contempt. But something inside her seemed to tighten.

He didn’t say anything. He just stared at her--no, *through* her—and cried. Jez knew what he was seeing. His own death.

“Oh, come on,” Jez said. “So you don’t want to die. Who does? But you’ve killed people before. Your gang killed that guy Juan last week. You can dish it out, but you can’t take it.”

He still didn’t say anything. He wasn’t pointing the gun at her anymore; he was clutching it with both hands to his chest as if it were a teddy bear or something. Or maybe as if he were going to kill himself to get away from her. The muzzle of the gun was under his chin.

The thing inside Jez tightened more. Tightened and twisted until she couldn’t breathe. What was wrong with her? He was just a human, and a human of the worst kind. He *deserved* to die, and not just because she was hungry.

But the sound of that crying. . . . It seemed to pull at her. She had a feeling almost of *déjà vu*, as if this had all happened before--but it *hadn't*. She knew it hadn't.

The skinhead spoke at last. "Do it quick," he whispered.

And Jez's mind was thrown into chaos.

With just those words, she was suddenly not in the forest anymore. She was falling into nothingness, whirling and spinning, with nothing to grab hold of. She saw pictures in bright, disjointed flashes. Nothing made sense; she was plunging in darkness with scenes unreeling before her helpless eyes.

"Do it quickly," somebody whispered. A flash and Jez saw who: a woman with dark red hair and delicate, bony shoulders. She had a face like a medieval princess. "I won't fight you," the woman said. "Kill me. But let my daughter live."

*Mother. . . .*

These were her memories.

She wanted to see more of her mother—she didn't have any conscious memory of the woman who'd given birth to her. But instead there was another flash. A little girl was huddled in a corner, shaking. The child had flame-bright hair and eyes that were neither silver nor blue. And she was so frightened. . . .

Another flash. A tall man running to the child. Turning around, standing in front of her. “Leave her alone! It’s not her fault. She doesn’t have to die!”

*Daddy.*

Her parents, who’d been killed when she was four. Executed by vampire hunters. . . .

Another flash and she saw fighting. Blood. Dark figures struggling with her mother and father. And screaming that wouldn’t quite resolve into words.

And then one of the dark figures picked up the little girl in the corner and held her up high . . . and Jez saw that he had fangs. He wasn’t a vampire hunter; he was a vampire.

And the little girl, whose mouth was open in a wail, had none.

All at once, Jez could understand the screaming.

“Kill her! Kill the human! Kill the freak!”

They were screaming it about *her*.

*Jez Redfern is the very first human-vampire crossover. With one human parent and one a member of the lamia, the vampires that can have families, she is regarded as a dangerous freak by the Night People. But something even more dangerous is coming her way. . . a quest to find the first Wild Power whose job is to stand against darkness and save the world, as has been predicted in this prophecy:*

*One from the land of kings long forgotten;  
One from the hearth that still holds the spark;  
One from the Day World where two eyes are watching;  
One from the twilight, to be one with the dark.*

*Can she do it? Find out in **Huntress** from **Night World Book 3**.*

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Contact L. J. Smith at [info@ljanesmith.net](mailto:info@ljanesmith.net)