



# The Summer Job

Summer opportunity available.  
No experience necessary.  
Sword skills a bonus ...

Robinne Weiss

Sandfly Books

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The rain came down in blinding sheets, driven by a howling southerly wind. Matt scrambled up the rocky slope, his fingers numb with cold and the rest of his body sweating inside his raincoat and rain pants. It was January, for God's sake, the height of summer! But that icy, wet wind felt more like July. His foot slipped on a moss-covered rock and Matt slid painfully downhill, wrenching his shoulder as he grabbed for a gnarled shrub to stop his fall.

Once again, he tackled the slope. According to his map, there was a bivvy up here. Matt's only goals right now involved a dry spot out of the wind and a hot cup of tea.

Foothold by handhold, he made his way upward, cursing the tracks that had led him into this gully hours ago. They had led him to nothing but an old camp, and had prevented him from noticing the storm clouds piling up in the south. He was beginning to wonder if he would spend all summer searching for orcs and never see one.

This had seemed like the perfect summer job for a fit twenty-something guy who didn't know what he wanted to do when he grew up. The ad described it as including "significant backcountry tramping", and said it involved "pest eradication". Matt assumed he'd be trapping possums or stoats. He never dreamed he'd be hunting orcs. Hell, he didn't even know orcs were real before he got this job. He just assumed they were some creature Tolkien had made up.

Matt was a Lord of the Rings fan—what guy his age wasn't? He'd read the books and seen the movies, including the

three Hobbit films, which he thought were a little stupid, but enjoyed anyway. But they were fantasy, right?

Apparently not. Not according to the Department of Conservation.

Finally, Matt made it to the ridge line. The wind up here was a living, roaring monster, and he didn't dare stand, for fear of being blown back into the valley below. On hands and knees he squinted through the rain. Clouds scudded over the ridge, obscuring even nearby objects. Please let the bivvy be nearby, he thought. He could see nothing but rock, lichen and rain. He crawled a few metres further and found the tramping track that ran along the ridge. Left or right? Which direction was the bivvy? He was about to pull out his GPS and then remembered—the batteries were flat. He had spares, but they were on the very bottom of his pack. To get to them would require taking everything out. In this rain. That's why they told you in training to always replace your batteries as soon as they were low, idiot!

He took a guess and went left, which kept the wind slightly more to his back.

It was painful and slow going on hands and knees. He gripped the rocks with his hands and dug his feet into cracks as the wind threatened to pluck him off the ridge. The wind blew rain up under his raincoat now, and Matt wondered if he would make it to the bivvy before he died of exposure. He decided he would crawl for half an hour in this direction, then turn around if he didn't find the bivvy and try the other direction. If he still

hadn't found the bivvy...well, he wouldn't think about that right now.

It was only twenty minutes before he saw it looming out of the clouds. Looming wasn't really the right word for the low A-frame structure held to the ridge with guy wires, but to Matt on his knees, it towered like a high-rise hotel.

He heaved open the door, pushing hard against the wind to do so, scrambled inside and collapsed on the floor as the wind slammed the door shut behind him.

Rain lashed the tin roof with a deafening roar, but inside was a sea of calm. For a few minutes, Matt didn't move. He didn't even take his pack off. He just lay still, savouring the respite.

Half an hour later, revived by a dry pair of thermals and a steaming cup of tea, Matt was almost glad for the storm raging outside. It gave him an excuse to stay put for the rest of the day. It wasn't even quite noon yet. He could have a nap, drink all the tea he wanted to, and lounge around until bedtime. He had the bivvy to himself, so he could even play music on his cell phone.

Matt managed to while away a few hours, organising the music and photos on his phone, enjoying a mug of hot soup and a few more cups of tea, and draping all his wet gear around the bivvy to dry. But as the day wore on, he ran out of things to do and found himself thinking ever more about his job.

Before his boss would tell him what the job even entailed, Matt had to sign an agreement to keep the nature of his job secret. He couldn't tell anyone what he was doing.

It was obvious why the government wanted this kept secret. If the world at large found out that there were orcs running wild in New Zealand, the tourism industry would die overnight. Not to mention it would be a bad look—a massive biosecurity leak that would destroy more than one career at Biosecurity NZ and the Department of Conservation.

The orcs had arrived with the Lord of the Rings cast and crew, of course. Where Peter Jackson got them in the first place was unclear—some said they came from Romania, others said they were actually Oni from Japan—no one really knew, but the fact was he had gotten real live orcs, not actors, for the orc roles in the films. When filming was over, most of the orcs were flown back to ... wherever they came from. Some, unfortunately, escaped their handlers and settled in the mountains on the South Island.

At first Matt didn't believe it, but he had seen his first orcs during training and had had enough encounters with the rubbish they left behind since then to realise there were at least a couple hundred of them out here. Filthy, they were. There was no mistaking an orc camp—cigarette butts littered the ground, along with bones of whatever hapless animal they'd recently butchered. Deer, tahr and rats, mostly (One of the other summer staff had found human bones once—he quit the next day). Piles of undisguised orc shit with toilet paper flags ringed each camp—they were worse than German tourists. And there were Tim-Tam packets, too. Orcs loved Tim-Tams, and every camp was rife with the discarded packets. Matt noted that Cara-

mel seemed to be their favourite variety, followed closely by Original.

It was a package of Original he'd dropped off in the camp he found this morning—Original laced with cyanide. Poison was DOC's answer to most vertebrate pests, and so they'd sent Matt and a couple dozen other guys out into the bush with packs full of poisoned Tim-Tams.

And swords.

The swords were meant for self-defence. Matt picked up his DOC-issued sword and pulled it out of its scabbard. The edge was still nice and sharp. No rust, though he should oil it after the soaking it got this morning.

He thought his boss was joking when he said he'd carry a sword, just in case.

"Why not a hunting rifle?"

"We're concerned that if we send a crew into Fiordland with rifles, the orcs could get hold of a rifle and ... well ... that could be bad. Better to fight them on their own terms."

So Matt had had a week of tracking and sword training, and then he was dropped off at the edge of Fiordland National Park with his search area marked on a laminated topo map in his pack. He checked in with the Queenstown Office once a week via cell phone and picked up airlifted supplies every fortnight. Between times, his task was to kill as many orcs as possible within his search area.

But Matt had yet to use his sword. He'd seen orcs from a distance and plenty of orc camps and trails, but he hadn't man-

aged to get close to them. He wasn't entirely sure he wanted to get close to them, actually. Seeing them on the movie screen was one thing, but being face-to-face with one was another. Besides, they always seemed to come in groups, so he knew that if and when he did catch up with them, he'd be outnumbered.

He really thought they should have given him a gun.

The gale continued through the day and into the evening. Matt made a cup of soup for dinner, eating it with the last of the stale crackers from last week's supply drop. He checked his drying gear and packed away what he could. He tucked the sword into his pack, just in case someone else was unlucky enough to show up at the bivvy tonight. He spread out his sleeping bag and lay down with a sigh. It was still early, but with the weather and the struggle up to the ridge earlier, Matt was ready to call it a night.

He was deeply asleep when the sound of the bivvy door slamming roused him. At first he couldn't even open his eyes, and when he did, the sight he saw made him shut them again quickly.

I'm asleep and dreaming, asleep and dreaming, asleep and dreaming ...

The rain lashing the roof couldn't mask the sounds, though. Grunts, growls and roars—the unmistakable voices of orcs.

In the bivvy.

He cracked his eyes open just enough to see through his lashes. There were two of them, one tall and broad, and the

other shorter and hunched. They both carried torches—not flaming torches like they did in the movies, but battery-operated, LED torches. In true orc fashion, their faces were revolting, but each in a different way. The tall one had a pig-like nose and jagged brown teeth. A thick scar ran from its left eye all the way to its jaw. The shorter one had a fringe of wispy white hair, a face that seemed to slide off its head, and eyes like peeled grapes without irises.

The orcs were clearly having some sort of an argument. From their gestures, he guessed it was something about whether they were going to take shelter here or somewhere else—the shorter one clearly was rooting for the bivvy, the taller one seemed to think the shorter one was a wuss. They didn't notice Matt for a minute, and he began to hope, as their argument heated up, that they'd just kill each other and have done with it. They had their knives out.

Then the short one gestured at the room, causing the tall one to glance in Matt's direction. Suddenly, their argument was forgotten. Greedy smiles spread across their faces, and they charged toward Matt.

Matt was caught in his sleeping bag, in his underwear and half asleep, and his sword was buried in his pack. All he could do was thrash and yell as the orcs grabbed him roughly and dragged him to the middle of the room where they could all stand without bumping their heads on the ceiling.

Switching to English, the orcs began to taunt Matt.

"Oh! It's our lucky day! Dinner, all ready and waiting for us. We don't even have to chase it down!"

The smaller one sniffed in Matt's direction.

"Too bad it ain't fresh!"

The taller one laughed.

"That's alright. I brought some aioli. Hides the stench of sweaty tramper."

Matt's legs were still tangled in his sleeping bag, and the orcs each gripped an arm in vice-like hands. His struggles and yells were accomplishing nothing. He was only vaguely listening to the orcs' conversation, but when he heard "aioli", he was so taken aback that he stopped his struggles.

"Orcs eat aioli? You know, that stuff is made with raw eggs—it'll give you salmonella if you don't keep it refrigerated."

The orcs laughed uproariously, sending spit flying at Matt's face. He shut his eyes with a grimace until they recovered.

"Oh, we got ourselves a smart one, here!" crowed the tall one. "They taste even better than the dumb ones!" He licked his lips and leered at Matt.

Then the orcs both burst out laughing again and released Matt, slapping him on the back like he was an old school chum.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! We got you, didn't we! You shoulda seen the look on your face when we said we was gonna eat you with aioli!" said the tall one.

"Aioli!" screeched the other through his laughter. "That was brilliant!"

"And then, you get all serious-like. You know that stuff is made with raw eggs." He burst out laughing again. Matt stood bewildered as the orcs wheezed and snorted with laughter. He thought their leering faces were bad, but their mirthful ones were positively gruesome.

When the orcs had calmed down somewhat, Matt ventured a question.

"So ... you're not going to eat me?"

"Course not."

"Yeah, we're vegetarians."

"Vege ... but you're orcs! You're supposed to be bloodthirsty man-eaters! You know MAN FLESH! Like in the movies."

"Mate, do you believe everything you see in the movies? Honestly, I thought you was smart."

"Yeah, we're not all bloodthirsty carnivores. Some of us is very sensitive and kind."

Both orcs burst out laughing again. Before Matt could work out how to react, the orcs were inviting him to sit down with them.

"C'mon! We brought the chilly bin and a bottle of something ... special."

Bewildered, Matt allowed himself to be tugged toward the pile of gear the orcs had deposited inside the door.

The smaller orc opened a large red chilly bin, and Matt marvelled that they'd lugged the thing up here—the movies had

clearly not misrepresented orc stamina. The orc pulled out a package of vegetarian sausages and handed them to Matt.

"These are awesome! Just like the real thing! We'll cook some up." He looked up at Matt. "Of course, we've only got tomato sauce for them, no aioli." Then he burst out laughing.

"Hey ..." said Matt. "I know you! You're the orc who said What about their legs? They don't need those!, aren't you?"

"He recognizes me!" The short orc grinned and turned to his companion. "Grabloc, he recognises me! I'm famous!" He lurched around the chilly bin toward Matt, who automatically shied away from him.

"C'mere, c'mere! I need a photo of this! Me with my adoring fan!" The orc pulled a cell phone out of his filthy pocket, slung an arm over Matt's shoulder and leaned toward him, grinning.

"Say cheese!" The flash made Matt blink. Or was that the orc stench burning his eyes?

"Hey, when you're done with your adoring fan, Thigspit, find the cookstove and get them sausages cooked. I'm starving!"

Thigspit set to work on the sausages while Grabloc pulled out a bottle from his pack. He opened it and took a swig, then sighed with satisfaction and wiped his mouth with his sleeve.

"Go on!" he said handing the bottle to Matt.

Matt took the bottle gingerly and examined it.

"Single malt scotch?"

"Yeah, that's good stuff, too—Talisker, eighteen years old. Nice an' peaty-like. Like takin' a drag on a cigarette. It'll put hair on your chest, mate! Go on. Take a swig."

Matt did so. He wasn't one to turn down an eighteen year-old scotch, and he figured the alcohol would kill whatever germs Grabloc had.

"Yeah, that is nice," he said, handing the bottle back.

"You got a cup?" asked Grabloc, waving the bottle to indicate he'd pour. Matt rummaged in his pack for his mug. As he did so, he saw his sword. He paused and looked furtively at the orcs. They were both busy over the sausages, testing to see if they were done yet. Matt grabbed his mug and cinched the pack shut tight. Now wasn't the time for a fight.

"Hey, uh ... what's-yer-name," called Thigspit.

"Matt. My name's Matt."

"Sorry, we've forgotten to introduce ourselves. I'm Thigspit, and the ugly one here is—"

"Grabloc. Yeah, I'd figured that out."

"Look! He is a smart one! Told ya! Anyway, I was gonna tell ya to pull out the bread and butter—d'ya mind buttering a few slices for us so they're ready for the sausages?"

"No worries." Matt found a partly squashed loaf of white bread and a greasy chunk of butter in the chilly bin. "Tomato sauce, too?" he asked as he noticed the bottle.

"Oh, yeah! Thanks!"

As Matt buttered bread, the orcs argued over how long to cook the sausages. At least, that's what they appeared to be

arguing about—they'd slipped back into Orcish while they bickered. Matt didn't blame them—it seemed to him that the language was specially designed for arguments.

Matt let his eyes wander over the orcs' gear as he worked. Axes, bows, knives—their packs bristled with weaponry. One of the bags was a scuffed, dun-coloured military pack from the 1960s, but the other ... Matt was impressed. The other was a snazzy new Exped Expedition pack—eighty litre capacity, fully waterproof—a great pack if you could afford it. Matt had looked at that pack himself, until he saw the price. He ended up settling on a used MacPac Cascade he bought on Trade Me.

Matt didn't want to think about where the orcs had gotten that pack. He tried to remember if any trampers had recently gone missing nearby.

"Ya got that bread ready, Matt?" asked Grabloc. "Bring it on over."

Matt carried a stack of buttered slices to where the orcs crouched over the stove. He handed the bread a slice at a time to Grabloc who laid a sausage in the middle of each. Thigspit squeezed an artistic squiggly line of tomato sauce on each sausage and stacked them on a plate.

"Ah! That looks good enough to eat!" growled Grabloc.

The three sat down on the floor with the plate between them. Grabloc poured a generous measure of scotch into their mugs. Thigspit raised his drink for a toast.

"To the great outdoors!"

"To single malt!" added Grabloc.

Matt smiled and raised his mug, clinking it ceremoniously with Thigspit's Sierra cup and Grabloc's insulated travel mug.

They ate in silence for a minute, Matt trying hard not to watch the orcs eat, lest he lose his appetite.

"So," began Grabloc through a mouthful of sausage. "What brings you to our lovely corner of paradise? And don't tell me yer one of them DOC rangers. Pesky things! Seem ta think we're not allowed here!" Grabloc's voice took on a threatening tone.

Matt's sausage stuck in his throat, and he was incredibly thankful his DOC-issued polar fleece was currently wadded up in his pack.

"Ah, no ... I ... um ... I'm just tramping, you know ... on vacation." Matt smiled and laughed weakly. "And what about you?"

"You might say we're on vacation, too," said Thigspit with a laugh. In answer to Matt's questioning look, he added, "We just quit our job last week."

"Another movie?" asked Matt.

Grabloc grunted. "I wish. Nah, we was workin' for the old man."

"Old man?"

"Saruman—or Sorry-man as we like to call him 'cause he's such a sorry excuse for a man."

"Wait. You were working for Saruman? Where?"

"Over in Long Sound. He's building himself another Orthanc. Thinks he's gonna breed himself up a new batch of Uruk-hai and take over New Zealand."

"What?"

"That's what I say—who'd want New Zealand? 'Course, I know for a fact Saruman's very fond of sheep, if you know what I mean." At this Grabloc burst out laughing, spraying bits of sausage all over Matt.

"But, isn't he an actor?"

"Yeah, he was," said Thigspit. "But he vanished right after the filming of that scene where the ents destroy Isengard. Collected his paycheque and just disappeared."

"Is that why they never showed the scene where he sweet-talks Theoden and Gandalf and everyone from the tower, and Gandalf breaks his staff? That was such a great scene in the book, I thought it a shame they left it out of the movie."

"Exactly! So Saruman just up and vanished, and then showed up in the middle of the night at filming sites, promising us orcs jobs, fame, fortune, women ... everything, if we'd come with him. We figured, what the hell!"

"But he never paid us shit. And there were no women, and precious little else to eat. So we slaved away in the rain and sand-flies for bloody nothing, while old Saruman lived in a sweet flat in Auckland and issued orders by cell phone."

"But cell phone reception in Fiordland is terrible!"

"Yep. Three times a day we had to run to the top of Cone Peak to report in and get instructions. When we complained, the

bastard said that we'd have fine reception in the tower as soon as we finished it. We told him he could build his own fucking tower, then shove it up his ass."

"So, did all the orcs quit?" asked Matt.

"Nah, couple of dozen quit last week with us. The others? I dunno. Either they're stupid or they think the old bastard is gonna come through on his promises. Ha! Yeah, right."

"So, what are you going to do now?"

"Dunno," said Thigspit. "Grabloc here wants to go home." He rolled his eyes.

"Bloody wasteland here. Not a bar within miles, and no one to fight, except this sorry bastard, who's only interested in nature," complained Grabloc.

"So, where exactly is home?"

"Philly."

"Philadelphia? You mean Philadelphia, Pennsylvania?"

"That's the place. You been there?"

"No, but I've heard stories ... Isn't it, like, murder capital of America?"

Grabloc laughed. "Yeah, that's home!"

Thigspit rolled his eyes again. "He just doesn't see the possibilities here. We're free of all that city shit! We got a whole country to explore! Awesome mountains, fabulous beaches ... I want to learn to surf ... and the gear! I mean, look at this!" He tugged at his shirt. "Wool! Merino! I've never worn wool this light or soft! It doesn't itch, it's warm when wet, dries almost instantly ... sure as hell beats that armour shit they made us

wear in Lord of the Rings!" Grabloc grunted his agreement, and Thigspit continued. "And these boots!" Matt noted he sported a pair of Merrells. "Completely waterproof! Light and cool—feet don't sweat in them." He frowned. "Course, I never know whether it's better to go with the synthetic or leather, you know, environmentally speaking."

Now it was Grabloc's turn to roll his eyes. "Don't let him get started on all that environmental shit. You'll never hear the end of it."

"Just because you have the environmental sensitivity of George Bush doesn't mean the rest of us don't care how our actions affect the planet," retorted Thigspit. "Look at you, in your cotton t-shirt. Do you know how many chemicals go into growing cotton? And it's not even warm when wet!"

"I'm an orc, not a fucking pansy," growled Grabloc. "I don't give a shit what I wear! I don't get cold."

It was clear he spoke the truth. Grabloc was wearing a black singlet, shorts, and gumboots. If you could overlook the warty skin and distinctly non-human body shape, he looked just like a Kiwi farmer.

"Well, I enjoy being comfortable, and this modern gear is brilliant!" Thigspit pulled out his cell phone. "Look at this!" he said eagerly, pulling up a web page on the screen. "This is what I want—tramping tent, weighs less than a kilo. Shelter anywhere I want it. I could hike anywhere with this." Then his face fell. "But the price ... I'll probably never be able to afford it."

"Maybe you could do product testing for MacPac or someone. They supply the gear, you use it, then write a review of it. It'd be great advertising—tested by orcs in tough New Zealand conditions!" suggested Matt.

"Do they do that?" Thigspit's eyes lit up.

"Well, they used to. It'd be worth ringing them to ask. Especially with you being so well-known from the movies." Matt wasn't sure this was entirely accurate, but Thigspit was identifiable, and it couldn't hurt.

Grabloc spit on the floor. "Don't encourage him. He's insufferable as it is. Anybody gonna eat that?" He pointed to the last sausage. Thigspit and Matt didn't want it. They passed the bottle around again.

Matt felt mildly guilty, sitting around eating the orcs' food and drinking their scotch. He was near the end of a two-week cycle though, and his food stores were low.

"I'll get dessert," he said, rising a little unsteadily. How much scotch had he had? He staggered to his pack and opened it.

There was his last package of poisoned Tim-Tams.

It would be so easy—they might not even notice if he didn't eat any.

His hand rested for a moment on the package.

Then he shoved it aside and reached further in to grab his emergency chocolate bar.

"Ooo! Cadbury Fruit and Nut! That's good stuff! You know, they use Fair Trade chocolate?"

Matt didn't know. He hadn't actually ever paid any attention to that. He sat back down and opened the bar, offering a piece to each of the orcs and taking one for himself. It didn't really go well with the scotch, but the orcs didn't seem to care.

Thigspit sighed as he bit into the chocolate. "Now, aren't you glad we came to the bivvy instead of squatting under a bush in the rain, Grabloc?"

Grabloc grunted. "Woulda been fine in the rain. We don't melt."

"Oh, stop being such a grump! Here, have some more scotch." Thigspit refilled everyone's cup, then looked sadly at the bottle. "Almost empty."

"That's okay. I brought backup," said Grabloc, reaching over to his pack and pulling out another bottle. "Might be a bit rougher than the last." He chuckled and set the bottle down heavily beside the rest of the chocolate bar. "That's proper orc-whisky. It'll curl your toes!"

"So, what was it like filming Lord of the Rings." The filming had caused such a buzz in New Zealand, especially once the first film made millions. And the movie industry was big—everyone wanted to use New Zealand's beautiful landscape as their backdrop. Matt was curious.

Thigspit and Grabloc were eager to tell their story. And there was plenty to tell. Matt was beginning to think that orcs weren't far removed from university freshmen—heavy drinking, lots of selfies.

"You gotta see this," slurred Grabloc, showing Matt a photo on his phone—Grabloc standing side by side with a grinning man.

"Is that really ..."

"Yep! It's him! Fame didn't go to his head. He always had time for us orcs, though he can't hold his liquor."

Thigspit laughed, snorting orc-whisky out his nose. This naturally set Grabloc and Matt laughing. When they finally stopped, Thigspit explained.

"He got the hiccups every time he drank, And then he'd get really crazy! Take a look at this!"

Grabloc pulled up an other picture, slightly out of focus and taken at an odd angle.

"What's he doing? Dancing naked on the table?"

Grabloc nodded, laughing.

"I had no idea he was so ..."

"Well-hung?" The three burst out laughing.

More whisky and more stories followed. Outside, the storm blew itself out, and calm descended, but none of the inhabitants of the bivvy noticed. By the end of the second bottle, the three were singing songs together and getting teary-eyed reminiscing over the death of Theoden.

Matt woke around noon with a screaming headache. He almost wished one of the orcs had buried an axe in his head—it might have felt better. He opened his eyes to find himself alone in the bivvy. All the orcs' gear was gone. He stumbled to his feet and out the door, grimacing at the bright sunshine as he made

his way to the loo. By the time he returned, his eyes had adjusted, but his head still throbbed. He sat down on a rock and looked around. There was no sign of the orcs. Two trampers were making their way up the ridge toward him. Still far away, though.

Matt went back into the bivvy and packed up the rest of his gear. As he opened his pack to shove in his sleeping bag, a piece of paper fluttered out. Crude writing was scrawled across it.

Safe travels, Matt! We enjoyed meeting you yesterday. Thanks for the chocolate and the sword! Give your boss our regards, and tell him to fuck off.

Matt rummaged around in his pack. The sword was gone. The Tim-Tams were still there.

Ten minutes later, he was on top of a nearby ridge, cell phone and Tim-Tams in hand. He hurled the package of Tim-Tams into the steep valley below, then sent a text to his boss.

Encountered orcs yesterday. Pls include single-malt scotch in next food drop.

Then he dropped down off the ridge, following the unmistakable tracks of a pair of gumboots beside a pair of Merrells. He hoped he'd be able to catch up.

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