



Staked: The Iron Druid Chronicles, Book Eight

By Kevin Hearne

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NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • Iron Druid Atticus O’Sullivan, hero of Kevin Hearne’s epic urban fantasy series, has a point to make—and then drive into a vampire’s heart.

When a Druid has lived for two thousand years like Atticus, he’s bound to run afoul of a few vampires. Make that legions of them. Even his former friend and legal counsel turned out to be a bloodsucking backstabber. Now the toothy troublemakers—led by power-mad pain-in-the-neck Theophilus—have become a huge problem requiring a solution. It’s time to make a stand.

As always, Atticus wouldn’t mind a little backup. But his allies have problems of their own. Ornery archdruid Owen Kennedy is having a wee bit of troll trouble: Turns out when you stiff a troll, it’s not water under the bridge. Meanwhile, Granuaile is desperate to free herself of the Norse god Loki’s mark and elude his powers of divination—a quest that will bring her face-to-face with several Slavic nightmares.

As Atticus globetrots to stop his nemesis Theophilus, the journey leads to Rome. What better place to end an immortal than the Eternal City? But poetic justice won’t come without a price: In order to defeat Theophilus, Atticus may have to lose an old friend.

Don’t miss any of Kevin Hearne’s phenomenal Iron Druid Chronicles novels:

HOUNDED | HEXED | HAMMERED | TRICKED | TRAPPED | HUNTED | SHATTERED | STAKED

Praise for Kevin Hearne and The Iron Druid Chronicles

“[The Iron Druid books] are clever, fast paced and a good escape.”—**Jason Weisberger, *Boing Boing***

“Celtic mythology and an ancient Druid with modern attitude mix it up in the Arizona desert in this witty new fantasy series.”—**Kelly Meding, author of *Chimera***

“Outrageously fun.”—***The Plain Dealer*, on *Hounded***

“Superb . . . plenty of quips and zap-pow-bang fighting.”—***Publishers Weekly***

(starred review), on *Hounded*

“Exciting . . . [Atticus] is one of the best main characters currently present in the urban fantasy genre.”—*Fantasy Book Critic*, on *Tricked*

“Funny, razor-sharp . . . plenty of action, humor, and mythology.”—*Booklist* (starred review), on *Shattered*

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Editorial Review

Review

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About the Author

Kevin Hearne lives with his wife, son, and doggies in Colorado. He hugs trees and rocks out to heavy metal and will happily geek out over comics with you. He also thinks tacos are a pretty nifty idea.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Chapter 1

I didn't have time to pull off the heist with a proper sense of theatre. I didn't even have a cool pair of shades. All I had was a soundtrack curated by Tarantino playing in my head, one of those songs with horns and a fat bass track and a guitar going waka-chaka-waka-chaka as I padded on asphalt with the uncomfortable feeling that someone was enjoying a voyeuristic close-up of my feet.

My plan wasn't masterful either. I was just going to wing it with an iron elemental named Ferris who was ready to do anything I asked, because he knew I'd feed him magic for it down the road. A faery snack, perhaps, or an enchanted doodad of some kind. Ferris thought such things were sweet—magic might even give him something akin to a sugar rush. Before making my run, I contacted him through the earth in a park and filled him in on the plan. He'd have to filter through the dead foundations of Toronto to follow me until it was time for him to act, but this was easier for him than it would be for most elementals. Lots of concrete got reinforced with iron rebar these days, and he's so strong at this point that he can afford to push through the lifeless underbelly of modern cities.

I dropped off Oberon and my shoes in a shaded alley and cast camouflage on myself before emerging into

the busy intersection of Front and York Streets in Toronto, where cameras from many sources might otherwise track me, not only the ones from the Royal Bank of Canada. But into the bank I strode at opening time, ducking in the doors behind someone else. Ferris followed underneath the street; I felt him buzzing through the sole of my bare right foot.

Security dudes were present in the lobby but utterly unarmed. They were not there so much to stop people from committing a crime as to witness those crimes and provide polite but damning testimony later. The Canadians would rather track down and confront robbers when they were all alone than endanger citizens in a bank lobby. Some people might suggest you didn't need security if they were just going to stand there, but that's not the case. Cameras didn't catch everything. In memories they sometimes didn't work at all, because you were clever and had a snarky anarchist hacker in your crew with some kind of oral fixation on lollipops or whatever. But even if the cameras stayed on and recorded the whole crime, security guards would notice things the cameras might not—voices, eye color, details about clothing, and so on.

Off to the right of the teller windows, the vault door remained closed. No one had asked to visit the safety deposit boxes yet. I'd wait and sneak in with someone except that I could be waiting for far longer than my camouflage would hold out. And the clock was ticking on my target's usefulness; the sooner I got hold of it, the more damage I'd be able to do. So I showed Ferris that vault door and asked him to take it apart. Let the alarms begin.

It's magnificent, watching a vault door disintegrate and people lose their shit over it in real time. The soundtrack in my head kicked into high gear as I stepped over the melted slag to tackle the next obstacle: a locked glass door that showed me the safety deposit boxes beyond. It was bulletproof to small arms but lacked the thickness to stop heavy-caliber rounds. Ferris couldn't help in taking apart the entire door like the vault, but that wasn't necessary; the locking mechanism was metal and he could melt that quickly, and he did. I pushed open the door and began searching for Box 517, the number I'd been given. I found it on the left and near the floor. It was a wide, shallow, flat one, with one lock for the customer's key and one lock for the bank's. With another assist from Ferris, both locks were dispatched and I opened it, snatched out the slim three-ring binder inside, and shoved it into my camouflaged pack before anyone even stepped inside the vault. I kicked the box closed just as a couple of guards finally appeared at the melted vault door, peeking through and seeing the open glass door. One of them was a doughy dude, tall and pillowy, and the other was a hard, cut Latino.

"Hello?" the puffy one said. "Anyone in there?"

The fit guard assumed that someone was. "You're on camera wherever you go in here. You can't hide."

Wrong.

"Why would he care about that?" Doughboy said. "Are you telling him to stop because he's being surveilled?"

Hardbody scowled and hissed at his co-worker, "I've got to say something, don't I? What would you say?"

"If you surrender to us now," Doughboy called into the vault, "we won't shoot you. Run away and they send the guys with guns."

"You're a twat, Gary," Hardbody muttered.

Gary—a much better name than Doughboy—blinked. “I’m sorry, what was that?”

“I said you’re right, Gary. That’s what I should have said to the robber we can’t see.” Gary didn’t look convinced that he’d heard him incorrectly the first time, but the cut guard didn’t give him time to pursue it. He stepped past the threshold of the vault and said, “Maybe he’s in the private room in the back.”

I turned around to see what he was talking about and spotted another door in the rear of the vault. Normally when customers removed their safety deposit boxes, they would step into that private room and fondle their deposits in safety until they were ready to return it. Hardbody was heading for that door, and I pressed myself against the row of boxes to let him pass by. Gary followed only to the glass doorway. He stood there, blocking my exit, and frowned at the dissolved lock.

“Somebody’s got to be here,” he said. “This doesn’t just happen by itself.”

Hardbody tried the door to the private room and found it secure. He punched in a code on a mounted keypad and peered inside once it opened.

“Anything there, Chuy?” Gary asked, finally giving me a better name for him.

“Nah.”

“Well, what the hell is going on? Is this guy a ninja or something?”

Oberon would have loved to hear that, and I nearly made a noise that would have given me away had they the sense to turn off the alarm and listen. As it was, the electronic shriek gave me cover to sneak right up to Gary. Since I was fueling my camouflage on the limited battery of my bear charm, I couldn’t stick around for much longer and wait for him to clear out of my way. Proper police would be around soon, and I didn’t want to have to deal with them too.

I reached out with both hands and shoved Gary hard through the threshold and to the left, leaving me a clear path to the vault door.

“Chuy called you a twat, Gary,” I said as I ran past. “I heard him.” It made me laugh, because Gary would have to report what Chuy called him since the perpetrator had said it.

Much cursing and outrage followed in my wake from both of the guards. A manager type was just outside the vault on a cell phone, talking to police. “Yes, sorry. There’s something a bit odd going on here at the bank. Our door has been melted. Sorry.”

The front doors to the bank had been automatically locked as part of the security protocols once the alarm went off, but Ferris gave me one more assist and I was out in the street. Whatever movement the cameras caught was fine; they would never get enough to identify me.

I thanked Ferris for his help and asked him to remain in the area for his reward. I’d have to scrounge up something suitably delicious for him before leaving.

That was fast, Oberon said through our mental link when I dropped my camouflage in the alley and chucked him under the chin.

I didn’t even get started on a nap.

“Only way to do it. Every second at the scene increases chances of capture. Ready for a spot of breakfast?” Oberon’s last meal had been on the plains of Ethiopia, during the episode that revealed to me the existence of the binder I’d just stolen. A tyromancer friend of mine named Mekera had pointed the way here after we’d hunted up some rennet for her, but she didn’t offer any snacks to us in the hours afterward.

Of course I’m ready! When have I ever been unprepared to eat, Atticus?

“Fair enough.”

I knew that it’s standard procedure to hole up in a nondescript warehouse or garage after robbing a bank, but I walked to Tim Hortons instead—affectionately known as Timmie’s—because I felt like having something hot and coffee-like and I didn’t have a big bag of money in a burlap sack to mark me as a dastardly villain. Instead, I had a backpack and an Irish wolfhound on a leash, so I looked like a local student instead of the mysterious thief who slipped past the security of the Royal Bank of Canada in downtown Toronto.

The Timmie’s on York Street sported a garish green-and-yellow-striped awning, a fire hydrant out front in case of donut grease fire, and a convenient signpost pointing the way to public parking. “What kind of ungodly breakfast meat do you want from here?” I asked Oberon as I tied him up to the sign.

The religion of the meat doesn’t affect its taste, my hound replied, a pedantic note creeping into his voice.

“What?”

Godly bacon and ungodly bacon taste the same, Atticus.

“Bacon it is. Now be nice to people who look scared of you while I’m inside. Do not pee on the hydrant, and no barking.”

Awww. I like to watch them jump. Sometimes they make squeaky noises.

“I know, but we can’t draw attention to ourselves right now.” Sirens wailed in the glass and steel canyons of downtown as police converged on the bank. The cars would get there eventually, but the two bicycle cops I saw pedaling the wrong way down York Street would get there first. “I’ll be back soon and we’ll eat.”

The teenager working the register judged me for ordering five bacon and egg sandwiches and a donut frosted in colors normally reserved for biohazard warnings. I could see it in her eyes: “Nice looking for a ginger, but shame about the diet.”

Well, as Oberon might say, I deserved a treat. Taking my maroon cup of coffee and a bag of greasy sandwiches outside, I sat next to my hound on the curb of York Street and unboxed breakfast for him as people emerged from the shop and wondered aloud what had the police in such an uproar.

“Whadda yanno, Ed,” a man said behind me. He hadn’t been there when I entered, but a quick glance over my shoulder revealed him standing next to a friend in front of the window, both of them holding maroon cups like mine, both dressed in jeans and work boots and wearing light jackets. “Sirens! That means crime. In Trahno.” I smiled at the local tendency to reduce their three-syllable city to two.

“Yep,” Ed replied. I waited for more, but Ed seemed to have exhausted his thoughts on the subject.

Hey! Oberon said, his tone accusatory as he gulped down the first sandwich. This is bacon, Atticus!

Didn't you say you wanted bacon? I answered him mentally since I didn't want Ed or his friend to worry about my sanity if they saw me talking out loud to my hound.

But I thought it would be Canadian bacon! Aren't we in Canada?

Yes, but maybe you were trying to be too clever there. People in Canada do not call that kind of meat Canadian bacon, the same way people in Belgium do not call their waffles Belgian waffles.

Well, it's still good. Thanks.

I snarfed the donut and slurped up some coffee and then pulled out the cause of all the trouble: a binder full of names and addresses, many of them international. There was no handy title page announcing their significance, but they were alphabetized, and I flipped to the H's. There I found an entry for Leif Helgarson, providing his former location in Arizona. It told me two things: This was, as I'd hoped, a directory of every vampire in the world, stored offline and therefore unhackable. But it was also months out of date at the very least. Leif had still nominally been the vampire lord of Arizona's sun-kissed humans around the time of Granuaile's binding to the earth, but he'd shown up twice in Europe since then—once in Greece and once in France. Germany too, if I counted a handwritten note. He was clearly on the move, and I had to assume the same would hold true for many other names on the list since I had started to pick off vampires via Fae mercenaries. Once word got out that this binder had been stolen, they would move for sure. So if it were to be of any use, I would have to move quickly, before they knew I had this. A USB drive with a file on it would have been more convenient, but since I was sure the idea was to make everything inconvenient for hackers and keep the speed of technology on their side, they had saved a hard copy only.

The two who would hear about it first and perhaps spread the word were the safety deposit box's owners: the ancient vampire Theophilus and the arcane lifeleech, Werner Drasche. The latter was most likely in Ethiopia where I'd left him, swearing in German and arranging a flight to Toronto. Theophilus, I knew, wouldn't be traveling across an ocean to chase me.

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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