

Ulfwerenar

by Kevin "Cian Shieldbiter" Thacker

A lean looking wolf he called "Wind" came over and tended his wounds, her rough tongue making his leg wound sting. She was thorough, making sure all signs of dirt or infection had gone before she was satisfied upon which she laid at his side. A thorn had stuck in her ear and with precision he deftly removed it.

Nearby his human companions tended their own wounds and talked in sombre tones amongst themselves about comrades just lost in battle, names in an endless list of names that stretched back into the past.

"Names" he thought to himself, "what did they mean to him", "many would fall and there would be many to replace them". He had once had a name "Agmundr" but that was a lifetime ago, many had entered his life and many had left it since then, only the pack endured, members changed but it was always the pack.

The one called Jorundsonn tended his leg wound whilst Jarl Eric talked to him quietly, the Shaman walked over and checked Jorundsonn's wound for himself "you'll soon be fit for battle son" he reassured the young Bondsman.

The Ulfwerenar sighed, once such assurances and understanding had been important to him, now they were only words. He vaguely remembered a woman talking to him, chatting, enquiring, interested, there had been children too, noisy, high pitched and raucous. Dead now, victims of the northern climate and a husband and father incapable of providing for them. For a moment he almost felt sorrow at the loss of his old life but death was part of life, the wolves had taught him that.

Why he stayed with the Norse men he didn't know, he felt happier amongst the wolves, perhaps one day he would let go the last shred of humanity and stay in wolf form. He smiled to himself "removing thorns would be a lot trickier". Blood and rending, they were the reasons he stayed, in his heart he knew this, he also knew that they were not considerations for most of his wolf pack, for them killing = eating. How they ate when the smell of rat or ogre filled their nostrils was beyond him although their blood tasted as sweet as any other (he had in his time as a half wolf used his teeth to dispatch his foe).

He watched Eric move amongst his men, of late he had felt a closer affinity to the warband leader, maybe it was because since Eric's gift from the chaos god of filth he too had no way to return to his old life. He knew Eric remembered him from the old days in the north lands but remembered little of him from those days, he only vaguely remembered being shipped to Cathay in a long boat tied inside the hull of a long boat.

He knew that Eric's hatred for the ogre captain had grown considerably over the last few days and feared this would lead to all their deaths. Not that he cared too much about dying but there were young men here who still had the vestiges of a life if they chose to take it.

What care of his, they were capable of making their own decisions. Thoughts of his own dead son drifted into his mind and he shook his head in an attempt to shake them loose forever. It wouldn't work, it never had, only the beast form really freed his mind. He drifted into sleep surrounded by the pack as dusk settled around the war band. His dreams were filled with monsters and memories but he was used to them, in some he was the monster and he knew this to be true and scarier than the other monsters.

It was just before dawn that the pack woke him, they were sniffing the air, heads held aloft and reaching. Darkness and breeze rolled mist made visibility short but he knew it was ogres, silently he moved over to Eric who was already awake and pointed eastward, where the breeze carried scent came from. Eric nodded his understanding and moved to wake the rest of the men.

Maybe he would make this his last battle, move into the woods with the pack, let the animal inside out, for good. Just one last battle, he felt he owed Eric that much. He stood waiting as the pack circled him eager for the fight. He looked over his shoulder the men were pulling on armour and readying weapons. He slowly started moving forward giving the warband chance to catch up. A new dawn broke the dark sky and he wondered what it would bring.