



TALES FROM TRUDVANG

◆ CREDITS ◆

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From Soj to the Great White

◆ TALES FROM TRUDVANG ◆



reetings, brave adventurers. I trust that you are tired and weary, for your journey must have been a most arduous one. Come closer now, warm yourselves by the hearth and treat yourselves to some mead. I want to hear all about it.

The world of Trudvang is a vast one. For thousands and thousands of miles its great landscape stretches on from the elven archipelago of Soj in the south to the blistering cold wasteland of the Great White in the farthest north. It is the home of sagas, the deep forests and great adventure. For many a century thousands of brave heroes have come and gone as they together have performed deeds both great and small that have held the darkness at bay and safeguarded the realms of decent folk. They have loved, lost, sacrificed and lived their lives by the sword from Wildheart to the Silferspiir mountains and beyond. Leading lives of solitude in the vast wilderness, it is to them the denizens of Trudvang owe their lives.

This is their story.

◆ LEMON CAKES AND HRIMTURSIRS ◆

For three weeks they had been trekking through the deep snows by the roots of the Jarngand mountains. Hildi was used to this kind of cold and yet she tightened the grip around her fur coat and wrapped it closer around the body as the Great White winds came roaring down from the hills. Storg and his brother Jormyr were with her and together they were heading back home to their village after a long hunting trip. Their hunt had been successful and they would return home with many hides and slabs of meat that would help them wait out the coming winter. Their catch was tied down to a cart that Storg was dragging along. This was no ordinary cart with wheels, it was built to be dragged through the deep snows of the northern Stormlands and thus it looked more like an oversized snow shoe.

Although they were close to home they set up camp under the shadow of a great rock where they could rest their sore legs for a moment or two. Jormyr was anxious to get on with the journey and did not want to stop, even though he felt his tender feet ache inside his fur clad boots. Hildi knew that Jormyr would complain, he always complained about almost everything. And just for that reason she had prepared a treat for her companions to make the rest worthwhile even for Jormyr. Hildi sat down and rested her back against the great rock as she started to rattle her leather pouch in search for the surprise. "We have no time for this", Jormyr lamented. Storg lit his pipe and joined Hildi by the rock. "Ah, come now brother", he said, "We will soon be home. Besides, I think we have earned ourselves a moment to catch our breath after such a long hunt, and a successful one at that!" Storg gestured towards the hides that laid frost bitten on the cart. Jormyr gruffed and planted his axe in the snow. Hildi smiled as she felt her hands grab around the little woolen knit in which the surprise laid hidden, "Yes, I agree with Storg. I think you will join us when you see what I have brought with me"

When Hildi pulled the woolen knit from her pouch both Storg and Jormyr lit up, for they knew what was packed within. "Lemon cakes!", Jormyr gushed as Hildi revealed the golden brown tarts to the group. Jormyr was first to grab three cakes from Hildi's hand and quickly scuttle away to enjoy

them in silence. After a moment Jormyr broke the silence, "Very well, I suppose this little stop was not a complete waste of time." Hildi smiled and let the sour filling of the tart softly stroke the inside of her throat as she reveled in every little bite.

Just as Jormyr had eaten the final cake and the group was about to prepare for the final stretch before they would arrive home, Storg stood up and quickly grabbed his axe. His gaze laid upon the mountains and his face was twisted in an expression of wonder and terror. "By Stormi, are you seeing this Hildi?", Storg said in a low voice. Hildi looked up and grabbed her shortsword.

That was when she saw it.

Down from the mountains it came with huge icicles hanging from its great horns. Hildi did not know what the monstrous creature was but Jormyr swiftly informed her that it was in fact a Hrimtursir, a frost giant from the Great White. Soon the ground shook with every rumbling step that the giant took as it was making its way down from the icy peaks towards the valley where the troupe had set up camp. Jormyr and Storg quickly took down the camp and was getting ready to leave whilst Hildi just stood there in awe of the giant. She was not afraid, instead she admired the hrimtursir with awe as it moved along through the snowy landscape. Just then it occurred to Hildi that the giant seemed very old. It bore a great frostbitten beard and as it walked along it leaned its weight against a gargantuan walking stick. To call it a stick is perhaps not quite right since it looked more like a great tree. Also, its blueish and frosty skin bore many scars and marks from the many battles that Hildi imagined that the hrimtursir had lived through, it even bore a great sword in its belt.

Jormyr readied his axe as the giant was now only a couple of hundred meters away from them, but Storg hindered him. "No," he said. "We would not be victorious in such a battle, brother. Let it pass on by and soak in the moment. We might never see another one like it in our lifetime" Storg did as he was told and once the giant creature had passed on by the troupe gathered their things and resumed their journey.

Soon Storg, Jormyr and Hildi reached their village where they could share their pelts and stories with the rest of the



villagers. Hildi would often let her thoughts wander back to that day in the valley by the foot of Jarngand and for many a year she would tell of that day to her children and grandchildren that would listen with gaping mouths.

Many times hence the three friends have made that same journey from the troll mountains to their village in the far north of Wildland. But in the end Storg was right. Hildi never saw another hrimtursir in her life.

◆ TROLL PEARLS ◆

Elsa ran as fast as her little legs would carry her. A little girl might not be able to put up much of a fight against full grown men with swords and axes, but she could surely outrun them. Through the forest Elsa sprinted, dodging branches and jumping over both stock, stone and brook as she went along. The thicket of the forest passed by in a blur but as long as Elsa could hear the howling and growling of the men and their hounds she could not allow herself to slow down. After some time when Elsa could no longer hear her pursuers behind her, she halted. Elsa sat down on a nearby tree stump to catch her breath. She was relieved to be safe from harm, but soon she realized that she had no idea where she was. Well, she was somewhere deep in the forest, that was for certain. Elsa had been so focused on her escape that she had payed no attention to where her feet were carrying her. She cursed herself, she had promised mother not to get lost in the forest. But now it was far too late, Elsa was truly lost in the forest.

For a moment she lingered by the tree stump, trying constantly to remember the route she had taken. She was going through the events step by step in her head. Firstly she had seen those glittering and perfectly round little pearls, lying in sacks by the crooked old oak. At that time Elsa couldn't have helped herself, she just had to have one of those pearls. It wasn't her fault that the bandits had left the pearls unguarded. And besides, they had so many already, surely taking one could do no harm. Elsa snatched one and took off as fast as she could, but it wasn't long before she could hear the bandits and their hounds following her. Elsa had picked up the pace and turned right by the great dwarf pine, or was it left? Then she came to the fallen tree and after that the glittering stream, or was it the other way around? Elsa sat down again and let out a deep sigh, "I'll never find my way back" she said to herself.

"Back where, little one?" a strange voice suddenly answered. Elsa gasped and looked up quickly. There, by the fallen tree, stood a troll. Old and ugly it was. Its face all wrinkled and its hair all tangled up with mud, twigs and bones. It was clad in fox fur and old torn cloths and on its fingers it bore many

iron rings. Elsa was of course startled and surprised to be joined by such an old troll, but not scared. It was not the first time she ever saw a troll, but she knew still not to anger such a creature, lest she wanted to end up as supper. "Back home." Elsa responded in a quiet voice. The troll stroked its chin and observed Elsa from head to toe for a moment and then took a few careful steps towards her. Just then Elsa stood up from the tree stump and cleared her throat, "I'm sorry, but I must ask you not to come any closer." she said. The troll quickly bolted back to the fallen tree and bowed its head. "Oh, my deepest apologies, little one. No need to be frightened, I mean you no harm." the troll mumbled. Elsa could feel cold sweats starting to run down her forehead as she grabbed her pearl tightly in her pocket. The troll must have noticed Elsa's motion, "What is that in your pocket, my child?" it asked. Elsa quickly removed her hand from her pocket and wiped the sweat from her forehead. "Nothing at all. Now, I must be heading back home or mother will be very angry with me." Elsa said as she turned away from the troll and started walking. Before she could get very far the troll had bolted round the trees to block her path forward once again. Elsa turned again and tried a different direction but every time she would go somewhere the troll would stand in her way. "Don't be hasty" the troll hissed. "I have eleven hungry little ones at home who would love to meet you". Elsa knew what this was: the troll meant to cook her and serve her up for dinner like a mere sunday roast.

The idea struck Elsa like a bolt of lightning just as the troll was liking its fingers and moving in to grab her. "Wait!" she cried out. The troll was startled and stopped for a moment with surprise painted all over its ugly face. "You want to know what I have in my pocket?" Elsa asked the troll. The troll was noticeably excited as it stroked its hands up and down whilst its emerald eyes remained intensely focused on Elsa. "Well, do you?" Elsa asked again. This time the troll nodded and showed its rotten teeth in a wide smile. "This is what I have in my pocket!" Elsa announced as she revealed the pearl. The troll almost fell over in awe and excitement as it laid eyes on the pearl. Practically drooling it came in closer to snatch it. "Oh, what precious little things you carry in your pockets".

Just as the troll was about to grab the pearl Elsa quickly put it back in her pocket. The troll cursed and tore its hair in frustration. "What a nasty little one! Give it to me, or I shall tear you flesh from your bone" the troll squealed. Elsa tried to remain calm, she knew that she now had the upper hand. "Calm down, master troll." she said. "The pearl will in time be yours, but first you will have to earn it". The troll stopped its cursing and looked at Elsa with mistrust in its eyes. "What mischief has the little one planned?" the troll asked. "No mischief" Elsa said, "the pearl will be yours once you show me the way out of this forest so that I can return to my ma and pa". The troll mumbled to itself for a moment before it answered. "As you wish, little one".

Thus it was that the troll led Elsa through the forest all the way back to its very border where the troll proclaimed that it would go no further in fear of straying too far from its lair. Elsa was most thankful and of course upheld her part of the bargain. Elsa would never see such joy again as the joy that she saw in the trolls face as it wrapped its mud clad hands around that pearl. The two of them parted there by the edge of the forest and went back home to their own families.

Elsa, the fishmonger's daughter, had lost her precious pearl to the troll, but in return she had been given a story that she would tell over and over again until it was passed down through the generations long after her death. And really, what worth is a pearl compared to a good story?



◆ THE ONE TRUE GOD AND I ◆

Lod Silvond tightened his grip around his sword. The inside of his helmet was boiling hot and he was breathing heavily. The clammer and thunder of battle rumbled in his ears and yet his mind was calm and focused.

The enemy was strong, stronger than Lod cared to admit. The cavalry had come down hard from the hills, and with their support, the Mittlanders had managed to encircle Lod and his fyrd. There they had been no match for the mounted warriors as one by one they had been picked off until the westmarkian archers could rain fire and death down from the heavens so that Lod and the survivors could make their escape under the cover of the ensuing chaos.

Now Lod readied himself for the final push. The moment when it would all be decided. Many had tried to flee but had been shot down as traitors by swift arrows. There was no escape from this, every last man and woman on this battlefield had to be ready to die on this day. But the one true god Gave was on their side, for Lod was a knight of the Nid and his war was a holy one. The enemy were heathens who had turned their backs on the light and on this day The Tenet of Nid would deliver justice to them.

The crows cackled in delight as the horns thundered in the valley and called the troops to a charge, for they knew that a most mighty feast was about to be served up. "This is it!" Lod heard his commander yell "Go now, knights of the Nid. Let justice be delivered on this day to the heathens. Go now to victory or glorious death, for god and country!". The westmarchian horde let out a thunderous cry and to the rattling of their steel they rushed to meet their enemy. Lod stood there frozen for a moment as his comrades charged in around him. Lod knew it in his trembling heart, he would die here today on foreign soil. For a moment Lod doubted it all, for a moment he wanted nothing more than to throw away his helmet and run for the hills. But he was quickly snapped out of his doubts when his commander grabbed him by the neck. "What are you waiting for?" he yelled "Go now to meet the heathens or I shall brand you a traitor and blasphemer right here, right now". Lod nodded and let out

a loud cry as he raised his blade over his head and rushed to meet his foes.

The impact was devastating. Lod slammed straight into a shield-bearing Mittlander with his armored shoulder. The enemy fell off his feet and Lod seized the opportunity to land a killing blow between the openings in his foe's armor. Still startled from the impact Lod bumbled about looking for the next opponent. If he could just survive for long enough he would be alright. Just one fight at a time, one fight at a time. He heard the neighing of a horse approach and as he looked over his shoulder he indeed saw how a horsemaster came charging with a great spear pointed right at him. Lod ducked at the right moment and managed to open a wound in the horse's side which forced the beast to the ground snorting. He pursued his dismounted enemy who had indeed been wounded by the violent fall, but not killed. Lod closed in and his foe readied his axe. The Mittlander was only clad in thick leathers and Lod found that his heavy scaled plate armor was not allowing him to compete with his foe's swiftness and grace. His enemy avoided every swing of Lod's sword and with every second that passed Lod could feel his strength failing him.

Now the Mittlander came towards him once again and in a last desperate attempt Lod held his sword aloft to parry the incoming strike. But alas it was to no avail, for under the weight of his foe's decisive swing Lod's sword shattered and the Mittlander's broad axe was firmly etched into the flesh of his left shoulder, shattering bones as it delved ever deeper. The pain was immense and for a moment the world before him seemed as nothing but a dark blur as Lod fell to his knees. Lod was broken and unarmed, now only waiting for the final blow that would send him to meet his master for whom he had sacrificed so much. The knight closed his eyes and prayed: "Gave, grant me a swift death. For I have paid the ultimate price and laid everything bare upon thine altar. I am ready". But death would lay dormant for just a moment longer. Lod heard the swoosh of an arrow and felt a swift breeze rattle his hair as it passed by his head. As he opened his eyes Lod saw that his foe had had his throat pierced by a large bolt. The knight looked over his shoulder and saw a crossbowman

reloading his weapon. Lod tried to rise but found that he could not, the pain was too much to bare. Still, Lod knew that he could not give up now.

Lod grabbed ahold of the axe that still sat firmly planted in his now numb shoulder. With a loud cry he removed it and threw it down onto the blood soaked soil. Lod arose groaning, every muscle in his tender body trembling immensely. Then he saw it. A long line of mounted Mittlanders had lined up on the horizon and they were readying themselves for a charge. As he looked around Lod could see his comrades bracing for impact, their eyes and faces calm. The crossbowman that had save his life hurried over to Lod and helped him stand up. The crossbowman was young, not even twenty summers. "What's your name, boy?", Lod grunted, gurgling blood in his beat up throat. The boy looked up on the knight, surprised to be spoken to by such a warrior. "Espen, my lord." Lod spat a gob of blood on the ground. "I am not your lord. But you have my thanks for your swift arrow. Now, the heathens are coming, and I suspect that neither you nor I will live long enough on this earth to tell of tomorrow." The boy looked upon the Mittlanders with terror in his eyes. The enemy had

sounded their horns and raised their banners and as they charged along the very ground beneath their horse's hooves shook for miles around.

"Do you fear death, Espen?" Lod asked. Espen met Lod's eyes, "I do" he said in a trembling voice. Lod smiled, "And do you still have faith in the one true god Gave and his teachings?". Espen nodded decisively. "Then fear not, my boy. For soon we'll be rapping at the door of his kingdom, and there Gave shall meet you and you shall have your wings back". Espen looked up at Lod with tears in his eyes, "Do you think so, sire"? Lod took a deep breath, "I know so.

For I have performed the vow of Gave upon you now, the same vow that I took on the day that I was knighted. And I take comfort in the knowledge that we few who have given our lives for the one true god shall one day walk beside him in his kingdom of light. You are his true servant, Espen, even as I. On this day, we go to fulfill our vows, and we shall know no fear".

The horse masters closed in. Lod could feel Espen's grip tighten around his shoulder as he closed his eyes, never to open them again on this earth.



◆ THE HERO AND THE WURM ◆

The stench was horrid. From the black waters of the bog little gusts of dark smoke bore with them a scent so foul and potent that Oywind had to bring his chainmail clad arm up to protect his nose. One careful step at a time he waded through the calm waters, making sure not to get stuck in the dark blue mud of that bog. The night was pitch black but Oywind carefully surveyed the area as best he could as he went along, anxiously spying for lyktgubbes or other dark undead. Tightly he gripped his sword and held up his wooden shield, as if waiting for something to lunge from the darkness at any moment. Oywind's prey was a cunning one, a silver tongued devil and dealer of death. Oywind was hunting a lindwurm.

Then suddenly, there over yonder, a warm light emerged from utter blackness. Oywind froze in place and ducked down in the water in fear of being spotted. Slowly he made his way over to the roots of a nearby tree, never allowing his eyes to stray from the light. That light came from a fire, that much Oywind was certain of. Then he spotted them, three cloaked figures all carrying small lanterns were moving slowly through the waters up ahead. Finally luck had found him, for Oywind knew that these figures would lead him straight to his prey. The figures were lindwurm worshippers and they had come to this bog to perform a ritual of sacrifice. Whether such a sacrifice was human or not, Oywind did not know.

Carefully he followed the cloaked figures and their lantern lights, never allowing them to slip out of sight whilst still keeping his distance. Soon they led Oywind to a place where the dead hung in snares from branches high above, swaying back and forth in the cold night casting long shadows on the trees and the water. Oywind looked up at them and shivered, for he could swear that their eyes were following his every move. At last the cloaked figures stopped by a great willow tree.

Just by the roots of that willow tree rose from the black waters a long stone table upon which many a gift had been laid bare. Those gifts took many forms, some more horrid than others. Skulls and bones, stone and wooden figurines, coins of bronze and silver, weapons and gemstones. All had been placed there as tribute by wicked folk who had come to

worship the lindwurm. For the cloaked figures were not the first to come here, but Oywind meant to make certain that they were indeed the last ones. The cloaked ones approached the stone table and placed their lanterns upon it as Oywind watched them from afar, following their every move carefully. Soon it would show itself, soon the great snake would be before him. The cloaked figures had come with gifts, just like others before them. From within their robes they brought forth glittering coins, ointments and incense. Just as they had placed their gifts the cloaked men took a knee in the muddy waters and awaited their god. They needed not wait for long.

From the darkness it came. Slithering hither and thither the lindwurm emerged from the blackness of the night to meet its servants. Monstrous it was with its hulking body, white scales, gleaming eyes and razor sharp teeth. The snake wrapped itself round the willow for many a lap until it at last rested its great head on its own tail, observing the cloaked figures with glowing eyes. "Well, well, well. What have we here?", the lindwurm hissed in a poisonous voice. One of the cloaked figures arose from the waters and drew a crooked knife from within his robes. "We have come hither to pay tribute" the cloaked one said. "For we are thine humble servants and merely ask to be allowed to gaze upon thine greatness and glory". The lindwurm was most pleased with such flattery, as all snakes are. So much so that it swayed its monstrous head back and forth as it let its forked tongue slip across its open mouth. "I am most pleased to hear it" the Lindwurm said. "But I would be amiss if I did not tell you that I am also very...disappointed with you lot. For I am hungry and you have not brought me a sacrifice of flesh and blood. Perhaps I must devour one of you three instead?". The cloaked figure that had stood up took a knee again and shrugged. "It would be our honor, oh mighty one". The lindwurm smiled and slithered ever closer, "Very well then".

In that moment Oywind stepped forward to reveal himself in the lantern light. "There will be no need for that. For I am Oywind, great hero of Arje. And I mean to slay thee on this night, wicked worm" he said and held his sword and shield at the ready. The cloaked figures suddenly arose and turned to face



him. The lindwurm looked at Oywind with intrigued eyes for a moment, then it slowly slithered back into the darkness and vanished. The cloaked ones drew their crooked daggers, "Fool! Do you not see what thou hast done? The master demands a sacrifice" one of them cried out. Oywind pointed his blade at the cloaked figures, "There will be no such sacrifices today, for I shall hinder it if I may". Then the cloaked ones came rushing forward holding their daggers aloft. One by one they swung their blades at Oywind who avoided every strike gracefully. Soon the cloaked worshippers were undone in a storm of blood and steel and as their corpses laid warm in the black water Oywind could feel the presence of his prey watching him from the shadows. "Come out, show thyself", Oywind roared to the blackness of the night. First there was only silence, then a hissing chuckle answered him from beyond the darkness. "Well done, well done indeed" the Lindwurm said from the cover of night.

"Thou hast undone my servants. Not the greatest of opponents, but an impressive display none the less, great hero. For that is why thou hast come, no? Because thou art the hero, and I am the monster. T'is a tale as old as time itself, a circle that will forever remain unbroken. Yes, it is indeed true that thou be a great hero, Oywind of Arje. The tales of thine bravery and valor have reached even my old ears. To end my life at the tip of thine blade would indeed be a worthy death for an old worm such as myself. But tell me, oh hero, to what end? For thou may strike me down as best ye can, but thou wouldst not do more than fulfill the prophecy that has already been written. For once upon a time I was too a great hero like ye, strong and brave. My conquests where the stuff of legend that all the skaalds would sing of. Many a man met their doom at the tip of my spear and it was said that no foe could undo me. But it was neither foe nor friend that would be my undoing, it was a heart. For I have once stood where you now stand and gazed into eyes much alike my own. But when my battle was done and the worm laid dead and cold before me, I too was nearing my end. For my wounds were deep and the blood colored red the very ground that you now stand on. In that moment I wondered if the old legends were true, was there power in the heart of a lindwurm? I held my blade aloft and carved the heart from the dead husk of that great snake. And I ate it. I gnawed away at the still beating heart until I had swallowed every last sinew. My wounds were restored, but after sixteen days I became as I am now, cold and scaled. As I said, oh great hero, t'is a tale as old as time itself. So I ask ye, to what end must we do battle?"

Oywind stood still for a moment. As much as it pained him, he could not help but listen to the seductive tale of the lindwurm that sent shivers down Oywind's spine with every word. The lindwurm told no lies, that much he was certain of. But in the end Oywind decided that a liar or not, the lindwurm would die on this day. "Your words will not sway me. True or false they matter little. I have walked through fire and water to end you, worm. And by the gods I shall see my quest fulfilled". Oywind heard a chuckle from beyond the darkness, "We shall see".

Then suddenly the lindwurm lunged itself at Oywind from the blackness of the night. And thus began a battle so long and terrible that I could not possibly tell of it here in its entirety. Suffice it to say that in the end the worm laid dead before Oywind and the hero stood victorious against his foe, but he had paid a most mighty price. For Oywind bled heavily from many wounds on his torn body, his bones broken and his shield shattered. Oywind had but one choice if he wanted to live and with his final strength the hero of Arje crawled through the muddy waters towards the husk of the worm. There Oywind grabbed a crooked dagger from one of the cloaked worshippers and with it he tore open the lindwurm's chest. Within sat a great heart, still beating and cold. Oywind grabbed it with his trembling hands and raised it up to his lips where he could not help but stop and hesitate for a moment. The night was dark and quiet, no help was coming. As grim a fate as it may be, it was his only hope. Oywind let loose a cry of pain and anger that echoed throughout the land as he bit into the heart. In a last dying frenzy the hero devoured the heart of the lindwurm, to the very last sinew. Then Oywind fell, bloodsoaked and dying his eyes were closed shut.

When the hero woke again he found that his wounds had been miraculously healed. Oywind returned home to his people - with the head of the lindwurm as a trophy - and there he was greeted and hailed as one of the greatest heroes and champions of his time. But in the end the hero's had been to no avail. In the coming days Oywind's mind grew ever darker, and his thirst for blood grew insatiable. He became cold as ice and his words ever more poisonous. On the next full moon Oywind had slithered back into the night, never to be seen again. As the lindwurm said, t'is a tale as old as time itself, a circle that will forever remain unbroken. The hero and the worm, one and the same in the end.

◆ ICE FISHING FOR TWO ◆



Thora did what she could to stay warm during the cold winter day in the forests of Fynhem. The rays of the sun and her fur and hide clothes surely helped, but a struggle it was nonetheless in such a cold climate. On this winter's day Thora was in the forest to look for food for her father and herself. Now that winter had arrived it was important that they filled their little cottage with all the food that they could find, for not a soul living or dead knew how long that winter may last. Lately she had found that a nearby lake was completely smacked full of fish in all shapes and sizes passing by in their search for warmer and more open waters downstream, sometimes she had even caught a salmon or two there.

These days the lake was of course frozen over and Thora had brought her ice fishing gear. It would be a long day by the lake, but she had brought her dog Nomi along to keep her company. Ice fishing on the lake could indeed be a lonely business and therefore Thora had not only brought her animal companion with her, but also a book. The book she had taken from her father's lock box without permission, he would never let such a precious tome escape him. It was a rare copy of a renowned sort: Jorgi's bestiary. Thora would get lost in its texts for hours and hours on end whenever she could summon the courage to snatch it from her father. There she would read about hrimtursirs, dragons, logis, basilisks and many other enchanting creatures. Thora wished to write such a tome herself one day, to travel all over Trudvang in search for species that might not even have been discovered yet.

Her daydreams were so real and interesting that Thora had not noticed that she had already reached the frozen lake and was now standing upon its slippery ice. Nomi's barking brought her back to reality and just as she was about to turn around to see what the dog was on about she lost her footing and slipped on the cold ice. With a loud thud she hit the ice and the wind was quickly knocked out of her. Nomi hurried over and started licking Thora's face in a desperate attempt to try and save her friend. Thora was of course fine, a little startled, but fine. "Oh stop it you old dog, I'll live" Thora chuckled and pushed Nomi away. The dog was pleased to see

her friend safe in one piece and took a seat on the ice.

Thora prepared her gear and pulled out an old fur blanket from her leather satchel on which she lied down. After arranging her gear Thora started to break open a hole in the ice with her iron hatchet. Each time the hatchet made impact with the ice the sound of it cracking and breaking beneath the iron echoed throughout the trees. A spooky sound, Thora had always thought. Now, an iron hatchet is perhaps not the finest tool that one can use for ice fishing, but nonetheless Thora could finally spy dark water beneath the hole she had made in the ice. Now the excitement was over and as she slowly lowered her fishing rod into the water Thora let out a long sigh, for she knew that many hours of waiting and sitting there doing nothing were before her, just like yesterday and countless days before that. Let's just say that she did not find ice fishing particularly thrilling. Thora had tried to convince her father to allow her to take his spear and hunt instead, but her father would not let her, saying it was "too dangerous". Thora frowned at the thought of it, "too dangerous", how silly. She knew that she could hold her own against whatever the world had to offer her, someone just had to give her the chance to prove herself.

Then, suddenly, Thora's train of thought was interrupted as she felt how something big grabbed ahold of the her bait at the end of the fishing rod. "Nomi! We've got something on the hook!" she cried out, and as she did the dog stood up and her panting intensified. Thora pulled the rod towards her but whatever was on the other end was strong and it fought back. There she stood for a moment, trying to win a battle of raw strength as the great beast beneath the ice was hell bent on her failing. With a loud crack Thora's fishing rod snapped in two and she fell on her back with a loud cry. Again Thora had the wind knocked out of her and as she laid there face down in the ice she heard Nomi barking again. "Oh you old dog, I'm fine still. I just fell, stop your noise" she said. But Nomi did not stop her barking and as Thora looked up she could see that the old dog was not looking at Thora, but at the edge of the forest. Thora quickly sat up and looked over at the trees.

There stood a fur clad figure on its hind legs looking at Thora with its amber eyes. The humanoid creature looked like a lynx standing tall like a man and Thora knew what it was for she had read of it in her father's book. It was a lomed, a wild and rare kind. Thora was baffled and just sat there unable to move whilst observing the lomed looking back at her. Then the lomed started walking towards her slowly under a silence that was only interrupted by Nomi's frantic barking. Thora was afraid of the creature and she started crawling backwards across the ice as the lomed was now standing just by Thora's ice fishing hole. The lomed tilted its furry head as it observed Thora, then it reached out its clawed hand and gently stroked Nomi's head and as it did the dog stopped its barking and happily licked the lomed's arm up and down. Thora was intrigued, if Nomi was not afraid then why should she be?

The lomed took a knee by the hole in the ice and looked down into the dark water, then back at Thora with intense eyes. Then suddenly, the feline creature swiftly dove down into the freezing waters and disappeared quicker than you can say "two trolls in a pinch". Thora rushed over and looked down the hole, gasping in surprise. Then what seemed to Thora like an eternity passed by. The lomed had stayed under the ice for so long that she feared that it must have lost its way

down there and gone under. However, her fears were soon put at ease when the lomed dashed forth from the icy water and landed in a dexterous pose on the frozen lake. Thora observed the drenched creature in awe as she saw that the lomed held in its large mouth a dead salmon. Huge the fish was and after the lomed had shrugged some water from its fur it ripped the salmon in half with its mighty jaws and tossed one half to Thora. The torn fish landed just by her feet and Thora quickly grabbed it with her trembling hands and stowed it away in her satchel. When she lifted her gaze towards the lomed she found that it had vanished without so much as a sign. Thora stood up, calmly looking towards the edge of the forest where she could see light movement in between the trees.

Thora quickly packed up her gear and returned home to her father. But the story about the lomed she had met on the frozen lake was a secret that stayed between her and Nomi. Ice fishing with such a rare creature forever cemented Thora's love of the wild and pristine nature of Trudvang and its many denizens. Several years later, when she had laid her father to rest and mourned his passing, she took Nomi with her and left the cottage in the forests of Fynhem and went off to see the world for her own and write of her travels. That day by the lake was perhaps the first time that Thora ever saw a lomed, but it was certainly not the last.

◆ A DWARVEN LINE OF DEFENSE ◆

Fire! Foe! Enemies at the gates, enemies at the gates!". The cries of warning echoed throughout the tunnels beneath the mountains of Nhoordland and many a horn called the dwarves to battle in defense of their home. Khravok ran as fast as his stout little legs could carry him through the many tunnels and passages of the underground kingdom. He and his brothers were rushing to the chamber of arms where they would have the honor of dressing their zvorda kin in mitraka forged murgli armor. All around the dwarves readied themselves with short spears and broad shields as they formed up by the many tight openings and narrow bridges where they would hold the line against the enemy. Khravok knew not yet what that enemy was but as he ran along he carried the words of his long dead brother in his head: "I tell this unto thee, little brother. When the horns of the dwarves call upon you to defend your homeland then you'd best summon up all the courage that you can find. For then, there be dragons at the gates". Khravok shivered at the thought of it, for he had never fought a dragon before, but he knew it in his iron heart that come hell or high water, he would fight for his home, dragon or no dragon.

Finally Khravok reached the chamber of arms where the zvorda warriors waited impatiently. "Where have you been? Don't you know that the realm is under attack?" one of the hulking troll dwarves roared. Khravok hurried over to the zvorda and with the help of his other Borjornikka brothers he started dressing the hulking brute in his armor. You see, dressing a zvorda dwarf in full mitraka forged armor is no simple affair. Firstly, the forging of such magnificent war gear requires meticulous and masterful craftsmanship combined with days upon days of hard labour by the logi forges deep in the underbelly of the lava filled mountains. To tell of such a process would be a story in its own. When the armor has been made strong and beautiful it requires many skilled Borjornikka dwarves to assemble it and dress it onto the zvorda, Khravok was such a craftsman and in times of war he and his brothers were summoned to the chamber of arms to fulfill their duty.



Now Khravok hammered away frantically at the shoulder plates of the armor, trying to fit the plating onto the massive zvorda, eliminating all cracks and openings so that the warrior could go to battle as strong and stubborn as the mountain itself. "Get a move on, little one. For I've a war to fight" the zvorda grunted. Khravok dared not answer the

hulking warrior, instead he hammered away and when he finally laid down his hammer from his tender hands and his work was done, he saw over yonder that one of his dwarven brothers was bringing forth the murgli. Khrovak rushed forward, for it was indeed an honor to carry the murgli helmet and dress the zvorda warrior in it. As Khrovak and his brothers approached the brute with the great headdress he saw how the zvorda was preparing himself for the coming battle. His eyes closed, mumbling inexplicably beneath his braided mustache. The dwarves chanted as they put the murgli upon the head of the warrior and locked its chains to his back. Then Khrovak and the rest of the Borjornikka stepped back to behold their mighty work, for mighty it was indeed. The zvorda grabbed ahold of his giant war hammer and held it aloft with his apeish arms whilst he let out a roar that sent shivers down Khrovak's back. "I thank ye, brothers of soot and stone, for as your work has ended mine has just began. I go now to defend our home by iron and fire, pray that my death will be remembered" the zvorda said as he left the chamber and thundered down the passage towards the gates where many a warrior had already gathered, awaiting the oncoming storm.

Khrovak and his Borjornikka brothers stood silent and still for a moment as they watched the gates tremble with every knock from their unknown enemy. Khrovak gripped

his hammer tightly in his sweaty palms, for he knew that he would have to use it for something other than blacksmithing before the day was at an end. Then came the deep breath before the plunge. With a thunderous boom and crack the gates were toppled and forth came the enemy in a whirlwind of steel and death. Storming the gates were no dragons, but a foe to fear none the less. Wildfolks from the mountains they were and with them came horrid thorn beasts with wings of utter blackness and teeth as sharp as so many daggers. Arks, they were called, and their business was with death itself. Khrovak's knees trembled at the sight of his dwarven brothers fighting bravely. But in the end the masses of the wild folks were too great and the dwarven horns blew to a retreat.

The dwarves scurried back into dark pits, tightly carved passageways, narrow bridges and deep chasms. For this was no human line of defense where row upon row of chainmail clad armies would stand tall defending a single gate until the last man. Here there were no towers from which archers would rain fire down upon their foes. This was a dwarven line of defense, meticulously planned, hidden, and near on impenetrable. On those narrow bridges and in those tightly carved passageways the Arks could come with a thousand men or twenty, it would make little difference. The way was closed. For these dark halls were made by the dwarves, sons of soot, fire and stone, and the dwarves would keep them.

◆ MY FIRST BLADE ◆

It was the eve of Eiwar's thirteenth birthday and his father had summoned him. The old warrior stood gazing over the open fields as the harsh wind made his white hair dance. Eiwar approached his father with careful steps, unsure whether he should disturb his father's watch. "Do not hide in the shadows, my son. It does not suit you," he had said in a stern voice. Eiwar approached swiftly and bowed, "You summoned me, father." Eiwar's father turned to him and looked at him with eyes that were as serious as death itself. The young man's blood froze, what could he possibly have done to provoke such emotions in his father? Then Eiwar noticed that his father was holding something, wrapped in light brown leathers. The hairs stood up on the back of Eiwar's neck, for he knew what was hidden within. "I have something for you," his father said. Then he clutched his wrinkled hands around the hilt and from the leather wrappings he drew a thick blade and held it aloft. Eiwar took a knee and beheld the blade with large eyes. The sword was magnificent. Sharp, perfectly balanced and decorated with the most intricate patterns of gold and silver. It was his father's sword, and it was named Wolf's Yawp after the two silver wolves that howled at the moon just by the root of the blade. "I am not worthy," Eiwar said as he lowered his head. Eiwar's father lifted the boy's head at met his fearful eyes.

"No, you are not. But I am old and can no longer wield it as fiercely as I once did in times long bygone. But alas, such times are no more and it is time to let die that which must die and let spring the new dawn of our family. You are that dawn, my son Eiwar. But as you say, you are not yet worthy. That is why you will leave this hall tonight and let the stars guide you into the east. There you will follow the heavens lights until you reach a place beyond Majnjord where the stones of our forebears lie. In the shadow of those rocks you must endure one cold night and then return to me. Only then will you be worthy to call this blade your own."

Eiwar thought back to that night as he now sat by his campfire and gazed at the bright stars above. He held Wolf's Yawp in a tight grip and his entire body was so tense that he swore that a muscle would soon snap from the pressure.

He was surrounded by the standing stones of his family's forebears. Their stone carved faces gazed at him in judgement and Eiwar could feel that their spirits had gathered around the circle. They were there to watch him decide the future of their legacy.

Suddenly a fierce wind came in from the neck of the wood below the crest of the hill. Its strength overcame Eiwar's campfire and extinguished it. Eiwar rose quickly and held up Wolf's Yawp, ready to strike. But there was no one there, only the silence of night. Eiwar turned around and searched both here and there for whatever might creep out of the darkness that laid thick between the standing stones. Eiwar could feel shivers dancing across his trembling body as his blood was boiling with fear. "Come out! Come out and face me!" he shouted at the cold and silent night. But then, two yellow eyes appeared in between two standing stones. Something growled from beyond the darkness and Eiwar could feel cold sweats running down his forehead. Then, from the darkness came a great black beast with fangs that gleamed in the night. A warg beast from the deep forests it was and it meant to slay Eiwar and eat him for supper. "Come then, get it over with" Eiwar hissed.

Then the feral beast lunged itself at Eiwar and he held Wolf's Yawp aloft and let rip a shriek so loud that the ravens of Darkwood far away heard it and took flight. Eiwar and the warg beast battled throughout the night. When the boy had struck the beast with his steel and wounded it, the warg would retreat into the night only to return a few moments later and resume the battle. So they did battle back and forth until dawn begun to rise over the Althissea to the south, red and bleeding like an open wound. Eiwar was bruised and wounded, his body colored red from blood both new and old. Now he readied himself for what he knew would be the final clash. The warg beast stood panting by a standing stone only a few meters from Eiwar. The two stood panting and moaning by their own corners of the circle, soon out of breath and strength to go on. Eiwar stared deep into the feral eyes of the warg. They were no longer filled with hatred and rage, only hunger and weariness. He wished no longer to slay the beast,

only to let it go forth from that place and live in peace at its own whim. Then he remembered what his father had said, "In the shadow of those rocks you must endure one cold night and then return to me." The sun now shone bright upon the circle and the cold night had passed, and Eiwar had indeed survived it. The boy sheathed Wolf's Yawp and arose slowly and trembling by one of the standing stones, not letting his eyes slip from the warg's gaze. The warg beast readied herself for a final clash, but Eiwar held his hand up towards him. "I

wish not to slay thee, wolf mother. Our struggle is at an end and I shall leave this place and go hither if you will do the same." Eiwar could not be sure, but it seemed to him as if the war understood and let loose a sigh of relief within.

So it was that Eiwar left the circle of his forebears and his foe on the morn of the bleeding sun. He followed the stars back to his father's hall, and there he was met with merriment and song as he was made master of Wolf's Yawp, his first blade.

◆ BY BLOOD, BY STORM ◆

The time had come. On this night of ritual, death would bring salvation, blood would be the wine of the gods and thunder would herald a new dawn. Tonight the folk of Vortland would perform a heathen tradition of gerbanis, a blood gifting to the god Stormi. This particular blood gifting was one of special magnificence. For normally the stormlanders would only hang beasts from the iron rings on the storm pole and ask the gods for a good harvest or a merciful winter. But on this night the villagers of Rimheim would ask for a most mighty favour.

For the jarl of the village lied before his death. His winter boar hunt had taken a bloody turn when the great hog had broken his spear and shattered his bones. The jarl was a great warrior who had defended the village for many years with an unbending strength. He was loved by all his people and none who knew his name could bear the grim thought of his passing. So, the people would beg for help from the gods to save the great jarl. Their offering: Greta, the jarl's firstborn daughter. Would his mind not be swaying between life and death the jarl would never allow such a thing to pass. For he held his daughter Greta very dear and would not allow any harm to come to her. But Greta too loved her father and would willingly give her life would it only save him. And thus, on this night, she would appease Stormi with her glorious death upon the storm pole.

With a steely expression on her face Greta approached the great storm pole. There all the village had gathered to watch and only the howling wind from the mountains broke the total silence. The Jarl's daughter stood in a ceremonial dinghy that was being dragged along upon the snow-clad soil by four men from her father's hird. It was lavishly decorated with gold, iron and bronze. Two storm priests stood waiting for her by the storm pole. Their heads were hung in sorrow, as there was no pleasure or excitement in this sacrifice. As Greta was getting closer to the chains that would hang her aloft cries of protest came from the crowd. But Greta held up her hand and

they were swiftly silenced. The storm priests gently removed the great bear pelt that had covered Greta's naked body and she was thus exposed to the elements. She held herself with grace and in that moment there was none stronger than the Jarl's daughter in the whole of the Stormlands. The storm priests chained her by the neck and by her hands, then Greta spoke in a stern and loud voice.

"Take heed, and bear witness to my sacrifice, oh Stormi. For on this night, and on all nights to come until the end of times, I give myself unto thee. Take my life and do with it as you will. Lift me up to do battle by your side or cast me into ruin and chaos, it matters little. I only ask of you - oh great Stormi - that you spare the life of another. Let him be free of his pains, of his wounds and of his sorrow. Let him rise like a warrior of old and stand by his people who hold him as one of their own. Let him not be worn down by rugged winter or by blistering wind of fierce battle. Let him break the chains of death and instead bind me to the same shackles. For on this night, and on all night to come until the end of time, I give myself unto thee".

Greta then looked upon the somber faces of her people one last time. The storm priest approached her and with a trembling hand he drew his sacrificial blade. Not a man, woman or child looked away when he slit her throat and gathered her blood in a wooden bowl. For they respected their ancient traditions and customs, and above all else, the brave sacrifice of Greta the jarl's daughter. Greta looked out over the sorrowful faces of the crowd as the blood rushed forth from her open throat. She remained standing until the very end, strong and proud.

Such is the way of the Stormlands and the world of Trudvang, death and life are sometimes not so different. It can seem cruel, even barbaric. But death is nothing to be feared in the land of sagas. For life carries on in death either within the mountain, by the side of Gave in his kingdom of light, in the great chaos storm, in the stars or in Othwa the kingdom of heroes.

◆ WHERE THE WILD ONES ARE ◆



h brook, oh stock, oh stone.

Lead me hither unto emerald wrapped and buried home.

What secrets keep ye in thine bosom?

Under fir, pine and wild blossom.

Calling my name by wind and wither.

I shall follow your path hither and thither."

"Not so loud! Don't ye know that there be wild folks in these woods?" Vitus hissed to his singing brother. Rabekk looked back at him with wide eyes of surprise and suddenly stopped his merry tune. "What? Wild folks? I hear they dress in the skins of their flayed foes. What horror to think that they are so close," he said. "Exactly", Vitus answered, "And now you've surely gone and woken every barbarian and troll from here to Wildheart." Rabekk shivered at the thought, "Don't mention that vile place when we're so deep in the forest." Vitus tightened the straps of his backpack and frowned as he searched for solid ground with his wool clad foot on the rockfall that was their only way down from where they stood. The two dwarves had come to the forest to look for their lost brother. He had left their home in the Icy Peaks half a year ago to find adventure in the forests of the Stormlands and he had promised them and their clan that he would return with riches from their long gone kin. The days had passed, then the weeks and then the months. Rabekk and his older brother feared that he had lost his way somewhere down there in the wide wilderness and that he couldn't find his way back. They swore that they would find him and bring him back, and if the worst had happened they would bury his body, that was the least they could do.

The two dwarf brothers were accompanied by a guide, an old man from Junghart who claimed to know the forest well. He was a strange man but he seemed to be well travelled. Where the dwarves had trouble traversing the landscape Heimir, as he called himself, moved forward with grace as if he knew every last pebble and root in the entire forest. He held a huge staff in his wrinkled hands from which many prisms hung and by his side he wore a short sword in a leather belt. "What do ye think, Heimir?" Rabekk asked.

Heimir stopped just by the roots of a fallen tree that would lead them over a small brook before he answered. "What do I think about what?" Rabekk looked around for a moment and then lowered his voice, "You know, about the wild folks." Heimir looked over at the dwarf with a crooked smile, "There are many dark things in the forests of our world. And your brother is right, some of them are best left undisturbed." With a swift maneuver Heimir moved across the fallen tree and over the brook without so much as getting his shoes wet. Rabekk and Vitus stood there for a moment observing his movement. "That's a wee bit suspicious, don't ye think?" Rabekk asked his brother with a flick of his eyebrows. "Keep silent, brother. He's a bit strange, I'll give ye that. But he's the only guide we've got."

The two brothers were interrupted by Heimir calling them beyond the woodwork, "Come! Look what I've found, my little companions." The brothers jumped into the brook and quickly waded through the water, they knew better than to try and balance their feet upon the slippery tree that their guide had crossed over. When they got to the other side, they understood what the stormlander had been so excited about. There, upon the crest of a great hill sat a ginormous skeleton, overgrown and clad in rusted armor. "Thursir", Vitus mumbled. Rabekk looked at the skeletal giant with huge eyes as he walked up to Heimir with trembling legs. "It must have come here to die hundreds of years ago, or fallen in some ancient battle." Heimir said to Rabekk. Rabekk laid his hand on the pale bone fingers of the giant that were larger than his entire self and looked up in awe at the skull of the colossal creature.

Then, suddenly, Rabekk felt as if something was watching him. He looked around but there was no one there, then he looked at the skeleton but it was dead and surely could not harm them now. But then Rabekk noticed something, within the hollow eye of the skull. Something moved there in the darkness but it was too late for Rabekk to do anything. Just as the dwarf let loose a shriek of warning, an arrow came swooshing from the eye of the giant's skull and with a loud thump it hit Heimir in his shoulder as he fell helpless to the ground. "Get down brother!" Vitus cried as he drew his

sword from its sheathe and rushed forward. Rabekk did as he was told and hid behind the hand of the giant and readied his hatchet. He was no warrior, but he would not let his brother stand alone. Then they crept forth from the dead husk of the giant. Their bodies were painted with soot, clay and blood and they were clad in untidy furs and skulls and bones from head to toe. The wild folks had laid in wait for the troupe and now they came in all their fury and barbaric wildness. Vitus was the warrior, he had always been that way ever since he first came up from the underbelly of the mountain. He let his steel sword sing as it sliced the limbs of his foes. Vitus had named that blade Bear's Tooth and it devoured the wild folks like so many lambs. But now there came more from below the hill, climbing up over its crest the wild folks were almost a dossen in number. Rabekk shed his backpack and rushed to his brother's aid with his hatchet held aloft. "No, brother! Get back, I'll not bring home two bodies" Vitus shouted. But Rabekk would not hear any of it, he would not simply watch his brother die. But death was certainly not far away now as the wild folks had them surrounded and trapped like two rats. Arrow after arrow was pointed at the two dwarves now and one of the barbarians commanded them to drop their weapons. Vitus was first to let Bear's Tooth fall and hit the soil beneath and after his brother had assured him that this was their only option, Rabekk too let his hatchet slip from his grip. There was no resistance against such a large group of wild folks, even so Rabekk clutched his fist in anger. But then the two brothers saw something that made the hair rise on their the back of their necks.

The giant skeleton that had laid dead for hundreds of years now suddenly raised its abnormally huge fist into the air and prepared to strike. Suddenly they heard Heimir shout from behind their backs: "Move, little ones!" The giant's skeletal fist hit the ground with such impact that the hill trembled and it squashed many wild folks like bugs under its weight. Then, chaos ensued. The undead giant grabbed fleeing wild folks by their legs and smashed them against the trees like wooden dolls. Some tried to put up a fight but their arrows simply snapped in two as they hit the bone of their animated foe. Rabekk saw that Heimir stood with his legs in a broad stance with a grim look on his face as he moved his arms and hands in intricate patterns. It seemed to him as if the giant skeleton moved with the same rhythm as Heimir's body. When he lashed out the skeleton would strike and when he swayed his arm to the right the giant would do the same and cast several of the barbarians down to meet their deaths on the jagged rocks below. It didn't take long before most of the wild folks had either been slain or made to flee in between the pine trees and disappear into the thick gloom of the fog. As they did, Heimir let out a deep sigh and rested his back against a nearby tree. The giant's skeleton again fell lifeless to the ground.

Rabekk and Vitus looked at the old man with awe and fear in their eyes. "What in the name of Borjorn the maker was that?", Rabekk asked. Heimir rose and laid his hand on his wound inflicted by the arrow from the wild folks. As he did, the dark blood under his green tunic seemed to disappear and pain washed away from his expression. "Like I told you", he said, "There are many dark things in the forests of our world. And some of them are best left undisturbed."

Until we meet again...