

Act I-The Birth of Mulgy

The frigid winds of the north blew harshly, tossing piles of snow like dust through the icy air. The once pure and spotless snow lied stained by vestiges and puddles of blood from fallen warriors. None claimed innocence and none of the blood fell noble. Naught but a single warrior remained standing, admiring his handiwork of corpses and carnage. Fire ignited his eyes as he sported a pleased grin and brandished a crimson stained axe upon a broad and aching shoulder. Drops of splattered blood stained an otherwise shining and golden beard. A grim and stoic look set in on a hardnosed face as he calmed himself from the bloodlust. Stern blue eyes gazed into the horizon, which shined mostly white but growing grayer with the approaching clouds. He stood a proud and hardy member of the Tribe of The Bears. Befitting to their customs he showed no mercy on the field of battle.

His heart pounded and he breathed deeply and rapidly. Feet covered in fur boots crunched through the early morning snow as he began the long stroll home. The stern and stoic look upon his face remained through the entire walk and never shifted. His eyes remained fixed ahead and free of fear or remorse. He passed the bodies, many mounted on spears, without another thought. A few heads rolled, kicked by the warrior set upon his purpose to return to the encampment. He felt nothing and knew no emotion for he stood a warrior of The Bears. His pride easily overshadowed what little remorse might have tried to nudge at his human soul. He stood the sole survivor of a glorious battle.

This was surely a sign of favor from the gods themselves, especially the god Ranu'k whose domains included war and strength, and sat upon the rugged throne of bears. This provided proof that he was chosen by the divines and destined to become a mighty warrior set to bear a mighty son. Standing the lone survivor in any battle is a sign of wonders, but in a battle this immense it was surely an omen of epic proportions.

He returned silently and stoically to the encampment. Many tents rose before him made from thick skins and furs of the beast. He passed through nodding solemnly in greeting at a few warriors who passed him. They often stopped to admire the blood on his axe and beat their chests to acknowledge him, a sign of their respect. He raised the axe to them in return as if in toast. A few campfires greeted him warmly upon his passing but they paled in comparison to the mighty bonfire that rose to prominence in the very heart of the encampment

In center of the camp the grandest of the tents stood to greet the warrior, waving with the proud flag at its highest point. The tent circled its spot on the ground, round in shape and structure. This tent towered over all the others, much more elaborate in its design than the simple dwelling places. This tent housed the greatest leaders of the tribe. He set his axe gently at his knees and bent to kneel in reverence before he entered.

"I serve the cause of Ranu'k. I bathe in the blood of our enemies. I offer my axe the king of bears." His grunting voice declared in whisper. Yet then he stood and roared ferociously.

The other tribes found their traditions strange, but none could enter the tent without reciting the sacred affirmation and the battle cry upon its completion. The bears considered the tent a sacred place, a center of spirituality, government, and military leadership. It often proved difficult distinguishing between the three. There the chieftain of the tribe resided to lead their people and lay the plans for war. The council of elders attended to most of the daily affairs of running the settlement and settling disputes between the often feuding members. Yet the true leader sat not upon a chieftain's throne nor did he reside in the chamber of the elders. Instead he wore the rugged robes of the high shaman. To defy the shaman was to defy the gods and Ranu'k himself.

The sickly man before the warrior kneeled in tattered robes, drenched in dirt and dampness. White scraggly hair flowed down from his crown to the base of his neck. He moved his gangly arms to stir the wooden ladle in the cauldron.

"I smell the stench of blood and sweat. I hear the heavy breathing of a mighty warrior." The hoarse and trembling voice declared without turning or standing at first to greet him.

Slowly though he stood after he muttered some indecipherable prayer. He turned a white and scruffy bearded face to greet the warrior. His eyebrows rested like sleeping white caterpillars upon his wrinkled forehead. The bags beneath his weary blue eyes distinguished him as an aged and seasoned priest who often spent nights foregoing the pleasures of slumber, and sometimes weeks without food for fasting. The lines on the surface his eyes only complemented his other rugged features.

"Rorlick," he recognized the face at once. "How did the battle fare? Are those miserable wolves still howling in the night?" he asked.

"They are slaughtered. Their entire army has been vanquished." Rorlick answered. Two wrinkled hands collided in soft applause as the old sage produced his trademark grin of rotting and missing teeth.

"Excellent! You have led the men well, and in time may succeed the chieftain."

"Only if you outlive me." A voice deeper than Rorlick's boldly contested. The man approached them, larger even than mighty Rorlick. He crossed his heavy club-like arms together with a smirk. His head shined in the dim light of torches mounted throughout the tent. Many scars rested on his scarred and naked scalp, a proud wound born during capture among the Tribe of Wolves. He flinched no longer from the agonizing memory. Instead he proudly smiled as he reminisced of how they snatched his hair by hand and forced it from his head. His smirk expanded greatly hearing news of their impending demise.

"I fear this is not all I have to report," Rorlick admitted. "For we have sustained equal devastation. I remain the last man standing from the battle."

The aging shaman's flew upon and he gasped in awe. "You...you were the sole survivor then?" he asked.

"Yes." Rorlick answered grimly.

"In a battle so immense? Yet I should not be surprised. This is a prophecy of our tribe. One man shall wipe out our greatest foe, the wolves, and after..."

"Are you saying what I think you're saying?" the gruff voiced chieftain asked, narrowing his eyes suspiciously.

"You will slaughter the rest of them Rorlick, their settlement. You will do so alone and if you succeed."

"I will succeed shaman and I will not fail my people. All that remains of the wolves are women and children and maybe a few elderly leaders and unskilled workers. No warriors will stand against me. As for you chieftain, prophecy or otherwise I am your warrior and my axe yours to move as long there is breath within your chest."

"Fear not Rorlick, I would not be ashamed to serve beneath you and if the prophecies declare it, I would not dare defy the will of Ranu'k. If it came to that I could serve as an advisor to your rule. You will need guidance."

"I would at that." He admitted.

"At this time Rorlick," the chieftain told him. "More pressing affairs await you. Your son was born while you were away. Your wife awaits you in your tent. Do not allow us to retain you."

"As you wish!" Rorlick fell to one knee and hunched slightly and beat his chest with a mighty grunt and roar. "For the glory of The Bears!" he cried.

"For the glory of The Bears!" the chieftain agreed.

"For the glory of Ranu'k." the shaman cried.

The sturdy warrior departed from the tent to return to the chill of the camp. A bitter wind picked up and flurries of snow began their descent from the sky. Rorlick quickly found shelter from the storm and entered his own humble tent. There he beheld the face of a beautiful, though weary woman lying in her bed in wait for his return. A pile of various furs and pelts supported her, though not comfortably. The bears were used to such accommodations. She snuggled a small infant, cradling the fragile boy in her arms. The child seemed content to be still and enjoy the warmth of his mother's bosom.

“Rorlick, my mighty warrior!” she greeted him warmly.

Her face lit up at the sight of her strong and noble husband. Her sweet voice warmed the cold stone heart even as the man bearing it fell to one knee to take his place beside his wife and child. His eyebrows rose in wonder as he beheld his flesh and blood and retrieved the boy from her arms.

He rocked him back and forth in his massive arms and admired him for a fleeting moment. The baby began to whine and whimper as he stirred from his slumber. The loving smile suddenly turned to a disdainful scowl. He returned the baby to his mother with a huff as he narrowed his eyes in obvious disappointment. He stood to his feet and crossed his arms, turning his back with a heavy sigh to the mother and her child. He groaned softly with his head turned to the ground and his face distraught.

“Has he not pleased you my husband?” she asked, almost whimpering.

“He is weak.” he answered flatly. “As his father you know it is my right to choose a name for him.”

“Of course my husband,” she said hopefully, only to be disappointed. “Have you a name for him?”

“His name shall be *Mulgy*.” He employed the word from the ancient form of the barbarian tongue. It was a word used only when cursing, particularly when one stumbles. The meaning of the word was ‘Mistake’

“You cannot mean that!” she gasped, nearly sobbing. Her eyes watered as she waited for a response that would come only after a moment of cruel silence.

“Tomorrow he will be taken to the ancient burial ground and given back to the ancestors in accordance with our traditions.”

“We will...sacrifice him?” tears choked her voice as she shuttered to speak the words.

“You would endorse such cruelty to your own son, your flesh and blood?”

“He is weak. To allow the child to live in this world would be a cruelty of its own.”

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Bitter winter winds whistled through the night and mercilessly beat against the tent. The sudden roar of the coming blizzard stirred the woman from her restless slumber. She gently lifted her husband’s heavy arm from her warm body and set it aside. She slipped silently from his warmth. Rorlick grunted aloud, tossing and turning. She gasped and stilled her heavy breath. Had she awakened him? But he returned to his dreams of

blood and death. She stood to wrap herself in a cloak and winter robes. She rested her knees gently on the solid ground and scooped the infant gently from where he rested. She cradled the lad and held him close. She gave him a quick affectionate squeeze, but tried to be gentle and avoid stirring the boy from his dreams of a future life. She wrapped him in a thick blanket and silently slipped out of the tent.

The camp still seemed somewhat lively for such a late hour. A small group of warriors gathered around the nearby campfire reminiscing of ancient battles and speaking of future glories. She flinched at the sight of them and stiffened from head to toe. They roared deeply with laughter, slapping each other's backs and turning their smiling face to the clear and starry sky. She joined them for a moment in admiring the stars and the four moons of Diamic, but only for a moment lest she catch their attention. Much to her relief too much mead had clouded their senses and they hardly even seemed to notice her even as they turned their heads in her direction when she strolled casually past the campfire.

She continued the cold and unpleasant journey as the winds whistled and beat against her chapped and paling face. She shivered from their cruel touch and held her child tightly to her breast, praying he felt warmer than she. After some time she reached the entrance to some patch of woods and a trail that seemed to cut through it.

She stopped and collapsed to her knees, weeping. Where would she go and what would she do? The hostile and frigid lands of the north provided no place in the wild where she could survive the harsher of the winters. From whom would she receive help? Only barbarians wandered the northlands, and all of them counted themselves sworn enemies of her people. The Bears had earned few friends with their warmongering and bullyboy tactics. She and her child would die in the wilderness if she stayed but *he* would die if she returned with him. She wept inconsolably, helpless and desperate. Why? She wondered why she would be cursed with a love so deep for a child that would grace the world for but a moment, only to have him snatched away by hate. What a cold and cruel existence indeed to inhabit the northlands in the Age of Blood.

At the moment she fell to her knees and began to pray, she relinquished all control not to the god Ranu'k or any gods in all of the pantheon. She prayed instead to a god whose name she did not know, one greater than all the rest. She felt him somehow, but knew not how. She looked up at the sound flapping wings overhead and gasped in spite of herself. A great white dragon swooped across the sky, casting a brief shadow over her vicinity.

"God of all," she prayed, bowing her head once more. "Please forgive my Mulgy. Ignore him not, but use my Mulgy for your glory.

A few clouds split apart above her head and cast a warming beam of light her way. It landed before the entrance to the forest. A muscled and shirtless man approached them both. His chest and back bore more hair than she had seen on any man. Only his top

half appeared a man at all. Her jaw fell and she covered her gaping mouth in wonder. He galloped slowly to the woman and her lad, striding on the legs and lower half of a horse. The dark brown and shining coat glimmered in the beam of light. The curly haired man with tiny horns smiled at her with teeth as white as a noonday sun.

"You are a centaur!" she exclaimed. "I never thought the legends to be true, but..." she stammered in spite of herself. "But why have you come here from your home on the Misty Planes beyond the Mountains of Veil?"

"Your prayer is heard." He spoke with a voice smoother than any man's she's ever heard. His tone fell soft and soothing to the ears. "I shall take your child. He shall be used for the glory of the Most High."

"You will take him from me?" she asked suspiciously.

"I will raise him as my own. I will teach him strength, but also cunning and compassion. I will teach him the things your kind has yet to learn. I will make him great. He shall be my ward."

"I have no choice but to entrust you with his care. Please see that no harm befalls him." She requested humbly.

"He is far too important for me to do otherwise. I promise you this for sure though, you may not live to hear it, but the world will one day praise his name."