

With a determination much larger than his short stature, the squat bearded dwarf muscled his way through the dense bushes blocking his path. He was shirtless, wearing only a pair of thick linen breeches and a simple leather necklace about his neck, with a large claw attached to it. He should have suffered numerous scrapes and cuts as he pushed to the other side of the natural growth, but for some reason the branches curled away from him as he passed through, as though reluctant to touch him or wishing him no harm. The dwarf paid it no heed, his eyes focused on the path ahead that he had emerged to, racing to aid the silent cries of an animal in despair.

A trio of armed men were surrounding a small bear, it was doing its best to growl and intimidate them, but Beric could tell the creature was struck with fear and would not actually strike at them. The young animal bled from a few small wounds, obviously from the spears held by the men. On the forest floor, only ten feet away, lay the still corpse of a much larger grizzly bear, likely the mother. Beric recognized the dead creature, causing him a reflexive grasp of the claw dangling over his chest. His mind flashed back to when he faced off against the aggressive bear, on a cool spring morning many years past. Beric had been near starving, living in the wild ever since the genocide of the dwarven race over a century ago. Some years were better than others, that one was the worst of all. So desperate was he to keep the small rabbit he had caught, he stood in defiance against the ravenous grizzly with only a wooden club to defend himself with. Through a dance of dexterity, a show of force, and a willpower only a dwarf possesses, he had manage to dodge it's attacks and find a way to strike it several times on the back of its skull enough to knock it out. During the ordeal, he had blocked one heavy strike with the wooden club, smashing it aside and tearing off a claw from the immense paw. He could have slain the bear afterward, and had enough meat to feed him for weeks before it became too rancid to eat. However, he could not bring himself to do it. Starving as he was, there was something about the great beast that urged him to leave it be, and so he did. He had taken the claw, and the rabbit, and left the bears' territory.

He snapped back to reality, only a second had passed during his reverie.

One of the men, with red hair and an even redder nose, lunged forward with his spear, causing the young bear to snarl and hop backwards, right into the tip of another man's weapon. It grunted and dropped to the ground, trying to swipe at the spear with a defensive slap.

"What's wrong," said the red haired man, laughing with a drunken slur, "not so scary with Mum not able to help ya!"

"That big one is prob'ly too 'eavy to bring back wit' us." Said the second man, a warrior type with a set of simple chainmail and a black cloak. "But I bet we could take dis one alive and earn a decent price for 'im back in Vey!"

"Just stick the beast and be done with it!" shouted the third man, a heavysset man that clearly looked to be the leader of the group. He sat astride a mule, one hand the reins and the other holding a small flask. "I'm in no mood to watch you two lugs attempt to bring a live bear back to the city!"

"But shir, we..." the redhead started to reply, before looking at the leaders' disapproving glare. "Yeshir", he slurred instead. He steadied his spear, about to lunge forward for a killing blow.

Beric had no idea of how he was going to stop three human warriors, but that did not matter now. He dashed forward and growled fiercely, much like the bear, but with an even fiercer intensity. The dwarf was a sight to see for the two humans, shorter than any human but more muscular than most. His face added to the surprise, as it was marked with symmetrical grey tattoos around his eyes and temple, the grey color matching the hue of his bristly beard and thick tuft of hair hanging to the side from the center of his head.

With both hands firmly grasped around the base of well-crafted cudgel he had used for years, Beric swung down, then upwards at the man in front of the bear. The bear curled up into a ball, not certain what to make of the collection of humanoids all around it, and no mother bear to support it. The red haired man attempted to deflect the bold attack with his spear shaft, and then realized his plan was a mistake when the spear was forced from his hands to fly several feet away. Beric followed the disarming with an overhead strike, smashing down towards the humans head. The strike was true, the intoxicated human too slow to react to the intense blow. The iron helm the man wore did not protect him from the strike, as the force of the attack dented the helm and the skull beneath with brutal force.

The man collapsed to a lifeless heap as Beric turned to face the other armed man. He was too slow; however, as the man had thrown his spear at him as he was turning. Before he became impaled, Beric leaped to the side, towards the small bear. The animal stood up, seeming to join Beric by giving a renewed growl towards the humans, its' head tilted back as it did so. The growl was short lived, as a dark black arrow streaked next to Beric and flew right into the open maw of the little grizzly. The growl turned into a gargle, then silence as the arrow pierced it's' brain from the roof of its mouth.

"Two down, one ugly little man to go." The heavy man on the horse said smugly. "I may not have liked Blane, but he always let me win at cards!"

The third man had picked up his spear, while Beric tried to assess what he should do next. A mounted man with a bow and arrow, and another with a spear. Suddenly the forces of nature spoke to him, on a level far beyond anything he had experienced in the past. Throughout the many years since the world had reshaped, Beric had felt an essence and power in the forest, but never knew what it was or how to harness it. Occasionally he felt a connection to a plant or animal, but always brief and never strong enough to understand what it was. Now it hit him like a tsunami, he could suddenly see a weave of invisible strings connecting him to the land, to the dead bears, and to the humans in front of him. He could see an infinite series of lines connecting every tree in the forest around him to every other tree, every other plant, and every blade of grass.

The man with the spear dashed forward, lunging directly at his chest at the same moment an arrow loosed from the mounted leader. Beric's magical awareness snapped into focus, and he somehow forced nature's magical strings to form into the torso of a bear in an instant. The force took shape as a green phantasmal image, roaring just as he recalled the adult grizzly roar at him so many years ago. He forced it two swing a massive paw, its green energy strings smashing through the spear and shattering it to pieces. The arrow was just about to hit Beric in the chest when the magical force snapped its head forward and bit down upon the shaft, stopping its dangerous flight.

Both of the men were stunned, the one with the spear fell to the ground, one elbow holding him up while his other hand stretched out before him as though to shield him from the unexpected creature. The man on the mule cursed loudly, then snapped the reins on the mule with excessive force while rapping against its side with his short bow. The beast immediately stepped forward and began a brisk run. Not realizing what, or how, he was doing it, Beric put forth his hand and transformed the bear's magical form into a stream of green energy that poured into the retreating mule. Beric's eyes glowed green as he took control of the simple animals mind, its eyes also going green. It stopped, and then bucked with a powerful burst that sent the shocked rider flying off its back and onto the hard ground of the path. Beric kept control of the mule, while turning his own physical attention onto the cowering man next to him. He used his wooden club to dispatch the man, holding none of the reservations he had about killing the grizzly bear. While he did this, he had the mule chase and stomp down the man who had shot the arrow. The fat man

attempted to roll to the side, and stand up, but could not do it fast enough. The mule raised itself up on its hind hooves, and crashed down on the leader's arm with its forward ones, pulverizing muscle and bone as it did so. Beric had the mule spin around and give the man a powerful hind kick to the head, ending his life with a crushed face.

When both the men lay dead, much like the bears they had slain, Beric dropped to his knees. He released his bloody cudgel, and released the energy controlling the mule. His glowing eyes returned to their normal state, still an emerald color but naturally so. The mule seemed completely disoriented, but realizing its freedom, it gave a loud whinny hee-haw noise before trotting off into the woods, still burdened with its cargo. Beric caught his breath, and his wits, for a moment, before proceeding to deal with the aftermath of what lay around him.

Over the course of the next several hours, he was able to pull the men and the small bear off the main trail and into the rarely ventured natural parts of the forest. The mother bear was a bigger problem. Recalling everything he had seen in the air and in nature before, Beric focused on his surroundings and began to see the connections of nature and magic again. This natural weave was truly astounding, now that he did not fear for his life. With intense focus, and mental experimentation of the connecting lines of invisible magic, Beric discovered a way to have nature assist him and raising the mother bear up, thousands of blades of grass and reaching branches of trees worked together to maneuver the immense corpse to a more secluded area off the main travelling route. The focus drained Beric of both mental and physical energy, requiring him to rest for several hours before finding the stamina to dig a grave. This was for the bears though.

The remains of the men he decided needed to serve a better purpose, a way to give back to what they had taken away. Beric took the men to an area near the territory of a wolf pack he knew of, one he intentionally avoided. It only took an hour before one of the wolves came across the corpses, sharing its find with a loud howl before beginning to feast. Shortly after several of its companions came, tearing the flesh and muscle from the men with wild abandon and insatiable appetites.

From that event on, Beric found ways to use his connection to the magic of Novus with nature and wildlife in many ways. Eventually he realized that his powers could be put to use beyond just his own survival, and that being the only dwarf in a world dominated by humans did not mean that he could ignore the needs of the world completely. Strange and powerful creatures had come to damage the landscape and the natural cycles of the world, and perhaps it was partly his responsibility to find a way to stop them.