

Circle of Life

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My first attempt at writing in the first person for a piece. Apparently it lacked life. The setting is ambiguous, and that's deliberate. With minor modifications, this story could be set in any world, at any time.

It was a sad return from two weeks away, fighting and winning a foreign battle. No trumpets, no music, no greeting. But then, this was not surprising, as there were no people here either. The town was a ghost town. No one had lived here in nearly 150 years. No one that is, except me. As I walked the streets, they seemed different. They had not changed in the last five years, until today. Yes, there was a peculiar, repulsive smell in the air. Normally the smell was stale, preserved, but today the smell was one of ... rotting flesh combined with the worst of Altdorf's sewers, and blood. Why would such a smell occur in a small town so long deserted that its name and location weren't even on the maps any more?

I walked up to the green, now overgrown and wild with brambles and thorns where once there was flat grass. I saw movement and hid. Might just be another fox, or a bear. As I slinked towards the edge of a building, I snuck a look around at the green. There was movement, a lot of it. The green had been trampled flat, and there were several people there, around the stone in the middle of the green, which from this angle, was obscured by a small tree. I was aware the stone had some magical power, so I decided to navigate my way around for a better view. I was no more than thirty foot from the stone now, and I got a clear look at the people there. They were not human, I thought they might be elven, but no elves I knew dressed like that. They were wearing suits of dark armour, spiked at the edges, and it seemed to crawl, like it was alive. Ow! Suddenly I felt something in my mind. It was like I could hear someone else's thoughts in my brain. Then, there was a scream from the stone which I had been distracted from looking at the guardians, and as I looked up I caught a glimpse that someone was being sacrificed. I turned away in horror, as his blood spilt over the magical surface. Then I felt a searing pain in my chest, and I blacked out.

I don't know how long I was out, but it was evening when I came around, and I had not been spotted, as I was crumpled in my hiding place still. I looked up at the stone to see that the rock had changed significantly. No longer did it look grey, with the twisting, swirling symbols that I had used to interpret that it was magical. Now it was blacker than the night sky, as though no light was escaping at all. It made my skin crawl to try and look at it, a hole into nothingness. The stench of death still filled the air here, so I decided to make my way out of town to find food and water, to return the next day. When I woke the next morning, it was raining. As I made my way back into town, the rain intensified to the point where it soaked through the light clothes I was wearing. At least this meant there would be minimal chance of encountering whoever or whatever had disturbed the green the other day. I slinked into one of my store buildings, to the sounds of maniacal laughter. Laughter? Here? It was only on the edge of my hearing, but obviously they had found my store. There was something else odd, and as I listened to the voices, just on the edge of my hearing, I realised they were not speaking Riekspiel. I was never one for languages, so I had no idea what it was, but the voices definitely didn't sound human, they didn't even sound elven, for the few elves I had met. They were too high pitched, too ... the word to describe them would not come, so I cut my losses lest I be seen or heard, and made out to one of my other storage buildings, where I pondered my situation.

I kept a watch on the building that had been taken for three more days, before I saw any activity. The rain had not given up in this time either. But on the eve of the third day, I heard, and then saw, horsemen coming into town. But these were not men, and it was not horses they were riding. The mounts were large, green, slow, lizard like creatures, with ferocious teeth, and, by the looks of it, a bad temper. Their riders ... as they came closer, it dawned on me ... dark armour, tall

slender figures, carrying vicious blades, and riding beasts that did not exist ... but dark elves were only myths! Stories told to scare the young and the gullible. But here, riding into my town, were ten of them. They were greeted by what I could now recognise as their kin, at the entrance to my old store building, where, after tying up their mounts, they were led inside. The rain abated the next morning, and with it, the elves started to search out the town. It didn't take me long to realise they were looking for the person who had stored the food and supplies ... they were looking for me! I saw an elf approach the front of the cottage I was hiding in. A quick look at my situation told me the only way out was to jump out one of the rear windows, and disappear into the undergrowth, where the elves should not search. I hurried to the back of the building, spotted my target bush to land in, and jumped. I had a perfect, almost soundless landing, so I readjusted my position carefully moving away from the building, and was well hidden by the time the elf gave a cursory glance at the garden and decided no one was there. As he turned around, and started to head back into the building, I sighed in relief, only to be bludgeoned over the head, and knocked out.

I awoke some time later, tied hand and foot to a pole which two of the elves were carrying. The elves were on the move. I felt deadly hungry. I groaned, and one of the elves looked at me, and said something in his tongue. I did not understand, struggled, and was knocked out again for my troubles. When I awoke again, I was tied in a building, which looked like a cottage. Could we be back in town? I did not know. I tested the bindings. They were very secure, and I had no strength. I was parched too, so dry I couldn't even get saliva into my mouth. There was nothing I could do, so I waited. Maybe 2 hours later, and my captors showed themselves. They provided a dribble of water, which did little to combat my dehydration. They then dragged me, still bound, out of the building. I could see immediately that this was my town, and this was the village square, but it was somewhat different again. It took me a minute to identify that the stone was once again grey. I had to raid my brain, but I was sure last time I saw it that the stone was black. Yes, I was surer now, the stone was black last time I saw it. The elves dragged me out, and tied me to the stone. I could see it coming, the same fate as the guy before me. But then, out the corner of my eye ... no, it couldn't be, I could see ... another ranger hiding in the village. As I watched, he slunk out of sight. As the elves prepared me for the inevitable, I prayed to Sigmar, to save my soul. One of the elves raised a dagger above me, and drove it deep into my heart. I tried to scream, but ... I didn't seem to have anything to scream with. I lashed out, and it felt like I hit something. Then it was black, and silent. Forming thoughts became harder and harder, and I found myself slipping away into oblivion.

The ranger had seen the elves enter his village, abandoned for a hundred years or more. He had watched them prepare a slave for sacrifice. He had slinked around to watch, and had been struck by something in his mind, and he blacked out. The circle of life continues.