

FRENEMY ALLIANCE 1916

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“I don’t know how WWIII will be fought, but WW 4 will be fought with stones.”  
“Nationalism is an infantile disease. The measles of mankind.”  
Albert Einstein.

## CHAPTER 1

The tree had worked hard to hold onto its pinecones in the fall, then its long branches at the onset of winter, and a nest of baby birds left by their most probably slain mother once deep freeze set in. But the snow was too heavy, the cold north wind too strong, as was the burden of loneliness, forcing the tree to let go of the nest. That still-living, wooded pine was all that was left of an arborous family of trees who had survived fifty years of winters in the Belarus forest and, by blessing and curse, two years of the Great War that had left it as the only arboured in its patch of what used to be forest which had a chance of breathing fresh warm sunshine in the Spring. But what would happen in the Spring of 1917 would have to await the events of Winter, 1916. And what the very-armed two legged and unarmed four legged creatures on the ground would do, or not do.

As for the latter category of God’s creatures in a year when the Creator seemed to be sleeping, or doing the bidding of the devil, the wolves surrounded the nest of young birds as soon as it fell into the snow. Birds that had been reduced to flesh coated bones, as were the equine skeletons on the ground still adored with halters bearing the Great Seal of the German Kaiser and the Nobel Coat of Arms of the Russian Czar. But, as wolves were created to be who they must by the Creator and, theoretically, a Higher and more Compassionate wisdom than any two or four legged creation could understand, it was feeding time.

Three winters ago, the wolves in the Belarus Forest dined on elderly rabbits, sick moose, lame deer and drunk-on-berries beaver. Their canine children grew up strong, healthy and happy. The wolves ate the muscle on the slain or dying beasts, leaving the eyes, intestines and brains for the crows, ravens and foxes. But with the coming of the two legged, uniformed humans carrying thundersticks which they were wise enough to stay away from, the wolves retreated further back into the bush. Thankfully, there was still enough bush to hide away in for the wolves. But it was void of the usual cochophony of game, those animals having been scared away by guns, hunted by the soldiers or rendered toxic by the chemicals the Armies used to kill each other, and anyone who dared to invade their charred, barbed wire playground which was littered with dead bodies of their own kind.

Those who survived previous times when wolves hunted humans recalled that retribution against intruding humans was unrelenting. The leader of the pack, a well-muscled, grey wolf with white speckles on his always smelling nose, who called himself Piervy, knew

that the humans shot wolves who got too close to them. Those two legged intruders into the wolves' Ancient hunting grounds then proceeded to cut down forests, replacing them with fences and enclosures containing livestock that knew nothing about surviving in the wilderness who were deadly temptations to wolves who knew nothing about the various traps that lay between them and a long needed meal.

Piervy was superior to the others in the pack both below the neck, between the legs and between the ears, and he did his best to teach the others. He did so more by example than forceful persuasion, but in times like these, such was necessary, particularly because of what was happening in the treeless valley, yet again, below the still-wooded overlook. "Eat or fight against yourselves more quietly!" he growled at his hungry compadres as they pushed each other aside to get a morsel of baby bird meat. He was grateful for their clearing away from the fallen nest, allowing him first dips into the windfall avian meal. But Piervy was more grateful that his own species had not killed each other for meat. Or for sport. Or for whatever reason the two legged intruders into the forest were obsessed with on the battlefield below.

The coming of another 'show' of human self destruction was heralded by a thin but still standing horse that bolted out a cry of help to anyone who would rescue him from the misery inflicted upon him by his rider.

"Face THAT way, you cowardly ingrate!" the over-weight, over-mustached and over-decorated Russian Major yelled at the half starved and half lame horse, pulling his head towards the German trenches from which the next 'last and final effort' attack was about to emerge. "Or it's stew meat for you, too!" the aristocrat in the custom tailored uniform screamed at the white steed, appended by a glance at the raggedly clad infantrymen in over or undersized boots carving up the remains of other horses that had fallen weeks ago. After treating the men under him with another round of condescending insults regarding their breeding, origins and inevitable fates, he commenced a severe beating with his riding crop on the rump of the horse, then dug his spurs pushed into his belly. With the horse's head now towards the German lines, his ears pinned back, the Major pulled out his sword and brandished it in the cold, winter air. "Prepare yourself for glory!" he exclaimed to the vermin who he now promoted to infantrymen, and those cavalry troops that had been turned into foot soldiers. Choosing a route protected from fire from the German lines, he rode as close to their backs, or chests, as he could, he pushed them out of their protected trenches.

"When I give the signal!" came from a neatly-dressed and freshly-shaved German Major on the other side of the charred, blood-soaked and barren meadow from behind the shield of an armoured car as it worked its way between skeletons of horses that had been used to cart artillery, ammunition and cannon fodder, otherwise known as replacement troops, to the trench that had not moved its position since the first snowfall. "The day is ours! On my order!" he declared to his beleaguered troops, somehow able to convince his men that the claim was both real and realistic.

“For God, the Czar and the Motherland!” the Russian Major affirmed as he roused the last of his men from a restless sleep, and the wounded from wet, muddy wooden planks which they wished had been mattress-covered cots.

“For God, the Kaiser and the Fatherland!” the German Major declared, in a rhyme that matched his Russian counterpart’s battle cry beat for beat.

“For your families back home!” the medal-hungry Russian Major declared, no doubt sensing that another level of motivation was required if he was to go home with more ‘salad’ on his chest. “OUR families, friends and countrymen. Who are more deserving, honorable, special, and more important than THEM or any of THEIR families!” he said, pointing to Fritz’s on the other side of the trench, sneering at their commander.

The German Major matched the Russian’s Major’s claim, reminding his men that they were not only more important than any of the Ivan’s, but that they were culturally superior, a claim that was maintained by more modern weapons, delivered by supply trains from Berlin which outmatched any rail system in Russia, a country that was still trying to pull itself into living in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, according to his view.

The ‘we’re protecting us and our families against them and their families’ seemed to work, as Piervy saw it anyway. He heard a whistle blow, as if from both sides, yet it was hard to tell who called for the attack first, as the hills around the battlefield provided an echo that both amplified the volume of the screams, gunfire and artillery barrage, but the horror within their timber. A horror Piervy knew all too well, as did the poor, deluded and unfortunate two legged ‘superior’ creatures who ran towards each other at full speed. Then, as the running became the wounded, and the wounded became dead, a crouching walk then crawl.

“Ahead is pride. Retreat is shame. Do not disappoint the Fatherland! Your fathers who died before you! Mothers who would give their life for yours! Wives! Sons! Daughters!” the German Major asserted as a proud father from his armored car drove behind the new line of infantrymen, seeming to believe it more than ever.

“Forward! That means everyone! Especially you ungrateful peasants!” the Russian Major blasted out from atop of his horse, riding behind his men, avoiding by means of luck or skill, the bullets and shrapnel which found their way into his subordinates, and nearly killing his horse. “Traitorous Bolshevik scum. Uncultured Cossacks... and...,” he continued, after which he noted two soldiers running East towards safety, or perhaps home. He curtailed that unauthorized leave with two bullets from his pistol that planted the men into the ground, forever. He turned around to the men who maybe did, or maybe didn’t see where the bullets came from that downed their two comrades, waving his sword and bellowing out, “Onward MEN! Forward! Hurrah!” Seeming to feel invisible, he galloped the horse ahead, straight at the armored car. “The days is OURS Fritz!” he declared to German Major.

“You Slavs must be civilized!” the German Major seemed to say with his eyes as he drove the armored car towards the Russian Major.

“Maybe this would be a better way to settle this War,” Piervy said to himself. “A duel between leaders to see who gets to rule the pack, and establish who will be alpha, beta and omega afterwards,” he thought to himself, knowing that this is how things were settled in a world ruled by Nature rather than Nature’s most irrational, destructive and silly species.

After growling his own subordinates into not running into the fray, or towards the poison gas he wind was blowing into the woods behind them, Piervy closed his eyes, asking Mother Nature to intervene on behalf of the pack, and for her own sake as well. This time, she was not so self-destructive. A hole materialized in front of the armoured car, causing it to dive nose first into the black ground below the deep snow, tossing the German Major into the air, then onto two spikes that penetrated his chest and leg. The horse spooked, throwing its rider onto rocks under the snow in a bone-crunching fall that broke the Major’s neck.

A clean shaven, German Captain, whose looked more like an aristocratic scholarly hunter than an infantry officer, crouch-ran his way ahead of the lines to the German Major. The Captain, whose 35 year old face framed eyes that seemed much older, and life-weary, assessed the condition of the injured old Major.

“That bad, Captain Telemann?” Pyervi heard from the Major in calm and accepting tone with his intensely directable hearing amidst the gunfire barraging both sides of the line.

“Too bad, Major,” Telemann said with the kind of compassion that was so deep, it needed neither tears nor embraces to be expressed.

“Too bad, Hans,” the Major replied, breaking into a chuckle. “Too bad to...” he continued, the rest of his words drowned by more blood than air coming out of his mouth. A barrage of bullets threatened to take down both surrogate doctor and terminal patient. With shaking fingers that were connected to barely moveable arms, the Major pointed to his revolver, then his forehead. With his eyes he looked towards the sword he still kept on his belt, the last remnant of an ancient time for the most technologically advanced Army in the world.

“To Valhalla then, which has been incorporated into Heaven now, of course,” the Captain said calmly to the Major, placing the sword in his right hand, enclosing his fingers around it, seeming to not be a believer in either the afterlife or a Lord or Lordess who looked after such. “Having fought a battle that will be noble.”

“And victorious, for OUR families, OUR comrades, and OUR countrymen? Not retreating one step from these uncivilized, cannibalistic Ivans?” the Major inquired, and demanded.

“You have my word on it, as a German, an officer, a comrade...”

“And Christian?” the Major asked.

“Of course, Sir,” the Captain replied, averting his eyes in ways he never had before. That thing humans do when they want to make others believe what they do not believe in themselves. The religiously atheistic Captain then inserted a bullet into the skull of his beloved superior officer, and friend. After which Telemann stood up on the battleground in front of the men who were now under his command, instructing them to pull back to the trenches. Standing on a platform tall enough to be seen by his men, and whoever was on the other side of the fog that had now blinded any of the Germans from a clear view of the enemy’s faces, then torsos, Telemann fired at the Russian line. Such cover allowed most of his men to run back to the trenches, where he quickly joined them once he had counted their numbers.

On the Russian side of the madness, a Captain grabbed hold of the reins of horse that had tossed off the Major. Leaping onto its back in the manner of a horseman from the 17<sup>th</sup> century Steppes, or Mongol from times far more ancient than that, he rode ahead of the Russian grunts. “Retreat, Comrades!” the 35 year old Cossack who bore a long warlock on his partially shaved head, a sash designating his nearly extinct but still independent Don clan, and a loosely worn non-regulation traditional shirt commanded the Russian soldiers as he whipped out a sword that had been used by three generations of fiercely independent ‘savages’ before him. To give them the opportunity to do so effectively without being shot in the back, this time by German soldiers rather than Russian goons, he whipped out an ornately decorated repeater rifle too beautiful to be constructed in the current century, firing it into the shadows he could make out on the other side of the fog, darting in and out of the line of fire till it created a path of least resistance for the retreat.

“Retreat, Comrades!” he commanded all of the men who could run, walk or crawl back to sanity. “You too,” he then requested of the steed under him, as he leaped off its back, ripping off the saddle and bridle with a fluid motion that was more of a dance than a procedure. “Before we kill ALL of your kind,” he gently said to the horse, after which he smacked him on the ass, then observed the noble beast running past skeletons of his fellow equines who had died in the service of stupidity, and finally disappearing into the woods.

The Captain smiled in delight, seeming to feel accomplished, like it was the most important thing he had done in his entire life. But it was a short lived moment of satisfaction, as something grabbed hold of the Cossack Captain’s leg. “Captain Boris Fedoroff! Help me! Please!” the wounded Russian pleaded, with more desperation and fear than in any wounded or dying soldier the Captain had seen. “Please, help me, Boris!”

The Captain examined the condition of the wounded man, finding it grim, but not hopeless. No doubt, he was suffering, both with regard to the pain in his body now, and

the fear of what awaited him in the afterlife once his soul had left the body. “Help me!” the Major requested of the Captain, again and again.

The Major, who perhaps was savable medically, but not otherwise, given what he had done and who he was. Allowing Passion and Practicality to work with each other, an event that rarely happened with Cossack such as Fedoroff, he retrieved the Major’s revolver, placed it into his superior officer’s hand gun, and flexed his elbow so that the business end of the Mauzer C96 would be aimed appropriately at the officer who both preached and believed that suicide was the quickest way to hell. “Help yourself! Imperialist, Capitalist scum!” Fedoroff barked at the Major, after which he put a less severely wounded infantryman over his shoulder and ran him back to the trench.

“Help me! Please!” the Major kept begging Fedoroff, then the other men under his command, then his mother, then finally, Jesus.

Piervy heard silence finally taking over the battlefield, then a single shot, then not a single human voice from the battlefield. His pack, or the pack anyway, licked their chops, anticipating some human meat to fill their bellies. Piervy considered it, feeling the pang of hunger in his empty belly, unable to hide the sound of his own stomach churning himself. “Okay, then. But when it is safe!” he barked, whined and growled at his fellow wolves, keeping them behind the line he had made between himself and the festivities below. “And when it is the right time!” he asserted.

“And that time is when?” Piervy heard from a female wolf with three white legs, her cubs repeating the inquiry in their own infantile but still understandable wolf talk.

“When....I say so, because as we all know, or should know,” Piervy said, trying to find a way to effectively lie to the fellow beings who were now his responsibility. Piervy’s explanation as to how they would eat this winter, and not be feed for the crows and earthworms come spring, was interrupted by an intruder from behind the pack, working his way through the woods. With his keen sense of smell that allowed him to detect with his nose things at a distance that most of his brethren could not see, Piervy smelled human. A special brand of human. Knowing what he had to do, Piervy led the pack to another location before the intruder could see him, or the pack.

Emerging from the charred bush was a man who called himself Umalo, a hunchbacked mountain man with a thick white beard that disobeyed all rules of symmetry, carting behind him a travail of supplies covered with furs and woolen blankets. He sang a somber Traditional tune in a tongue Piervy didn’t recognize, boldly working his way through the deep snow without breaking a sweat to the rhythm of the Ancient hymn. He looked below at the battlefield, crossed himself, then looked up to sky. “Lord, forgive them. For they DO know what they do. Or...hmm...Maybe not?” Umalo paused the conversation with the Lord above and felt an answer blow into him through a shifting wind. “Yes...I agree...Yes.... As you wish, Heavenly Father...And as your...” he said to the sky again, with kind yet knowing smile. Umalo heard the sound of Piervy in the woods to his left, leading the pack higher up the mountain. He then looked down at the

skeletons of the birds, and horses, the wolves had left behind. “Forgive them for what they must do,” he said regarding the canines, and most particularly, their heavily muscular, agile and no doubt intelligent leader. With that, he picked up his travail of supplies, and moved on through the snow towards the battlefield below, singing an ancient song of sorrow, hope and perhaps redemption.

## CHAPTER 2

There was no shortage of hurting units in the Russian trench, very much including those who had not been wounded in the last skirmish. Private Vladimir Petetsia, a 20 year old, peach-fuzzed faced Dukabor Pacifist, unable to wash the blood of others off his hands, tried to scratch it off, stopping only when he shed his own from his raw, nearly frostbitten fingers. “Lord, forgive me,” he muttered from his freeze-dried lips to the God who he had abandoned the day he ‘enlisted’ on the day when the Commissars came to his village. “For allowing myself to be conscripted in the Army so that my fellow Dukabors back home would not be put in jail or executed for refusing to kill another man. What we, I am doing here now---”

“---is necessary to cleanse of the Motherland, my deluded Dukabor friend...The fight against immorality. The vicious Hun,” Private Dmitri Raski, hard core, stubble faced, sloppily dressed 40 year old veteran with criminal tattoos, reminded his young Comrade in arms. “Is that not so?” he asked the former owners of the ears and eyes that adorned his necklace.

“---Who we can only defeat with order, discipline and proper demeanor....Reporting all those who present,,” officially asserted Sergeant Andre Petrovitch, a 30 year old, with a face clean shaven with trimmed mustache, trying to spit polish his boots, his uniform tidy relative to others. “A danger to moral and order to the proper Christian authorities. Is that not correct, Captain Fedoroff?” he continued, to his, for the moment anyway, his official commanding officer.

Fedoroff, who by any measure, looked more like Cossack civilian than a Captain in the Czar’s Imperial Army, stroked the large wooden crucifix around his neck, agonizing over yet another day of military and moral surprises. “Yes...the ‘proper Christian’ authorities who say that...” He stared pensively at a blood-stained map that he had stolen from the Major’s satchel after he was, according to his official report, killed by enemy fire. Fedoroff assessed the cartography which showed villages that were nothing more than ash or looted ruins by now. The Cossack who hated industrialization even more than the Czar who was betraying his Motherland, knew where East, North, West and South were with his gut sense rather than the Major’s Army compass now in his possession, which registered inaccurate information. “Hmmm”, Fedoroff muttered. “I know that high command deems it necessary that we don’t know where we are so we don’t know the way back home, but to confound the Major like this? That is...brilliant!”

“Indeed,” Raski added. “Like they kept us thinking we were going in circles when we were moved from jails in Moscow to ‘education camps’ in Siberia.”

“And trains with closed compartment that took us away from farmland where the only mode of transportation was a horse, or your own feet,” Petitsia lamented.

Fedoroff noted Seargent Petrovitch taking notes in his ‘diary’, no doubt written for eyes other than his family and friends back home, if indeed the snitch who sought to be Correct rather than right had any family and friends back home. Fedoroff reasoned that some time, some way, Petrovitch would meet the same end as the Major, but that was God’s job, not his. Or maybe it was time for God’s servants to judge as well as carry out His Holy orders.

A young messenger from another unit interrupted Fedoroff’s private debate between the ears that both sides would lose, arriving on a set of skis with the speed of a horse and the grace of an eagle. His uniform was new, every item on it too big, except for his boots, which were too small for his large, naturally athletic feet. With pride, and no interest at all in knowing what was in it, he handed Fedoroff a note, then snapped to attention, then saluted him. “A message for you, Sir,” he proclaimed in a Georgian accent that revealed his ignorance of the Russian language, and most probably the dialog he heard around the commanders’ table back at headquarters. Pitying and envying the youth’s enthusiasm, Fedoroff took waved down the salute, and handed him a flash of vodka, insisting that he drink it. Fedoroff read the note, doing his best to not let what came into his eyes show on his face.

“The war will be over soon, as we have been promised?” Petitsia inquired, hopefully.

“The war against insulent, sadistic and morally corrupt criminals,” Petrovitch interjected. “like you, Private and soon to be convict again Dmitri Raski who---“

“---have been ordered to stay here, with the rest of us, and hold the line,” Fedoroff informed the two soldiers in his command who fought against and hated each other more than any German. “The most important line in the war, so High Command tells us, again,” the Cossack officer who was so good at his job because he hated doing it added. He gave the skiing messenger three cigarettes from his pocket, and sent him on his way, sparing him what and who was to come into his mobile conference room next.

Private Sasha Melovic, a young worker in a meat-packing factory from Kiev who aspired to be a factory owner, or perhaps restaurateur, in Moscow by the time his three daughters were ready to take on the task of finding a husband who could give them love, and Melovic grandchildren, came by with his pot of ‘eats’ for the men. The company cook carted with him the stew of the day, noting that the first men to avail themselves of his services were more interested in conversation than the food spooned into their rusty, dented, and blood stained metal bowls.



“And if we don’t hold the line in this ‘essential stand’ to defend the Motherland, Boris Fedoroff?” White Russian Raski challenged.

“Or if we can’t hold the line, Sir?” Petitsia inquired, hoping that reason would convince his new Commander to do the smart rather than honorable thing.

“It’s a prison camp...for both of you!” Petrovitch spat out with the wave of his finger. “If not one run by the Germans, one run by us. Where there is even more cold and less food than here.” Seeing that he needed a bit more ammo in his saliva to scare the young lad into enthusiasm and the middle aged convict into submission, he directed his voice towards the official commander. “Is that not right, Captain Fedoroff?”

Against his nostril’s and palate’s wishes, Fedoroff chose to use his mouth for eating rather than talking. He tasted the food in his bowl, then winced with pain. As did the others, who swallowed as quickly as they could so their famished stomachs would filled before their tongues would elicit vomiting. According the Fedoroff’s design, and God’s plan, it brought the men together into common cause.

“Chef Sasha Melovic! Your new recipe for headcheese with meat of, maybe non-human origin...fit for a dog,” Raski noted with a humorous tone that, for the first time in days, was not based in sadism.

“Or maybe eaten by a dog first?” Petitsia added, expanding beyond his ‘above all do not offend’ religiously dictated morality to ‘above all, be Alive, big A.’

“After he ate a...rat?” Petrovitch said, reaching into his bowl and picking up a rat tale. He removed the ‘diary’ from his pocket and wrote another set of ‘notes’ for his novel.

“I’m doing the best I can with the food that’s available,” Melovic pleaded to Sergeant and perhaps Secret Policeman for the Czar Petrovitch. “Better than any of you can!” he continued to his fellow privates, then Fedoroff. “The supply trains and trucks stopped coming, and the woods---“

“---Still provide what you need, and want,” interjected Umalo in Russian, having arrived into the trench with his travail of supplies, undetected by everyone, even Fedoroff. “But, I will let you noble defenders of the motherland tell me if this is palatable. A new recipe.”

Umalo whipped off the furs and tarps over his sled, revealing a pot of freshly cooked food which he uncovered. Raski, Petitsia and Petrovitch smelled the steamy aroma that broke into the frigid stench of stagnation, find it mouth watering to the nose and pleasing beyond measure after they helped themselves to hefty portions they shoveled into their metal plates.

“Delicious,” Raski declared with the flair of a mobster whose chef had earned, yet again, the right to be the exclusive right to be the only cook allowed in his restaurant’s kitchen.

“Mouth watering,” Petitsia added, thinking but not saying ‘even more than mother’s milk.’

“Better than any Imperial Army food I, as a loyal and grateful servant of the Czar have been honored to experience,” Petrovitch noted.

“A passable alternative cuisine,” Melovic conceded after being bold enough to take in spoonful, fighting the temptation to indulge in taking more and forcing his lips to not reveal the smile his tongue wanted them to express. “A passable cuisine,” he continued, sneaking his spoon into the pot for a healthy portion to ‘sample’.

“Which...the wounded should partake of instead of us, Umalo,” Fedoroff declared, putting extra shares of what Umalo dished out to him back into the pot, encouraging the rest of the men to follow suit. “For what may be their last meal...” he said regarding the wounded troops behind him who according to his experience and word from the company doctor would not see another sunrise.

“Or maybe not their last meal?” Umalo offered, drawing Fedoroff’s attention to the wounded in the more protected area of the trench.

“Who it seems that you doctored back to health,” Fedoroff noted of the men who he thought would never see another sunrise who now were breathing, walking and even joking amongst themselves. “Better than our own doctors. Physicians who were trained in the Czar’s ‘best and most modern’ schools of healing that were actually institutions of...”

Fedoroff held back his commentary about Czar’s medical training program and its agenda to treat the rich first and the poor last, or not at all, after seeing Petrovitch turning another page in his book, to start another ‘letter to his nephew’ back home. But this time, Petrovitch seemed interested in something other than anti-government ‘gossip’.

“HOW did you save so many of the wounded?” Petrovitch inquired of the unsolicited wonder chef and miracle doc, suspicious of his magic.

“And WHY?” Raski pressed, voicing the real question everyone in the company wanted to know but were afraid to ask.

Umalo took in a deep breath of cold winter air, then looked up to the big blue sky above him. “Because the Lord called upon me to serve life, not death,” he declared with a solemn smile. “Like I did...once,” he continued, his head bowed, his eyes caught in a blank stare.

“And will do again, back home, with your pacifist Dukabor family, Ivan Petitsia,” Fedoroff interjected, attempting to bring the old man back to the real world, an dimension

that even mystics with magical powers had to check into every now and then. "If...maybe, Umalo, you can tell me what is going on over there," he continued, pointing Doc and Chef Santa to the German trench.

"Ah yes," Umalo replied with a secretive yet kind smile. As if feeling a trumpet call from above, and below, he reached into the recesses of his half tarp, half fur coat into his breast pocket, pulling out a pocket-watch bearing writing his hand covered. "Where I am due...ten minutes ago," he noted. "You will excuse me, my friends," he said, turning around to his sled, the front half loaded with supplies.

Petrovitch aimed his rifle at Umalo, as did Raski, then Petitsia.

"Indeed we will excuse you," Fedoroff said with a bow to the old man, delivering a penetrating stare to the three men under him. "With gratitude to you for your services," he continued to Umalo. "Correct?"

Fedoroff's penetrating stare reminded Petrovitch, Raski and then finally Petitsia to lower their weapons. He then reached into his pockets, emptying them of a mixed currency of earned rubbles and pilfered Deutchmarks, emptying his pockets. He encouraged his subordinates to contribute what they could as well.

"Not necessary," Umalo said with a warm smile, appended by a glow of light around his head made by wither the sun behind him or something from the Inside. "My Father in heaven sends his often mysteriously disguised blessings to you all." With that, Umalo hobbled his way into the woods leading to the German lines. He addressed the Russian soldiers en masse, somehow addressing each one individually. "My Father sends his blessings to you all!"

"By sending us a lunatic from the woods who thinks he's Jesus," Raski commented, followed by Petitsia, the finally Petrovitch.

"Thinking can become believing, and believing can become...Hmm...Reality," Fedoroff noted, after which he removed a copy copy of Das Capital from his pocket, opening it to pamphlet calling for overthrow of the Czar he had been using as a bookmark. "God and Reason willing, a Christian reality," he continued to himself, having lost his audience for the lecture he so wanted to give to the men now that the Major was 'in heaven', or hell if there was any justice in the afterlife.

Fedoroff's reading of Marx, looking for references to Christian principles within Socialist ideology and Communist mandates was interrupted by feeling Petrovitch's presence behind him. Indeed, the Seargent was taking notes in his black book regarding his Captain.

"You have nothing to lose but your chains, Seargent Petrovitch!" Fedoroff proclaimed enthusiastically to the self-tortured, lonely and pitiful 'by the numbers' non-

commissioned officer, and small time snitch who had rose up the ranks by reporting on others.

“And your master’s little black book,” Fedoroff heard, from Raski, as he stole Petrovick’s ‘diary, after which he wiped his ass with it, then threw it to Petitsia, playing catch with it as the old by the numbers Seargent chases after them. Fedoroff smiled in delight as he observed the young, humorless, guilt-ridden, gospel obeying Petitsia playing catch with the criminal whose morality changed daily, using the now brown-covered black book as a ball, Petrovitch the frustrated monkey in the middle. Fedoroff took his leave of observing the game in his lines and walked to the ‘observation line’, a position which, according to calculation and experience, was short of the range of small arms fire and machine guns.

Rightly or wrongly, Fedoroff had a duty to the men under him that rivaled, and often surpassed, his responsibilities to his Don Cossack wife, children and siblings back home. He looked over at German trench, worried as more trucks came in re-enforce it. “Yes, if we had trucks, or trains or...hmm...” he muttered to himself, recalling that the Imperial Russian Army was rich in numbers and passion, but poor in modern equipment, and more importantly, trains and trucks that can resupply missing equipment, or people.

His contemplation and calculation of how long the Russian Army, the largest Army in the world at the beginning of the war, could survive another winter in it was interrupted by shots that reach two tin cans, twenty feet in front of him. He looked toward the German lines. He noted a very smartly uniformed officer holding a high tech rifle with telescope sites. The German officer aimed at Fedoroff again.

Fedoroff whipped out his grandfathers’ Cossack sable, displayed his ability to make it ‘dance’ in the air and human flesh, then did an ‘on guard’ to the man behind the high tech rifle. Fedoroff waves his hand, as if to dare him to a duel. “Kommen Sie heir Fritz. Face me like a man!” the industrial hating Cossack dared the high tech cowardly officer on the other side of no man’s land.

### CHAPTER 3

“So that’s what this is about, Ivan,” Captain Hans Telemann muttered from the firing side of the newest revision of the Gehwehr 98 rifle, a long range weapon with a newly developed high powered scope that was delivered to the line along with other supplies due to the existence of a railway system the newly united Germany had build 50 years ago in anticipation of a war here and trucks that could take them the rest of the way. “Last Century Passion against this Century technological necessity.” Part of the 35 year old scholar-engineer regretted the truth of that statement, such motivating him to lower the weapon. But the bigger part of Telemann acknowledged that he was the vanguard of the new necessity for Europe. Everything about Telemann was functional, modern and civilized, from his neatly trimmed blonde mane that always kept its shape no matter how feirce the wind, to the firm musculature enveloping his solid, healthy and appealing-to-every-woman-in-the-Fatherland body. But though he was blessed with fortune, family

and enough fame to be comfortable in the most industrialized country on the continent, Telemann did harbor an admiration for the tenacity of the less developed cultures, most particularly the Russians. And the danger of not recognizing how effective that tenacity was when it was underestimated. The number of wounded behind him was evidence of that. But after this skirmish, he noted that fewer of them would be joining their countrymen under the ground. Indeed, the least injured of the wounded were now assisting in the care of the more severely sick, under the direction of a relatively new member of the medical team.

“Captain Telemann,” Lt. Goldmann, a slender, middle aged doctor with long sideburns and a handlebar mustache that somehow accentuated his prematurely wrinkled face commented said to his new commander as he approached. “I must protest that lunatic Belarusian woodsman treating MY wounded!” he barked out. “Who does Umalo think he is?”

“Someone who can heal them better than you can, Lieutenant?” Telemann offered, inviting the hardworking, summa cum lauda graduate of Berlin Medical School to re-assess the status of the wounded with his tired eyes.

“Sure, temporarily,” Goldman grumbled back. “With Pagan chants, Eastern Orthodox prayers, and herbal potions rather than modern science!”

“And if we combine pagan chants, Eastern Orthodox prayers and herbal potions with modern medicine?” Telemann offered in the calm, logical yet still understanding tone that was his trademark, even in the most emotionally heated conflicts of mind and soul that War elicited in everyone, including himself. “We have to use every tool available to us,” he reminded the Doctor who had worked tirelessly to keep as many men alive afterward he himself, thus far under the command of the departed Major, had ordered them into harm’s way. “Including this Gehwehr model 98,” he continued regarding the newest long range weapon developed. “One of 1500. While you work with Umalo, model one and only, in the service of the men, not our medical or military egos, Herr Doctor,” he said with a courtly bow to the Lt. Goldman, acknowledging his former rank at Captain before he had pilfered medical supplies earmarked for superficially wounded officers to save the lives of critically injured enlisted men.

“Yes, Sir,” Goldman replied, saluting Telemann as an officer rather than acknowledging his intentions as a comrade in arms.

Telemann saluted him back, maintaining the appearances that were now required of his new position as commander. Goldman went on his way, back to Umalo for another medical discourse. “Doctor!” he yelled to Goldmann, wanting to address him by his first name, but knowing such would be misunderstood as condescension rather than friendship. “We are all in this together.”

“And look out for each other,” Telemann heard from Seargent Jacob Schneider, a 55 year old, short, big boned man whose triple chin had been ingrained with blood, grime

and muck from 30 years of service the Fatherland in uniform. “For a commander to keep his men alive so they can go home to their families, he must think clearly and to think clearly requires that he eat well,” old veteran said from behind a bowl of food far larger than the usual rations given the rest of the men. And with an aroma that was far better than any Army cook Telemann had experienced on the Eastern or Western Front. “Grandpa Schneider’s orders, Captain. From Umalo,” he explained with very non-military bearing, his fluid-flowing hands doing most of the talking. “Eat... While it is still hot.”

“As able to fatten your gut, I see, Sergeant, who sounds more like a Jewish Grandmother than a German soldier,” Telemann replied, with a raised chin regarding the ethnic and feminized rhythm in Schneider’s offering.

“Sergeant,” Schneider said, his back abruptly straightening with a prideful pose. “Who has kept you and your men from becoming crow meat, or stew for the Ivans,” he reminded his superior, using his finger to first wave into Telemann’s face, in the manner of the father who insisted that Telemann not only live up to but surpass the his aristocratic heritage “Whose relatives back home in Russia have become cannibals,” the low born Sergeant continued to the high born Captain, pointing to the dehumanized enemy on the other side of no-man’s land.

“As our families back home will be reduced to unthinkable acts to keep themselves fed,” Telemann noted, from very real experiences in this War as well as stories told to him by his highly decorated father and grandfather. . “If we retreat.”

“Or if we don’t find a way to get out of these woods,” Telemann heard from Private Karl Bauer, a blonde , blue-eyed recruit from the maybe still bucolic farmfields of Hesse-Kassel who was still desperately trying to grow a mustache to prove that he really was 18 when he enlisted. “Umalo says these woods are haunted. Ruled by Satan. Who will send us all to hell!” the believer in the All Good, All Mighty Heavenly father continued.

“Hell doesn’t exist,” Sgt Schneider interjected in the manner of a Jewish scholar and Yiddish Uncle. “It’s a Christian myth that...”

Just as Telemann noted an even deeper Hebrew roots to the old veteran’s undisclosed ancestry, he arched his back again, adjusting his diction to something more Nordic. “... better replaced by believing that brave soldiers and good souls go to Heaven.” He continued, turning to Telemann. ”Or Valhalla?”

“Someplace far better than where we are now, or will probably return home to...someday,” Telemann replied, keeping his own religious beliefs to himself, as always. Such was a good practice with regard to keeping a good rapport with his men. Men who had to hold onto whatever beliefs in the Almighty and the Hereafter they need to so they could get through the day, or deal with the day that would be their last. As for what Telemann believed, he was an devout atheist, not because he hated God, but because his Mind didn’t need that Construct to make sense of the world, or to relieve him of the terror

that it brought to any sane of thinking man. At least he didn't think he need a belief system beyond what could be seen with the eyes, felt with the fingers, or changed with enough scientifically-based industrially-serving activity. Nature to Telemann was something that should serve mankind rather than the other way around. After all, if there was any unifying concept to the universe, it was that the strongest and smartest survive and maintain their position on top by being compassionate to those below them. But even Telemann felt the pangs of being human, yearning for what those believing in Christian, Jewish and Pagan superstitions did.

The glimmer of the sun heading towards its resting place over the Western horizon caught Telemann's eye and focus, as it did the others. "We'll all be COMING West, my dear, beautiful Elsa, son and daughter," he stated to those who gave him purpose to continue. "With no more of us GOING West, my now dearer and brave Comrades," he pledged, as he and the men around him heard then saw the last evacuation truck taking the departed back to graves in the Fatherland, assuming that that truck would not be taken out by aircraft, or run out of gas, or be diverted to be used somewhere else first.

#### CHAPTER 4

A magnificently colored sunset displaying the constellation of colors both named and unnamed by the mind of man was replaced by a moon that rose high in a cold, cloudless sky that soon invited storm clouds to fill in patches of the canvas the star and moonlit canvas above. The clouds, this time, held onto the snow in them, deciding, for whatever reason, to allow the humans below to live in spotlights of illumination, or alternatively, shadows of black. As to who would be visible and who would not be, such was now up to Mother Nature, and not the two legged creatures who had initiated all manners of disruption on the ground she had so carefully taken care of before the Great War came to this forest. The wind made its presence known, blowing moderately from all of the four directions according to its own timetable. Between transitions, it was quiet enough to allow the men on both sides of no man's land to hear most of each other's movements, as well as the pounding of their own heartbeats.

Captain Fedoroff, whose extra-large sized, wilderness raised Cossack ear had learned to hear things in the distance that few could see even during the daylight, as well as the Silence of the woods which was his favorite sound of all. With his ears, he could hear a fox shit, copulate and munch on dead rabbit carcasses afterwards. With the size large nose under his size extra large mustache, he could smell the odors produced from those necessary and beloved activities. Having heard and smelled unusual activity from the German trenches an hours after Sunset, he had instructed his men to dig in triple layers, 'as a precaution'. In order to give his men a sense of calm to what he knew would be a storm, Fedoroff, in the front line of the triple-layered defense of course, passed the time on the fireless night reading Das Capital by the light of a moon that decided to shed more light than shadow upon him.

A terrified Private Melovic sat next to him, more scared of what was behind than in front.

“Captain Fedoroff,” the talentless yet still-aspiring chef and perhaps restaurant mogul commented to his superior while seeing two Russian soldiers whose faces he had not recognized braced for action with machine guns in the third line of defense.

“Boris,” Fedoroff said as he turned the page on the Communist Manifesto which gave him reason to believe that the failed Revolution of 1905 against the Czar would work this time. “Or if noble and needed experiments are allowed to be tested, Comrade Captain, Comrade Private,” he continued, realizing that as a Cossack, his role would be in the Army. But THIS time, not in the Army as part of a deal with the Czar so that his family and community back home could have, relatively speaking of course in the slave state that was still Russia, autonomous rule.

“Captain... Boris,” Melovic continued, unable to comprehend an Army where officers actually shared equally with enlisted men, or embrace a classless society where workers such as himself ruled themselves. “Those men, who speak with Sgt Petrovich more than any of us, behind us, manning the machine guns. The barrels of those weapons seem to be pointed more at us than the Germans.”

“On the orders of our thankfully departed Major Shostoskov, the Czar’s favorite puppet,” Fedoroff related by way of explanation. “Or the next Captain who will replace me after I’m accidentally shot...” he continued, after which he chuckled, sharing a badly needed black humor joke with himself.

“And the reason why you haven’t been accidentally shot at dawn?” Melovic, whose first war was this Great War, asked. “And snuck into the headcheese stew and chicken Kiev Sergeant Petrovitch will order me to serve for supper?”

“Because those assholes behind the machine guns and idiots like Petrovitch still need me to keep them alive,” he noted, looking around him to see if Petrovitch, natural born snitch as well as coward, had tried to desert himself.

But of more important note was something else he heard, and perhaps smelled, behind him in the woods. “Yes...Petrovitch and his fellow rats need me to keep them alive from an enemy that is watching us...from behind,” Fedoroff whispered to his Comrade, while facing forward. He instructed Melovic to do the same, then chirped and signaled to half of his men to brace for an attack from behind, knowing that it would be only half of the problem at hand.

“What did you hear?” Melovic asked though teeth rattling due to cold as well as fear as the sounds in the woods got closer.

“A very smart enemy, or deserters dumb enough to come back here and...” Fedoroff motioned for the men assigned to protect the rear to hold their fire, recalling three theoretically conversations he had had with three MIAs a few days ago, and hoping that such was the reason behind the three discretely moving intruders approaching from as many directions.



On the German side of the madness, the men were poised for a fight that may be their last, yet gain. Telemann looked at his map, illuminated by a flashlight rather than relying on the flippant mood of the clouds nor the moon's ability to send light through them. Intelligence report and logic said that an attack was supposed to be coming from the front, but rustling in the bush behind the lines suggested something different. Sgt. Schneider, as always, found his way to Telemann's side just as the Commander allowed his logical mind to be overcome by the emotions he had learned to bury so effectively.

"So...These Russians decide to use their brains and attack us 'Fritz's' from the rear rather than charge us with pitchforks from the front," Schneider noted, as a German who was well aware of how advanced his culture and Cause was relative to the Slavs. "So what do we do about these smart assed Ivans?" he inquired of Telemann.

"Become smarter Fritz's," Telemann smiled back. With that, he motioned for his most of his men to spread out, directing their hopefully well-maintained, modern weaponry at the woods behind them as well as on their flanks, and to hold their fire.

"The Fritz's are moving faster," Melovic pointed out to Captain Fedoroff as the unidentified guests coming in from the woods started to come in from the sides as well. "What do we do?"

"Think, and move, faster," Fedoroff whispered back, in a non-worried tone intended to make the intruders still think they had not been noticed. With one reassuring hand on Melovic's shaking shoulder to maintain that illusion, he used the other to motion to machine gunners to go into the woods. They obeyed, this time anyway.

"Starting with sending Petrovitch's deserter- killing spies into the line of fire?" Melovic stated, having ascertained Fedoroff's secret plan.

"Tonight, we're all in this together, Comrade Private," Fedoroff said, as he adjusted his saber to be withdrawn at a second's notice should events get 'up front and personal' too quickly.

"Yes, Sir," Melovic replied, seeming to have confidence in his commander and, most importantly, himself.

While 'the wind' in the woods behind and to the sides of Telemann got more expressive, Telemann motioned more of his troops to protect the rear, leaving a skeleton crew to man the front, including bodies of those whose service to the Fatherland had been ended by a bullet, frostbite or self-inflicted wounds that one never wrote home about or put into official reports. Telemann perches himself in an elevated position to see what is going on in the woods, aiming the telescopic scope of his new, custom made, long range rifle as

whoever it was. Following his 'student' Commander's plan, Schneider send several men with small arms that could be used in close quarters into the woods, hand picked for their ability at hand to hand combat. They disappeared into the woods, hidden from view by the charred but still lingering branches of the pine.

"A good plan, Captain," Schneider commented as he rejoined Telemman. "We give cover while they capture the intruders."

"After we wound those intruders," Telemann boasted. "Me, anyway," he continued, hoisting his super weapon on his shoulder, scoping out the woods with a new innovation that allowed him somehow to see though not only darkness, but a fog that decided to come between him and his Russian prey.

The footsteps in the woods behind and on the sides of the Russians moved quickly. Faster than any man would run, even the Supermen German athletes whose blonde hair, blue eyes and classically muscular bodies who were advertized on the recruiting posters Fedoroff has seen posted around towns which the Kaiser's troops sought to convert before destroying. Fedoroff didn't believe in ultimate German superiority, nor in the ultimate victory of industrialized states over passionate ones. But he did believe in what could not be seen by the eye more than what he could.

"Ghost!" Melovic said as waves of intruders, now escalating in number each time you looked towards them, seems to move low and fast through woods faster than the wind, and with more unpredictability.

'Ghosts who we need to take ALIVE,' Fedoroff asserted, afterwhich he stood up to 'face' them. "ALIVE ghosts, who will be shot as coward for sneaking around and not showing themselves," he continued in broken German, drawing his grandfather's sword with his right hand, holding his father's pistol with the other. Waving that well-tempered blade which inspired his Cossack ancestors to be better than they were, and more independent than any Czar envisioned they could be, he motioned for five men to follow him into the woods, including a, for the moment anyway, inspired Melovic.

On the German side of the line, two of the lead soldiers advanced, using their best instincts to outflank the still-unseen intruders in the woods, and finally finding a way to get behind the low lying shadows they now projected. Then, without warning, the woods turned quiet. The first soldier, an old corporal, looked around him, according to the drills they had rehearsed ad nauseam in training camp and during 'off' time in the trenches, sensing nothing wrong, he took a sip from his canteen, hoping the alcoholic 'water' in it would make the chill of the night less oppressive. His comrade, a young private who was better skilled with a blade than anyone in the Company was with a gun, saw a pairs of bright eyes in front of him, the face of the intruder hidden by the bush. Then one more set of eyes to his right, and left. Before the young private could raise his weapon, or voice, to the sharp shooters perched behind him, or his old friend, he was drawn into the bush by his leg, afterwhich he screamed out in agony. The old corporal

rushed to his aid, firing into the mangled bush at the shadow of what seemed to be a large, muscular monster of a man. “We’re under attack!” he yelled out to his men, seeing three sets of eyes glaring at him from behind the bushes to his left. He turned his rifle towards two of them, and was able to fire three rounds out. But by the time the bullets left the barrel of the rifle, the business end of his sawed off Mauzer was aiming at the stars, fired from the ground as he felt himself pulled into the bushes to his left.

Telemann saw it all from the sites of his new high range rifle, but the bullets from that super weapon were no match for the highly mobile intruders. If he anticipated them moving to the left, they scurried to the right. As for the view of it all from the perspective of the common soldiers under Telemann, their view of the events was the corporal’s arm, and the private’s head rolling down the hill then into a patch of moonlit snow in view of all of them.

The Germans, en masse, opened fire into the woods at anything that moved, exhausting their magazines. Such was against Telemann’s order, but it was too late now, as the men under him were more scared of the Ghost Army that had become real than any retribution for disobeying a battlefield command. He only hoped that the bullets would find their way into the enemy and not the fellow Germans he had learned to value as friends, who were now family.

The attack off the encroaching Army then commence without delay on the Russian side of the line, announced by one of the presumably cold as steel machine gunners who screamed out “We are under attack. Open Fire!” after which he was dragged into the bush himself, but not before seeing the limb of his comrade torn from his body, making the white snow blood red. Fedoroff saw it all, from the machine gunner’s perspective anyway, from his perched position with his naturally-developed enhanced night vision.

Gunfire from Russian guns into the ghost army commenced as well. Ranski, Petitsia and Petrovitch arrived in unison to a position near Fedoroff. They joined shoot into the woods behind them. The firing into the woods stopped only when Fedoroff finally convinced everyone that if they ran out of ammunition now, they would have nothing to fight back with later, using all manner of expletives to make his point heard.

As predicted, Sgt. Petrovich tried to establish his superiority. “Sounds like we got them,” he tried to boast confidently, though even a half blind man could see fear still lingering in his eyes. “Go check to confirm that we did,” he said to Raski. “You still haven’t earned your parole from prison, as far as I, and High command is concerned.”

“Go confirm it yourself, you---“ Raski shot back. But before he could bring down the Sgt. whose only verifiable crime was his lack of compassion for anyone except himself or his ‘beloved’ superiors in the Imperial Army, motion took place in another area of the woods. Raski fired into it, followed by Petrovich and Petitsia doing the same. This time, Telemann merely reminded rather than ordered them to try to make every shot count.

Finally, Telemann was able to gain control of his men, and perspective, as was Fedoroff. The Germans advanced into the woods behind them with machine guns and grenades, firing at anything that moved. Periods of silence happened, followed by movements to the right or the left, after which another barrage of bullets and shrapnel were cast into the heavily wooded blackness against the hit and kill Army, which took four more men with them into the dark abyss, never to be seen from again, but heard from with a blood curdling scream as they exited the land of the living.

“So, these Ivan’s are fighting dirtier than we think they are, Sgt Schneider,” Telemann commented as calmly as he could to his mentor after the fourth assault.

“And smarter,” Schneider added. “Making us perhaps rethink that we are the superior race,” he continued, seeming to mean more than what he had said.

The Russians advanced with every ounce of their weaponry against the enemy, with the same results. After the fifth attack, with the loss of as many men, whose limbs and heads rolled out of the bushes, Petrovitch approached a frustrated and for the first time visibly fearful Fedoroff.

“So, Captain Fedoroff,” he said with his arrogant high pitched voice, twirling the outer tufts of his perfectly trimmed, regulation mustache. “Grenades haven’t worked against the Fritzs. Maybe you can poison them a reading from the Communist Manifesto, which is you read is closely says---“.

Before Petrovitch could rant on again about how the Czar and his Capitalist Industrial machinery was the only thing that could save Russia from itself, and go on again about how the rebels who tried to establish a democratically elected government in 1905 deserved to be sent to Siberia, Raski rushed up to Fedoroff, appearing from nowhere.

“As requested, Captain Boris,” the paroled convict who boasted about his real learning experience in school was to steal the Headmaster’s watch, sell it for a bottle of wine, then use it to steal the Schoolmarm’s virginity said as he handed Fedoroff one bag labeled in the language of the ‘Superior Race’. “Gas, stolen from the Germans,” he said of the canisters inside of them. “And as acquired from our departed Major’s locked supply chest that found its way to my eyes,” he said of the second bag. “Reserved for himself and no doubt visiting dignitaries, or the Czar if he chose to come re-visit the War he started.”

“Gas masks,” Fedoroff noted, counting no less than ten of them. “That I requested for all of you. But now can be used by only...hmmm.”

Fedoroff calculated the spread of the gas, put his finger up to detect the direction of the wind, then threw a mask to ten of the healthiest men he could see. He saved the last one, which seemed in defective shape, for himself, strapping it on his face. “Now, Comrades,

we are a Super Insect Army, with the strength and tenacity of a thousand cockroaches, but with only three legs,” he said with a nasal tone while pointing to his penile process as the third lower appendage. “Out to throw these canisters into the pussy’s of those Fritzs out there so we can scare them back to the Daddyland, and we can all go home.”

The men appreciated the joke, in their own way, all except Petrovitch of course. “An while you are throwing these canisters at the enemy, what will I do as second in command?”

“Nothing!” Fedoroff said. “Think,” he said. “And if any of this gas comes back your way, do what we always did.”

With that, Fedoroff led his specialized detachment of men into the woods to weed out the Ghost Army with poison gas, leaving his men behind to piss into their scarves and hold them up to their mouths in the event that another gas attack happened.

## CHAPTER 5

By 6:14 AM German time, and dawn according to the Russian clock, the woods surrounding No-Man’s Land were silent, with nothing moving, save for the ghosts of the departed soldiers who, if they had any brains left in their mangled bodies, headed off to any afterlife available. As the sun took its assigned place over the windless Eastern horizon, Raski, Petrovitch, Melovic and Petitsia were amongst the still living soldiers searching for the wounded and the dead, all of whom wore Russian uniforms, or what was left of them. Hatred had bound them together in ways they had never been bonded before.

“Bloody Krauts!” Raski grunted regarding a body with leg and arm bones lined with only a shaggy coating of flesh, his anger at not being able to adorn his necklace with more German ears and eyes overrun by fear of his own body parts being brought back to Berlin or Hamburg as someone else’s souvenirs..

“God Damn Huns!” still-devout Dukabor Petitsia growled, using a voice and expletive that he had thus far been able to hold back as his eyes beheld neck in which everything except the trachea had been extracted.

“And those Fritzs call us vicious cannibals!” Melovic pushed out of a throat which had been parched due to a seemingly endless stream of vomit that had come out of his belly since the search-after had began. He noted the exposed stomach of the unidentifiable soldier, noting that the intestinal tract and the other uneatable parts had been left for the crows, foxes and worms. “What kind of creature carves up and eats human flesh!”

“Hungry ones given this,” Fedoroff explained as he emerged from the bush, before Petrovich could add his two toxic rubbles to the commentary. The wilderness bred Cossack who wouldn’t, or couldn’t, make a go of it in any big city, or small

industrializing town, tossed onto the ground in front of the men the thin body of an emaciated wolf he had discovered in the brush. “A weak member of pack who wasn’t fast enough to avoid our bullets, grenades, or gas. Wolves who first pull their prey down by chewing off their legs. Then hide in the woods again till they---“

“---Eat into the throat, and the spinal cord,” Private Bauer explained to his comrades on the German side of the line, finally being superior in knowledge and composure to his fellow enlisted men, and perhaps even his respected more than feared Captain. “Or paralyzing their prey. Then feeding on the rump, legs, arm to feed themselves and their cubs,” the farm-raised and still land-loving Christian continued.

“Leaving the head, eyes and guts of OUR comrades for the crows to eat,” Fedoroff noted as he and the other Russians gazed upon the face of a man who they could hardly recognize. “All because----“

“We’ve bombarded, killed or starved out all the small prey the wolves normally eat in these woods,” Bauer provided to his comrades and superiors by way of explanation. “In this hell we have created for ourselves as well as the innocent,” he continued, trying to make sense of the events of the past night, and century long year, himself.

“And, interestingly,” Fedoroff pondered, stroking the blood and frozen snot out of his overgrown mustache. “Wolves of this species stay away from any human flesh, living or dead. Until now.” He and the others heard howls of wolves all around them, then observed representatives of the chorus on the snowy and still wooded overlooks on every side of them. A chorus of tens, maybe hundreds of beasts gazing down below with more confidence, righteous indignation and superiority than any German Death Squad preparing to decimate more inferior Slavs, or company of Imperial soldiers arriving in a Cossack village to round up dissidents or Jews.

“But there is one thing I do know,” Fedoroff informed his men as he took count of them, and the canines he could see showing themselves, or trying to hide in the woods.

“These wolves are being led by a very smart leader,” Bauer noted as the men around him raised their gun barrels up, aiming at the beasts. “Beasts who----

Some of the men point their guns at the wolves.

“Know, or have been taught, how far these guns of ours can fire,” Fedoroff informed his men, hoping that they would not be stupid enough to not waste any more ammunition that would fall short of its mark.

“But not his rifle,” Telemann grunted as he raised his tailor made, hand delivered long range rifle at the head wolf. “In a war against technology and nature, you lose, you vicious, uncivilized, bastard who...”

“...Thinks faster than you can, Sir,” Bauer replied with a slight bow. “With all due respect, if you...”

Telemann allowed anger to overtake him, then focused that into a first shot, well aimed, which missed the wolf. As did the second, and the third. The wolf’s answer to the near hits was to back up further into the woods, bringing the rest of the pack with him. Telemann, the commander who never had to raise his voice to be heard or obeyed screamed out at the beast, preparing for another go at him. “You damn wolf! You---“ .

“---have been educated about us a bit more,” Lt. Doctor Goldmann said, having become as he approached, his hands in his pockets as if warning an intern that he was about to screw up his first case.

“A lot more about us, Sirs,” Bauer added. “That head wolf and his pack.”

“WE are the alpha species, gentlemen!” urban-raised and wilderness-hating Telemann grunted as he took aim with the next shot at the wolf. He kept both eyes open, squeezed the trigger slowly, and fired, only to see the shot miss again. And the wolves backing up further into the woods, greeted by twice as many of them who had presented themselves previously.

“More of them than us,” Fedoroff noted from his vantage point in the valley regarding the canines on the hills above. “Unless ‘us’ includes...” He looked towards the German lines, ripped off the least bloody white shirt he could find from the dead, placed it at the top of his sword, climbed on top of the highest rock he could find, and waved it in the air.

“I know it makes sense, and is necessary,” Telemann said to his always present mentor, and friend, Sgt. Schneider. “But...” he continued, stroking his always clean shaven chin.

“The Christmas 1915 Truce in France was a welcomed miracle that happened without orders from above,” the Sgt. reminded the Captain. “Which you celebrated.”

“Until I was sent here, without seeing my family en route, and was told that if it happened again, the authorities would crucify me, and my family,” Telemann replied, recalling more than he would, or could, tell anyone except Schneider.

“A painful but necessary path to glory. Real glory,” Schneider asserted as he whipped off the white scarf he had been sent off to War with from his ailing mother, which he kept unsoiled by urine, mud or blood. He offered it to Telemann, who mounted it on the business end of his long range rifle, then held it firmly up in the air, committing himself to the possibility of another deal that could go a lot more sour than the one he had been part of last Christmas.

## CHAPTER 6

Though the language of peace and truce in the Cause of mutual survival and, perhaps, gain, is a universal one, some intermediate tongues had to be employed for a deal to be solidified between Fedoroff and Telemann.

“Sincerity, if we can fake that long enough,” the low born Cossack Russian Captain carrying 19<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century weaponry that most cultures would have put in museums a long time ago said as he walked up the hill towards the wolves, in English, showing the men behind him a ‘hey, trust me Comrades, though he is wearing a German uniform, he is one of us’ smile.

“A stroke of luck that we both speak English,” the Prussian-Aristocrat German Captain said while aiming his newly designed long range rifle with a high tech scope at the woods replied, while throwing his own men another ‘we have to trust the Ivans now for our own good and that of our families back home’ stare.

“And thank God we don’t have to fight the English,” Fedoroff added. “Well, my men anyway. But outside of having to deal with these wolves, we all do have something in common.”

“My right to earn as much as I can for my family in a free marketplace, or yours for a ‘peoples’ Communist boss preventing me from doing so?” Telemann spat back at Fedoroff, having seen the copy of the Communist Manifesto ‘coincidentally’ visible in his coat pocket.

“No,” Fedoroff replied, putting off his most passionate Calling in order to serve his first. “Home,” he continued, looking to the East then the West. “Which we can all go back to, once you surrender to us, or we surrender to you,” he continued with a chuckle, indicating his longing for either option.

“Indeed,” Telemann agreed with a tightly held smile, in manner of the religiously non-expressive Oxford University elite who he learned to emulate and imitate during the summer session in England which he was required to succeed at so that he would be allowed to come home in the fall.

As for the men walking behind the two captains, ordered to work together to spot the man-eating wolves and kill them that was another matter. Taking their orders literally from their commanding officers to work side by side, the Russian soldiers kept to themselves on the left flank while the Germans kept on the right, as mistrusting of each other as they were of the wolves hiding in the woods, but armed with something other than guns to test and defeat their two legged opponents.



“Guten Tag,” Raski said to the Germans to his right with as fake a smile as he ever used on marks who put him in jail, and gullible guards who wound up helping him get out. “Good day for a hunt with savage pigs and motherfucking technical schoolgirls who call themselves German soldiers,” he continued in Russian. Such evoked private chuckles and displayed smiles from his fellow countrymen, even Petrovitch. Petitsia, however, looked at Bauer, saying with his apologetic eyes ‘it was his idea not mine’.

“Spaceba. Dobrey Den,” Lt. Goldman bowed back to the Russians, greeting them a good morning in the best diction he could muster. “Russian sub-human, unevolved scum. Who one day may discover the wheel, fucking women instead of horses, and bathing,” the normally professionally dictioned Doctor continued to his own troops, providing a badly needed dose of raunchy humor.

“So, they seem to be getting along,” Fedoroff noted as he heard the laughs of the men on both sides become louder than their footsteps, the wind or the thumping of his own overworked heart as he trudged through the deepening snow.

“Indeed, yes,” Telemann acknowledged, hiding his exhaustion with an arched back and clenched teeth.

“So, getting back to our proposition,” Fedoroff continued as he stopped to take a break, pulling out a coin from his pocket. “So we can all go home to what’s left of, or what could become our two still very different countries. Heads you surrender to us. Tails we surrender to you.”

Telemann seemed to think that Fedoroff meant it. After all, the only predicatable thing about a Russian was that you could never count on him doing what you think he will. And somehow always count on him doing something that would elevate his suffering rather than alleviate it. From the populus bringing back Ivan the Terrible to the throne a year after they had worked so hard to depose him, to the refusal of modern day Cossacks living without electricity to accept industrialization that would allow them to experience rather than endure winter.

The coin missed Fedoroff’s hand, perhaps on purpose or maybe because the reflexes of the war weary Cossack were not as good as he would let on. It fell into the snow.

“So, is it heads or tails?” the artistocratic-capitalist German Captain asked the renegade-Communist Russian Commander.

“Hand, and foot,” Fedoroff replied, as he withdrew each of those blood-covered, mutilated limbs from the deep snow.

“Russian or German?” Telemann inquired.

“Human,” rang out a deep, consternating and caring voice from behind both of them in English that was heavily accented with Belarusian diction. “From a species that will

destroy itself as long as it divides itself,” Umalo continued as he took both well-eaten limbs from Fedoroff. He placed them both in a burlap sack mounted upon his sled. “And my Father in Heaven says that unless you love your enemy as you love your friend, or family, the seeds of evil will continue to---“

“---The wild wolves,” Fedoroff interjected, noting a blood soaked rag around Umalo’s right wrist.

“That did that?” Telemann added, noting a chunk of missing flesh from the other side of the bandage, with fresh wounds extending up his torn sleeve all the way up to the elbow.

Umalo paused for a moment, glancing at his hand, then the woods, then something up in the sky. “My Father in heaven said that if thine eyes offend Me, rip them out. And if thine hands offend Me, tear it off.”

“And YOU say?” Fedoroff inquired.

Before Umalo answered, wolves howled in the woods, on all sides, as if talking to each other. Every uniformed man took cover, aiming their rifles, and focus on a the common four legged enemy.

Umalo remained standing, bending his ear to one side of the woods, then another, nodding each time. Finally, he turned to the two Captains, their backs to each other, their guns aimed at the unseeable creatures in the bush who slowly made themselves known, just beyond range of even Telemann’s rifle. “I say that WE have to become a smarter species than THEM. Because according to what THEY are saying about US....” Umalo’s next thoughts he kept to himself. He smiled sardonically, then lost himself in mad laughter. The kind that men indulge themselves in before they do something destructive, or realize something profound, or both.

“What are they saying about us?” the usually logical Telemann observed himself asking the crazy self-appointed mountain man Messiah.

“And what are you laughing at?” Fedoroff demanded of the old coot.

“It probably loses all its meaning in translation,” Telemann speculated.

“Or...” Fedoroff replied, his ever wilderness-raised mind stumbling on something in Wolf Talk that he thought he actually could understand and translate, his leg giving way to a hole under the snow made by mortars rather than moles.

## CHAPTER 7

The path up the hills and into another wooded valley that the War had extracted or demolished the best from. After some stops to pick up supplies left behind by both

sides, Umalo led the company of mistrusting but still alive soldiers to a frequently used, detected as such by the packed snow to Telemann's eye, and grassless ground under it as sensed by the soles of Fedoroff's feet. Umalo insisted that the soldiers trudge their way everywhere except on the path in the deepening snow, using pine branches attached to their asses to cover up their tracks. The energetic old man halted progress of the younger ones behind him by abruptly putting his hand up, then uncovering the tarp on his sled. He

"Maybe he knows that a tired body leads to an obedient mind?" Telemann commented to Fedoroff, huffing and puffing himself, and noting that the 'friendly' insults between Russians and Germans behind him had turned into grumbles of mutually shared complaints.

"As well as knowing a lot more, by the way he's setting up these snares," Fedoroff noted as Umalo examined a tree's strength and willingness to participate in the endeavor at paw. "These traps of his are different than those set by grandpapa Sergei, but he seems to know more than that seldom at home but always alone battleaxe did."

"Requiring different parts, from THIS century," Telemann commented as Umalo motioned for him to cut him off a three foot long string of German made barbed wire from the sled, demonstrating how it is used. "Wire from OUR fences. Which are sharp."

"And ours which are STRONG," Fedoroff shot back, cutting off a piece of rusted, thick Russian manufactured wire that had been used to build fences on no-man's land.

"Swords," Umalo replied, taking both wires into his hand, then intermingling them with each other. "Which we will convert into....hmm...what word am I looking for?" he continued in his heavily accented English.

"Plowshears," Fedoroff replied, playing the unwilling student on behalf of the student body of two, as Telemann gave the answer to the last Socratic question posed by Umalo to them both.

"Yes, indeed," Umalo continued as he quickly constructed the most efficiently looking trap Telemann had ever seen, and the most interesting one Fedoroff had ever envisioned. "And now for the bait."

Telemann and Fedoroff looked at each other, feeling nothing except the humanity for each other. They looked at the sac on Umalo's sled, hoping they would not have to open it again.

"Come now," Umalo said. "Flesh is flesh, and after the spirit, is nothing more than that, lads."

Whether it was the condescending form or address, or the need to serve the living rather than overmourn the dead, neither Fedoroff nor Telemann knew. Working with the one

mind that they found themselves trapped into, Telemann opened the sac and Fedoroff, with hands covered with tarp so as to not put his scent on it, retrieved fistful of human flesh. An arm this time, from the pile of dead that had been discovered in the snow, or dug up a shallow grave, the latter being, according to Umalo anyway, more attractive to the wolves who were now the enemy.

Umalo smelled the flesh before putting it into the trap. “Ah yes! You boiled and seasoned the meat just right, according to my instructions,” he said with a proud smile. “Good lads.” He then broke into another hymn in a language of either his own land, or perhaps his own making.

“Lad!?” Telemann barked back, having had enough of the crazy old man’s taunting, teaching and secrecy. “I’m not a lad, you.”

Fedoroff inserted his hand on Telemann’s chest, and lowered the German’s arm before Umalo could see the fist he was about to push into Umalo’s blissfully smiling face.

“---You want him to call us Son again?” Fedoroff whispered to Telemann.

“The why, Professor Jesus, are you singing?” Telemann blasted out at the coot.

“Because they like the song, of fools playing around, who think there is no danger near, so we can call them here,” Umalo answered in song, with Oxfordianly accented English. “With just a...” he continued, punctuated by a musical bridge of wolf howls.

Umalo’s canine cantata was answered by an accompanist, then multi-part harmony by the rest of the wolves in the woods. They emerged from the brush, slowly, led by their Alpha. On the bottom of the hill, the soldiers formed a circle, aiming their weapons at a detachment of wild canines who surrounded them on the right and left flank, remaining

While looking at the large Alpha, Umalo pointed Telemann towards a tree, then Fedoroff to a spot in the snow near the trap. Telemann proudly inserted his high powered long range firearm into his shoulder, Fedoroff smeared his legs with the red mixture containing blood from humans and beaver, along with the ‘special spices’ Umalo had sprinkled into it, then settled into his spot near the trap.

“So, why do I get to play dead, and he gets to go up the tree to shoot his gun,” Fedoroff inquired of his new Mentor, noting that he had disappeared into the woods.

“Because I’m a better shot. With technologically superior weaponry,” Telemann replied as he found a branch of the tree that could hold his ass in place without ripping his testicals off.

“Maybe, maybe not,” Fedoroff answered. “There is an Ancient power in these,” he continued regarding the revolver and sword left to him by his father and grandfather,

presumably after they died of natural causes when away hunting. “And an indestructable energy this,” he continued with more surety, stroking the crucifix around his neck.

“I thought that you Communists didn’t believe in religion,” Telemann noted as he looked at the movements of the wolves coming toward them, then gauged the wind, and calculated in his mathematically oriented head where the bullets should be pointed, and when.

“There are many different ways to be Communist,” Fedoroff replied as he saw with his eyes, then felt with his belly the rumbling of wolf paws transitioning from a walk to a trot toward him.

“Maybe, maybe not,” the die-hard free market capitalist answered as wolf trots led to gallops, then leaps. “Or…” he continued, noting that the head wolf was indeed leading the pack.

“Come, come, come on and get me,” Fedoroff said to the Alpha wolf in his native tongue. “If you can!” he growled to what looked like the natural leader to this company, or perhaps battalion of wild canines who, according to what he saw and was told by Umalo, did nothing without his say so. “We kill the Czar, we liberate the people, even the Industrial Capitalist Imperialists!” he continued.

Maybe it was the way Fedoroff spoke to the Alpha, or his having seen Telemann’s face in the tree above, or some human arm, leg or liver he ate for breakfast. Or something that another wolf from the woods said with a distinct and assertive howl. The Alpha turned course, doing a u-turn back into the woods, taking most of the pack with him. However, two wolves continued the hunt towards the recumbent pile of Russian human hamburger.

One of them snatched the human meat put into the trap in front of Fedoroff, got snared around his leg, then got hoisted upwards onto a branch of the tree to which the trap was attached. But in the battle between wolf and tree branch, the latter lost, defying the laws of physics as well as the Umalo’s home grown calculations. Above Fedoroff, Telemann’s custom made rifle jammed on him. Now free to use all of its limbs on the ground instead of the air, the super wolf ran towards Fedoroff’s blood coated leg rather than his throat. Such gave the Cossack enough time to shoot the beast with his revolver, then rip through his belly and chest with his sword before the wolf could take a chunk out of his throat, which Fedoroff considered saved because of the cross that was still hanging from it.

The second wolf interrupted Fedoroff in mid prayer, having learned to avoid the trap as well as the temptation to go after at easy bite of human leg prior to ‘wolving up’ and going for the throat of his two legged prey. This time, Fedoroff’s gun jammed Thankfully Telemann’s didn’t. The wolf lay dead on Fedoroff’s neck, its mouth open, its teeth an inch way from biting off every ounce of flesh from his sweat-soaked neck.

“Now is the time you say ‘thank you’” Telemann reminded his temporary Russian ally who he knew would be his most dangerous enemy all too soon.

“Yes, thank you to the Lord for this experiment working,” Umalo said as he emerged from the woods.

“Experiment?” the Russian and German Captain shot back, in unison.

“My sons,” Umalo smiled at them both as he pulled the dead wolves away and loaded them onto his sled. “How assured you will be in life if you embrace uncertainty But in the meantime,” he continued, examining the branch that the wolf had snapped off with a combination of killer teeth and super muscular limbs. “We’ll have to find trees stronger than these wolves for our next investigation”

With that, Umalo leisurely ambled back into the woods, in the manner of an ancient Greek philosopher who feared neither the elements, not the gods, nor any retribution from any two legged creature he had the fortune, or misfortune, to be sharing the planet with.

Federoff and Telemann look at then into each other, very worried. From the woods, Umala fully another personality, a learned and stern professor. “Gentlemen. We have to move on.”

Fedoroff bowed to Telemann, letting him go ahead of him. “Lad,” the Cossack said to the Industrialist.

“Dinosaur,” replied the Prussian engineer protégée grumbled to the Russian who smelled of horse no matter how many baths he took, taking the lead. Fedoroff followed, then stopped dead in his tracks, his eyes fixed on something appearing on the ledge above him.

“What, another sighting of Tarus Bulba?” Telemann slurred from the side of his mouth. “Or is it Pugachev, the illiterate Cossack fraud who thought could liberate you from Katherine the Great, or maybe---” This time, Telemann decided to look at the ‘ghost’ that had been following Fedoroff ever since they left the trenches they had been bogged down in for weeks. Trenches where ghosts of men slain by one’s own hand, or by one’s own order, periodically visited their executioners in their dreams as well as ‘awake’ states. Even Telemann had witnessed for himself delusions that his logical brain said were not real, but his conscience could not ignore. But this time the ghost had a long neck, two rather than four legs and whinnied rather than spoke its piece.

“The horse you rode when saved your men from being killed by mine,” Telemann said of the white steed who Fedoroff had adopted as his own as soon after it had thrown off the Major who had nearly beaten it to death. “The horse that you---“

“---Let go! Liberated!” Fedoroff yelled up to the white horse with the long mane, pawing at the snow in the manner of a Cossack horse beckoning his human to jump on his back for a journey to places big, free, open or necessary. “Go, get out of here!” the Cossack screamed to the horse again, in Russian. “You are free!”

“To be bait for these wolves,” Telemann offered as gently as he could. “Who, so far, haven’t eaten you, but when they do, will do so very painfully, for you, unless I...”

Telemann put a silencer onto his rifle, raised it up, then aimed it at the horse.

“No!” Fedoroff grunted putting his hand in front of the barrel.

“He’s suffering, Captain Fedoroff, Boris,” Telemann said. “An injured right front and left hind,” he continued pointing the Cossack’s attention to the horse’s ambulation. “And his body condition. He’s suffering. ”

“So am I, and you!” Fedoroff grunted. “So maybe I’ll put YOU out of YOUR misery.” With that, Fedoroff pushed the rifle out of Telemann’s hands, pinned him the ground, then held his sword to the German’s throat.

“Gentlemen...Together we stand,” both Captains heard, as they contemplated their own demise. Umalo continued, in a voice reeking of reason, even the kind that a crazy Cossack could understand. Still, Fedoroff kept his sword lingering on Telemann’s neck. “Divided we---“

The discourse was halted by more wolves howls from the woods, from every direction.

“—Divided we die,” Telemann informed Fedoroff, pointing him to the men under both of them below, pointing their weapons at the woods. More terrified of the wolves than each other. “And that horse...putting him out of his misery will get all of us out of ours.”

“Yes...I know,” Fedoroff acknowledged, noting that the he was setting the poorest of examples to his men to cooperate with the Germans. He grabbed hold of the Telemann’s rifle, then said to Umala. “Say a prayer to that horse.”

“What horse?” Umalo replied.

Indeed, when Fedoroff looked up at the ledge the horse was gone. “A smart horse, who knows how to hide from the wolves, and us.”

“But not you,” Telemann added, knowing now that it was the horse that was following Fedoroff, not ghosts of anyone’s imaginations.

“Yes, I know,” the Cossack replied with fondness, and regret. “But there is one thing I do know.” His super hearing drew his attention to a ledge on the opposite side of the snow covered meadow. The Alpha Wolf appeared, his eyes glowing, his growl confident, his face seeming to be laughing more than snarling.

“These animals are smarter and stronger than any of us?” Telemann said, giving voice to what was in Fedoroff’s mind. “Or perhaps even you, Professor?” he continued turning to Umalo, who now seemed more contemplative than ever, yet certain of one last plan.

## CHAPTER 8

Umalo University and Seminary opened its doors to those of all ranks, religions and social classes at its main campus. Both the location of Umalo’s hut and its nature was now available for all of the Russian and German soldiers to experience. It was nestled in a small patch of woods that was neither visible from the air, nor the small overlooks around it. Its one-third wood, one-third scrap metal and one third canvas or hide construction was crude, colorful and eclectic. Indeed, it was more of a closed off lean to than the house that seemed to be more built into the woods than into it. From inside, smoke came out of two chimneys, the aroma and hue of those vapors changing every few minutes.

Fedoroff and Telemann would have to wait to see what was inside the windowless dwelling into which Umalo allowed no one entry, the old man insisting that he needed no help him to bring out food he had provided for the hungry troops to share. Not until they appreciated what was on the outside, and what he had to say to them there.

According to the Professor’s instructions, every Russian was paired with a German, and vice versa, their uniforms supplemented with pine branches, birch bark, moss and dirt, making them indistinguishable by national affiliation on the outside. Bauer was assigned by Umalo to work with Laski, Goldman with Petrivitch, Schneider with Petisia. None of the above were happy with their new attire nor lab partner, which seemed to be the case with every other couple, excepting for, if the wind was blowing in the right direction, Fedoroff and Telemann. Each pair of students were required to gather material required for building a trap that could trick and hold this newly evolved species of Superwolves from the large junk heaps on either side of Umalo’s house. The Professor pontificated in English, walked up and down the row of soldiers with hands behind his now erect back, Telemann and Fedoroff, provided with no more nor no less raw materials than their subordinates, translating to the men behind them the meaning and subtext of his speech to the best of their abilities, and understandings.

“As we have seen and observed, and felt,” Umalo said, pausing to look at his chewed up but still moderately functional right wrist. “They wolves are, according to the vernacular, demons, possessed by the devil himself. Following a leader who has made them stronger, and more destructive than they ever could be on their own.” Umalo paused to reflect on what he just had said, looked into himself, then into sky, then took in a deep



breath. “They smell fear,” he continued, more like a preacher than a teacher. “Crave your bodies. Devour your souls on the way to the afterlife.”

Raski discretely pulled out his necklace of German the ears and eyes, addressing their former owners in Russian. “So I’m spared the ‘pleasure’ of dining on bland food with even blander Christians in heaven, or where maybe I’ll see these back to YOU (ears and eyes on the necklace), which I took fair and square after you----

Raski’s black humor rant, intended to both terrify the naïve, kind, and still very Christian Private Bauer, as well as to alleviate the intensity of the fear Raski hid so well within himself, was halted by a knife thrown by Fedoroff,. It cut the necklace in two, scraping Raski’s own ear in the process.

The ex con who feared nothing except humiliation threw Fedoroff an angry look, then pulled out his pistols, aiming one at Bauer, the other at Fedoroff. Petrovitch pointed his rifle at Goldman, ordering with his eyes for Petitsia and Menovic to do the same to the Germans who they are paired up with. They do so, reluctantly, look apologetically at their former foes. As did most of the other Russians with whatever armaments they could whip out most quickly.

“So, Captain Comrade Fedoroff,” Raski said as he looked over the men who were now under HIS command. “It appears by popular People’s Consent, this truce is officially called off.” He slowly turned to his boss, who he hated only because he was a boss, and for no other real reason. “And, Boris Fedoroff, if anyone objects I will have to...”

Silencing Raski’s mouth, and ambition to become leader so he would not have to be follower, was halted by a bullet. Shot not by Fedoroff’s pistol, but by Telemann’s rifle.

“You want me to finish him off, Boris?” the German Captain inquired of the Russian Commander, addressing him by first name for the first time, as was against all professional protocol but now was personal necessity.

Raski grunted, then grabbed hold of Bauer’s neck, inserting his knife under the peach-fussed farm boy’s shaking neck.

“Go ahead, Father Fritz,!” Raski growled at Telemann in his best German. “One cut into your favorite choir boy’s throat, and I send him to heaven, and you to hell for letting me do it!” he continued in Russian, motioning for Fedoroff to translate his warning, and promise.

Mid way through the translation, Raski was pulled down from by behind by a wolf that moved in without being seen nor heard by anyone, including Umalo. As the ex-con and soon to be excommunicated corpse was dragged into the woods, the howls of the wolf’s Comrades surrounded the al fresco lecture hall, giving new meaning to the urgency for Wolf Trapping 101. Fearing for their own lives, the men scattered, took cover, and shot whatever they had handy into the woods. Finally, the howls were silenced.

“We got them, Praise Jesus,” Bauer said in German, noting one wolf down in the brush to his right.

“All of them, thank God,” Petitsia added, in Russian, noting that he had downed one, maybe two of their number to the left.

The two devotees knelt in the snow and crossed themselves, noting only that the manner in which one does so in Western Catholicism was left to right, whereas it was right to left in Eastern Orthodoxy. Both of the young recruits recalled from history classes they endured more than enjoyed that the differences were crucifiable offenses not too long ago if you were caught in the wrong war and location.

“Time to collect our pelts,” the always pragmatic Schneider said, collecting the corpses of the dead wolves in front of the two religious farm boys “Without the middle man.”

Schneider nodded to Umalo, asking HIM to translate it into Russian, which he did.

“So I can make stew with meat that ALL of you can identify!” Melovic declared to his fellow Slavs as well as the Huns, pulling out his knife. Melovic requested Umalo to translate into German, to be sure that his meaning and message was understood.

A magical moment of cooperation and even bondship overcame the camp. Germans and Russians bonded together skinning the wolves that had finally been outsmarted, carving up their meat for stew, and assessing how their daughters, wives, and mistresses, would look in their new coats. There were even kind words to say about Raski, Germans wishing him a good journey to Valhalla for standing up for what he believed in, Russians addressing his ghost in the wind wishing him a good journey to a place where there are no bars, guards nor need to steal anything from anyone. Though, in truth, the soldiers were grateful for Raski being put of his own misery, as well as their own.

Such reminded Telemann of the truce of 1915 where a dove flying over the trenches in France shit, spit or channeled in its wake some kind of potion that caused Tommy, Frog and Fritz to lay down their arms and celebrate Christmas by loving their enemy instead of sending up another Yuletide prayer to the Heavenly Father for victory for one’s own side. Fedoroff recalled the street demonstrations of 1905 in Moscow where everyone, even the Cossack Palace guards, were united in the conviction that days of one man ruling another because he had a bigger gun or more money in his pocket were finally ended. Indeed, it was an early Christmas moment for all, until Umalo climbed up to the highest platform in his front ‘yard’, looked into the woods and declared with open arms.

“There is still much more work for us to do!” Bringing proof to that point was a triple fortissimo symphony of wolf howls in the woods above the clearing. The beasts, in even larger numbers, made their visual presence known. The Alpha proudly displaying his presence at the highest point. He seemed more gigantic than ever. Driven by anger

and fear, the men blasted their guns at the killer wolves, none of the bullets hit their mark, due to both distance and the mobility of the target, or perhaps a gust of swirling wind that decided to spare the beasts. Telemann and Fedoroff ordered their men to hold their fire, but not after even more precious ammunition had been exhausted. In answer to the futility of the gunfire, and their own departed dead, one of the wolves pulled out Raski's body, laying it as if in tribute to the Alpha wolf. He looked at it, seeming to consider the mutilated corpse as worthless as shit, then pushed it down the hill. It dropped off the ledge, then rolled down the hill, landing barely a yard front of Fedoroff's feet.

"So," Fedoroff screamed at the Wolf, in English. "You're laughing at me! No one laughs at me...No one..." he grabbed hold of Telemann's rifle and aimed at him.

"He's out of range," Telemann warned him.

"So I'll get in range," the usually in control of his Passions Cossack grunted. He ran towards the wolves, cheered on by Russian and German alike, firing en route. Each time he advanced, the Alpha wolf retreated a bit. Finally, he ran out of bullets. He angrily pulled out his sword, then charged at the beast. His progress was stopped by a snare that grabs his legs. It pulled him up onto a branch. Men from both sides start to laugh at him, in good humor again, feeling alright to do so as the wolves retreated into the woods.

Umalo stood in front of them, fired a shot on the air, then addressed the men in badly pronounced Russian and German.

"A well made trap. Whose was it?" Umalo inquired of the men."

"His," Telemann said, pointing to the frustrated and angered Cossack stuck atop a tree branch in a trap of his own making. He approached Fedoroff, cut him down then offered him a drink from his bottle of schnops, puts his arm around him.

"A demonstration we staged...Gentlemen, and Comrades," he explained to his Comrades in German, lying on the fly, as such was a required skill of all effective, and compassionate, military commanders.

Telemann motioned to Umalo to translate into Russian.

Fedoroff picked up on the improvised fib and very visibly offered Telemann his flask of vodka. The men drink enthusiastically from each other's secret stash, covering their disdain for the brew with big, 'I never tasted better than this' smiles.

Picking up on it, Umalo circulates bottles from the cabin to the men in camp. He pointed to a large altar covered with neatly arranged canvas and hides behind his lean-to/cabin. "Drink of my blood," he offered them in Jesus speech. "And still," he continued, whipping off the covering from the holy shrine, revealing a masterfully-constructed spirit-making apparatus, adorned with jugs chock full of several kinds of brew around it.

The men found the elixirs to their liking. Umalo smiled, then seemed to feel something wrong going on again. Fedoroff turned his ears to the woods, sensing if he could hear more reinforcements en route. Telemann poised his high powered scope onto his eagle eyes, hoping to see what was approaching before it.

The Alpha wolf made a single appearance, seeming to look directly at Umalo. The interaction between wolf and wilderness man was seen and heard only by Fedoroff and Telemann. Whatever it was, the wolf seemed to be demanding something of Umalo, which the old man defiantly refused, with a clenched fist on his wolf-bitten hand. Until that wrist trembled, the earthquake invading Umalo's body spreading quickly to every limb in his body. Unable to stand, or kneel, he fell into the snow, his head hitting a sharp stick while he went into a full blown seizure, rolling some more, than landing on his back with his arms spread out. Telemann and Fedoroff came to his aid, followed by Bauer and Petitsia, whose natural aversion to alcohol had made them sippers rather than gulpers of the no doubt power home grown brew.

"He's speaking in tongues," Petitsia noted regarding the string of words Umalo's soul pushed out of his frothing mouth.

"And on his palms..." Bauer added, noting fresh wounds in places only Saints, or perhaps Messiahs, bleed from. "Stigmata!" he declared.

"Indeed he is the Christ!" Petitsia asserted.

The young Private devotees of the Creator both knelt next to their returned Messiah while the real-life Captains responsible for looking after the welfare of the creations left to their own devices did their best to control the bleeding from Umalo's chest and other limbs.

"The Christ who is, and was, just as human as the rest of us," Lt Goldmann said as he found his way to his next, and perhaps most valuable, patient medical kit in hand. After a quick assessment, Goldmann reached into his box of medicinal, emptied what was in a small vial into a large syringe, and pushed it into the thankfully still blood filled vein on Umalo's non-wolf bitten arm. "Yes," Goldmann said, noting another kind of wound on the wrist of that arm as the shakes went out of it and Umalo sank into a restful sleep. "He's very much human. Desiring to be with His Father in Heaven more than we ever realized. "These slashes. Humanly inflicted. By himself." he explained to Petitsia and Bauer, as neither of those lads had ever faced the abyss like so many of his other patients did.

"Jesus attempting suicide? With a knife?" Fedoroff noted as color came back to Umalo's cheeks, and breathing rather than death rattles to his lungs.

"It beats crucifixion," Telemann noted as he was relieved of emergency nursing duties by two fledgling Russian orderlies who had been promoted to 'doctors' prior to the wolf attacks, now grateful to the German physician for his instruction and support. "Or

whatever else he was afraid of,” he continued, reading something in Umalo’s eyes that he had never seen before, in a language of ‘metaphysical understanding’ that the reductionist, ever logical, believer in nothing that couldn’t be scientifically verified felt overtaking him. Telemann raised his right hand up, commencing to cross himself in the event that all of his theories about the afterlife were wrong, when Goldman intervened.

“Whatever Umalo IS afraid of. I’m not losing this patient!” Goldmann pledged, asserted and promised. “We ARE taking him to a real hospital.”

“Where?” Telemann asked.

“Ten, maybe fifteen kilometers from here, by my best calculation, just outside of Tribunki as I recall seeing from the transport truck that brought me here.” the German Lt informed his Captain. “That I hope YOU IVANS didn’t destroy or loot,” he blasted to Fedoroff, requesting that Telemann translate for him.

“No!” Umalo said, emerging from whatever hell he was visiting, or cleaning up, before Fedoroff could answer Goldman’s inquiry, or apologize for now having an answer. “No! No! No!” Umalo yelled out, regarding, to the still completely living’s best perceptions anyway, transport to the hospital in question.

“Yes, Herr Umalo,” Goldman whispered into the old man’s ears in an assuring and assertive tone as the eccentric, clairvoyant and mysterious mountain man was carried, kicking and screaming, to a the hundred year sled that could ambulate the snowy and rocky terrain better than any modern machinery mounted on wheels. “Yes, my friend, Goldman continued as he walked with the paramedics to the ambulance.”

“No!” Umalo grunted out with whatever energy he had left in him as he was tied to the sled.

“Yes, my Lord,” Petitsia assured Umalo. “This time we will save you.”

“We are not going to lose You again,” Bauer added, seeming to feel himself to be an Apostole as well.

“Unless he loses himself,” Fedoroff noted to himself and Telemann, from a distance.

Both Commanders looked into each other’s uncertain souls as the men under them took verbal and non-verbal orders from Doctor, and (before he put his patients in front of the military objectives, Captain) Goldmann that were understood, obeyed and believed in.

## CHAPTER 9

The hospital near what had been the village of Tribnnka was in severe need of repair by doctors with a specialty in Carpentry. But thankfully, all of the patients there were now enjoying or enduring the afterlife. The wolf and element-eaten bodies those souls had used remained behind in the healing center that seemed to have specialized in ailments of the head rather than diseases below the neck.

“Yes, losing yourself is easy to happen in a place like this, Hans,” Fedoroff said as he saw human skeletons chained to beds, walls and tables. “In the battle of science against humanity, humanity seems to have lost,” the Cossack continued, noting the wires on an electric generator still connected to the wrists of a deceased patient whose soul perhaps was one of the many whose voice was speaking to, or reaching out, to him through the multi-person murmur that Fedoroff could not block out of his mind.

“And what do the voices of the dead say about us joining them, Boris?” Telemann inquired as Fedoroff dared to decipher the specifics of the White Noise.

“That they prefer we concentrate on the still living,” Fedoroff replied. “If indeed the dead can talk at all,” the intuitive but not yet clairvoyant Cossack continued, knowing fully well what happened to anyone who claimed they could hear, see or touch that was beyond the physical senses or un-measurable by scientific instrumentation, particularly in this new, advanced ‘humanistic’ century. “But thank God, who IS real, and beyond being detectable or deciphered by ANY scientific machinery, we got our own Savior here in time for Doctor Goldmann to pull his ass out of the abyss, and maybe ours,” Fedoroff said, in English.

“In a facility that has most of the facilities that are needed to resurrect Umalo’s soul,” Goldmann replied in English from the now nearly wall-less facility in what had been an operating room. “Which needs his body to be accessible to us, and the world,” he continued to Petitsia and Bauer, requesting with his fingers and stern eyes that they do their part to keep the old man alive by handing him surgical instruments and focusing on the tissue they were retracting in his operating field instead of praying with heads bowed to the floor. “I do believe, to the best of my knowledge and experience, that Umalo is going to get a healthy body back, gentlemen.”

“And his mind?” Fedoroff inquired.

“That we will know soon enough,” Goldmann answered, gazing towards the jar of chloroform and ether which he seemed to calculate would buy him enough time to sew up and stitch together what recent trauma, and no doubt hard living in the bush, had done to the old man. “Yes, soon enough.”

“Make it sooner,” Telemann ordered.

“Yes, Doctor who mysteriously can speak English,” Fedoroff added as co-Commander.

“You Cossacks hold on to some of your secrets so you can survive. We Jews hold on to our secret so we can save ourselves,” Goldmann stated while he continued to operate on doctor time, and doctor pace. “I am correct, Sgt. Schneider? About we Jews keeping more to ourselves than what we reveal to the Gentiles?”

“Yavol,” Schneider replied in accentless German while rummaging through the contents of a large storage chest whose lock had been ‘broken by the elements’, according to what both Telemann and Fedoroff had been told by their man. He pulled out barely legible vials containing powders, bottles still filled with liquids identifiable only by smell or sampling, surgical instruments, clothing, some perhaps valuable jewelery, canned food and leather bound books bearing titles that were worn down. “Yes, indeed, Herr Doctor,” Schneider replied in German to Goldmann’s lingering question regarding a heritage one was proud of at home, but seldom shared outside of closed doors.

“Yes to hiding your being a Jew, or finding ‘medicinal’ Vodka in that you’ll horde for yourself?” Telemann inquired of the veteran who he once trusted more than himself.

Schneider continued his treasure hunt, uncovering medical records under the ‘readily useables’, which he thumbed through for a quick perusal. “Yes, yes, yes,” the Jew who perhaps was versant in English or perhaps was faking such to serve some other secret he was hiding said. After the fifth yes, and as many non-relevant finds, Schneider’ sun-baked and winter-blown red face turned white. “No!” he said in English, then several times in German as he sat his ass down next to the pile of ‘supplies to share’ with the rest of the men, his eyes fixed in disbelief.

Telemann helped himself to a look over his shoulder. “Umalo...as a patient here?” he ascertained from whatever non-German words he could recognize, and the photographs in the one inch thick file. “Who was---”

“---a danger to himself and others,” Fedoroff read as the final evaluation of the head doctor after having dribbled on in print for three pages. “Multiple personality disorder,” he saw in the shorter and better written medical reports of two other physicians. “Who..” he read, after which he dared to turn the page and heard. “Who...who...who...” in a variety of voices, all of whom seemed to be beyond the veil. Looking up, the Cossack observed the real source of the voice.

“Who...who...who...” Umalo continued to utter, then say, then scream, each time coming from a different part of a soul trying to find itself. The winner in the battle to see who was to be in charge of Umalo’s body had a deep voice, a demonic presence, and the strength of ten saints. With such, he pulled himself up from the operating table, pushed aside Goldmann just as he was about to finish stitching him up, and kicked devotees Petitsia and Bauer into a wall that was more splinters and holes than solid wood. The ‘who’s’ quickly became wolf howls, then laughter Umalo directed at the skeletons still chained to their beds, tables and walls. “Who tried to teach YOU a lesson, Doctor,” he admonished a skeleton chained to the wall in Belarusian Russian. “An all of you,” he

continued to those who were still using their skeletons in the land of the living, in Russian, German and English. Before anyone could restrain the old man, or figure out what he had become, threw a chair through the only window still intact, howling out to the woods in wolf speak.

As he turned around, wolves rushed in through the window, attacking anything that moved. While the Russians and German soldiers banded together to or disable as many wolves as they could, both on the inside of the hospital and on the outside, Umalo leisurely put on his mountain Mensch clothing, whistled a happy tune, and walked his way through the carnage between, unnoticed by man, beast or ghosts. He made his way into the woods, disappearing into the green mist that moved in overtook the snowy woods.

## CHAPTER 10

In the aftermath of the battle between wolf and man, the latter held their ground. The wounded were equally distributed between Russian and German troops. The bodies of the most severely injured and disabled were kept warm and their wounds dressed with hides taken from the wolves that hit but could not run away from the sneak attack. As for the reasons why there were no human casualties in this fight against wolves that seemed faster, meaner and smarter than in previous encounters, such would have been of top interest to any sane military commander.

But Fedoroff and Telemann, both of whom felt they were now thinking with the same alogical and unpredictable brain were focused on the files Sgt. Schneider stumbled upon while looking for badly hospital supplies, food and spirits. Of particular relevance was why and how Umalo got away from the battle without a scratch. Fedoroff looked to the sky for answers, while Telemann kept examining the print on Umalo's medical records.

"It's obvious," the Russian Cossack said through a sardonic smile. "God protects fools, drunks and multi-personality disorder victims."

"Particularly one who speak five languages in THIS world," Telemann noted, flipping the pages of the file which had more pages in it than any other patient who had the fortune, or misfortune, of being treated at this once locally prestigious hospital. "A graduate of the most prestigious Medical School in Warsaw. And researcher in animal behavior who out-published Pavlov. One of yours, who..."

"...I know who Pavlov is!" the self-taught Don Cossack barked back at the university-trained Prussian Engineer. "A RUSSIAN psychologist who said that we are all rats in a cage, trying to avoid getting shocked by electric volts and doing whatever we can do get the cheese. Or...get out of the cage and put the investigator in control of us in a cage!" he continued, looking up at the hills above the hospital, sneaking a look at who and what was watching him in an attempt to catch the 'master' of all of this off guard.



Lt. Goldmann dragged his doggedly tired feet through the bloody snow, turned around, then let his ass fall on a log next to Telemann and Fedoroff. "I know that I rant on about how alcohol takes away your ability to handle the cold, and your ability to out-think the elements, but right now, gentlemen, I need a drink," the worked to death doc who had saved so many others from the jaws of the Reaper proclaimed.

Telemann offers him his flask of schnops.

"A REAL drink!" Goldmann asserted, pointing to the canteen strapped to Fedoroff's sash.

"With an inviting and appreciative smile, the Russian Cossack passed on his canteen to the German Doc.

"So, the count, Herr Doctor?" Captain Telemann inquired Lt. Goldmann, addressing him with a bowed head offered to a superior officer.

"Six wounded wolves...Eight dead," Goldmann answered between sips of home-brewed Slavic vodka that became gulps. Whining of three wolves from the woods were silenced by three shots. "Make that eleven dead."

More howls from other portions of the woods could be heard, echoing against the hills. Fedoroff grabbed Telemann's rifle, looking through the high powered site mounted on hits barrel.

"And three times that number, still very alive," he reported.

"And how many of us are left to face them?" Telemann asked.

"Ten wounded, Sirs," Goldman replied. When he raised the flask up for another drink, his right hand shook, then lost its grip, the saved from falling into the snow by Fedoroff's still quick reflexes.

"Eleven wounded, Doctor," Telemann said, noting a large gash on Telemann's arm made by wolf teeth that found their way down to the bone.

"I've had worse bites," Goldmann noted with warm, privately enjoyed smile...."From my patients. And..." he continued, keeping the memories her was recalling to himself while taking another sip.

"Kinky girlfriends?" Telemann inquired.

"Or maybe, drunken manfriends?" Fedoroff offered, inviting Goldmann to share real truths without consequences, as was his way with everyone under his command.

“Who got nasty when getting into bar fights, over who gets to take home the women, that is,” Telemann interjected.

Goldmann averted his eyes. With a sobering stare he directed Fedoroff and Telemann’s attention to corpses being buried by German and Russian grave diggers, working and praying together. “We have five dead, Sirs,” the Lt. informed the two Captains.

“Who we have to put back into service,” Telemann said, giving voice to the same thought that entered his head at the same time that it entered Fedoroff’s. “Is that not correct, Captain?”

“Correct and necessary, and it’s own way, Right,” Fedoroff replied.

With that, Telemann pulled out a large empty body bag from what had been the hospital morgue. Fedoroff whipped out his sword, giving it a sharpening on a stone. They worked their way to the graves, requesting those with shovels to stop digging, then ordering them to move aside and assist Goldmann in the hospital. The two Captains then began stripping the corpses of their clothing.

“I’m sorry, Comrade Petitsia,” Fedoroff said in Russian to the corpse that had once been given Life and Purpose by the Dukabor Private who believed that Umalo really was the Second Coming of Jesus. “As your Savoie said, these wolves can only be baited with fresh, human meat.”

“And you two are, were, the most human people here,” Telemann said in German to the body that once was inhabited by Bauer’s soul. “God help, and bless you.” Telemann then crossed himself.

“I thought you were an atheist,” Fedoroff inquired.

“Gave it up for Lent,” Telemann replied.

## CHAPTER 11

Confident that their men were now more afraid of and hated the wolves than each other, Telemann and Fedoroff ventured off into the woods, following the largest paw prints left in the snow and the sketchy diagram mapped out by Umalo before he went epileptic regarding where the pack’s most favored home range was. If they could trap the Alpha wolf, the rest of the pack would either go away or be so disorganized that they could be picked off by even the least able two legged beast wearing a uniform. Fedoroff felt this in his gut, Telemann coming to the conclusion by reason of course. The two Captains who had become Comrades felt invincible as they pulled a sled loaded with traps and bait into ever deepening snow, setting up traps according to Umalo’s instructions, Private Bauer’s suggestions and Fedoroff’s best memory about how it was done in the old days by his Cossack grandfather, supplemented finally by memories Telemann had of the black sheep

woodsman granddad in his pedigree. They set up traps with lightening speed, stopping for neither food, drink, nor sleep. But some things even Supermen had to tend to sometime.

While Fedoroff took his turn unloading the sled, Telemann pulled down the zipper of his trousers. "Some things have to get done NOW!" he asserted as he exhausted the last of the reserves he had to hold in his bodily liquid waste.

"These wolves an see and smell yellow snow," Fedoroff informed Telemann. "Go to the river. Or piss into this, Cityboy," The Cossack offered the Engineer a flask, and pointed him towards the bushes. "So what order did you give our men back there at the reopened hospital?" he inquired as Telemann finally felt the relief he had been desperately dreaming about for at least half an hour.

"I told them to survive," Telemann related between sighs of relief. "My men are trained to obey my orders. Yours?"

"The want to go home as much as yours do, maybe more," Fedoroff replied as he commenced setting up the next trap, a triple snare designed to envelope more than one appendage, and if the Alpha's neck was as thick as it seemed, that as well. "But in the meantime, a question."

"Do Germans piss yellow urine like Russians do? Is our blood cold and green instead of warm and red?" Telemann mused. "And when we make babies, is our semen white as an angel's halo or black as a witch's pubic hairs?"

"Something more intimate than that," Fedoroff said, thankful for Telemann finally revealing some sense of humor, but more interested in another issue about his partner in this new war with the wild canines. "Your interest in whether your Sergeant Schneider and Lieutenant Doctor Goldmann are Jews. And if they were?"

"They would need special protection," Telemann said, closing the sphincter to his bladder as well as the porthole to his heart, and innermost Soul.

"From your superior officers, or you?" Fedoroff asked, inviting Telemann to provide an honest answer that would remain between them.

Telemann revealed nothing with his eyes, nor his mouth, his attention drawn into the bush as he closed the lid to the nearly overflowing flask.

"I know," the very Orthodox Christian Cossack continued, recalling the relationship between his own people in the past, and his own genetics in the present, with regard to the Hebrew question. "We develop opinions about a Jews, Pollacks, Turks, or even Germans because five of them have fucked us over in business, school, marriage or—"

Fedoroff's confession and rant was silenced by Telemann's hand on his shoulder, referring him away from thoughts of the past to realities of the present. That present reality manifested itself as a Mother Wolf with three distinctively white feet, bringing a dead groundhog to her babies. Though she looked famished herself, she insisted that her cubs get first dibs on the small meal that no doubt she had worked so hard to obtain.

"Yes, love," Fedoroff noted with a warm smile, recalling the mother and child bond his wife still maintained for his own offspring at home, according to the latest letter that somehow got to him anyway.

"Indeed," Telemann noted, recalling his own upbringing and current marital situation in the Fatherland, overcome with the humanity in the eyes of the mother wolf. "They are magnificent beasts, Who were here alone. Before we came along and destroyed their 'paradise' so we could build ours, elsewhere who seem far more easily capable of love, caring and intelligence than us." He recalled his experiences as a mother hen to his troops as well as family life back home. "But for now," he continued, taking in a deep breath of cold air that found its way to another portion of his soul. Such was accompanied by raising his silencer-equipped rifle, and aiming it at the wolf's head as it looked away. "We live in a kill or be killed world."

Saving Telemann from the lesser part of himself, Fedoroff put his hand over the business end of the weapon. "They're hungry children, being fed by an even hungrier mother," the Russian Cossack reminded the German Aristocrat. "Made hungry by a war WE brought to them." Putting his money where his Passion was diverted to, Fedoroff removed the meat he had placed into the trap and threw it to the mother and cubs. It was devoured by the latter, and appreciated by the former.

Telemann looked at Fedoroff. "That was---."

"---Foolish," the Cossack said as he dismantled the trap. He felt it necessary to explain the reasoning for his actions with words rather than his eyes. "It is also necessary for ALL of us. 'Mama Three Socks' here probably has nothing to do with the killing of the our men."

"Possibly," Telemann said, pulling another portion of bait from the burlap bag in the sled, and feeding it to the hungry cubs and then their mother. "Yes, very possibly."

Three Socks howled what felt like a thank you to Fedoroff and Telemann. While smiling back at her, both men shared the same thought. They were after the Alpha wolf. The possessed leader who made the others stronger and more destructive than they would have been on their own, according to Umalo. A clairvoyant mountain man who, before his departure from the world of the 'established', had written volumes of insightful books about wildlife behavior. Some of them even understandable and acceptable by the old academic guard to be published.

As for what was left of Umalo other than memories and mysteries, Fedoroff looked at tracks in the snow to the left of the trap after dismantling it. The blood below the wind-blown iced surface has pieces of caked not only pieces of cloth, but the paws of a huge canine with an extra toe. “Mama Two Socks. You wouldn’t know anything about this?” he said as he turned to the bushes, only to find mother and canine children gone. And wolf howls of distress coming from two traps behind them.

With a sense of remorse, and duty, Telemann and Fedoroff backtracked to see if they had caught Alpha, or if they had merely captured two of his minions who they would put out of their misery. Quietly and discretely, ideally, so that more retribution would not come down on them from their peers.

## CHAPTER 12

After backtracking to finish off two wolves who had been caught by the traps they had, Fedoroff and Telemann skinned the scrawny beasts and covered their shoulders and chests with their hides, allowing them to continue on tracking Alpha as the temperature dropped. But as it is so common, the best laid plans of mice, men and internationally-oriented Visionaries were trumped by Mother Nature. In her wisdom, or rage, she decided to turn the blue sky above Fedoroff and Telemann grey, then white. Snow poured down like a series of blankets that kept covering their tracks, then their ability to determine if they were trudging on solid ground or thin ice. The latter took the sled containing their traps and bait, then their compass when they saved each other three times from drowning into the frozen ponds that had become deep lakes. Still, they followed what Fedoroff seemed to hear as the howl of the Alpha, armed with little more than the weapons on their back, the hope that limited visibility would allow them closer access to him, and the determination to put him into a snowy grave in retribution for that possessed and empowered beast having done such to so many two and four legged creatures thus far.

The wolves knew better than to try to continue their war against the two legged intruders into their domain, keeping themselves well hidden in the woods. They waited behind the trees, in the deep snow, or huddled from the wind in caves and dugouts that only they seemed to know about.

Finally, the windy, white sky gave way to bright blue again. Such afforded the now Russian Cossack and the German Engineer a clear view of the landscape, and its inhabitants. Wolves approached slowly from all directions, working their way through low lying brush, snow drifts and blown over branches of pine trees that had been vane enough to extend their limbs way too far during climatically-kinder times.

“So, how many rounds do you have left?” Fedoroff asked Telemann, giving voice to that phrase which all men in combat zones feared both asking and answering.

“Enough to get some of them, you?” Telemann answered.

“Enough to get the one who matters most,” Fedoroff replied, pointing to the biggest of the pack. “Who’s coming into the range of my father’s rifle,” he continued in a whisper, aiming the barrel of the weapon that neither ice nor mud had ever stopped, whose massively large bullets never missed anything he had aimed at, until this winter anyway. “Whose hide I will make a coat out of for my wife.”

“My daughters,” Telemann growled, raising the site to his high powered long range rifle, aiming it at the wolf who approaches slowly, with his head bowed. While the other wolves held their position, in every direction, saying low to the ground.

Neither Telemann nor Fedoroff could figure out why a single wolf was working its way to them through the deep snow. But they did know that they would have to both get a clean shot at Alpha if they were guaranteed to stop him, requiring a perspective that was higher than their present position. “We get up and fire at the count of ten,” Fedoroff said, calculating the wolves course to a more vulnerable position.

“Five,” Telemann asserted, after which he whispered the first integer in the countdown.

By the count of three, both men rose up, pushing off their wolf-coat capes and aimed at the approaching beast. “Don’t shoot!” it said, Russian, with a German accent, thankful that pride had given him a three second delay between being spotted and shot. Sgt. Schneider pushed aside the wolf rug he had been wearing, stood up and pointed to the Russian hat atop his head.

“It’s us!” another ‘wolf’ crouching in just behind ‘Alpha’ screamed out in German. As proof of such, Melovic shed his wolf costume, under which he was sporting a German cap. “Ittt”’sss us....” he continued in Russian, with chattering teeth.

“And who else?” Fedoroff shouted out.

From the woods emerged other ‘wolves’, Russian and German soldiers in mixed uniforms. Their number was half of what the non-wounded were when Fedoroff and Telemann left the hospital.

“You were supposed to stay behind. Orders!” Telemann barked out at the lot of them, in German then his best Russian.

“Orders from both of us!” Fedoroff shouted out in Russian, then his best German. “To take care of each other, and the wounded.”

“Which we had to disobey,” came from Petrovitch in a procedural tone as flat as the horizon over the treeless and hill-less Ukrainian steppes. He was clad as a Russian from head to toe, with spit polished boots and a freshly cleaned tunic and what seemed like pressed trousers.

“Why?” Fedoroff inquired requesting an honest answer, no matter what it was.

From Petrovitch came no answer through his eyes or mouth.

Fedoroff took in a deep breath, then let the fire in his belly soar into his arms. With fingers shaking with rage, he grabbed hold of Petrovitch and yelled into his emotionless face. “Why did you disobey our orders, Sergeant Petrovitch! MY orders to stay behind, protect the perimeter and each other, you cowardly, son of a----“

Before Fedoroff could come up with an appropriate name for the ‘maternal unit’ who was responsible for cursing the world by giving birth to Petrovitch, the Sergeant’s rigid body was overtaken by tremors that Fedoroff had seen before, all too many times. The shell-shocked snitch fell into the arms of Schneider, losing all consciousness of anything except the nightmare he was reliving behind his hyper-dilated pupils.

“The wounded became mad,” Schneider informed Telemann, in German.

“Then destructive,” Melovic added in his native Slavic tongue. “Then..”

“We had to protect ourselves,” Schneider said in both languages, his head bowed in horror and shame.

“Those of us who could,” Melovic explained.

“And couldn’t,” Schneider added, pointing to Petrovitch, whose pressed trousers got a fresh cleaning with freshly evacuated urine and fecal material.

“And Lt. Goldmann?” Telemann inquired.

“The good doctor,” Fedoroff added.

Melovic and Schneider looked at each other, then shared a coin toss between their eyes. “He became...” Melovic said, with a bowed head having been the loser in that game of chance. “Someone very bad, who, to protect whoever didn’t turn bad, we had to...” Tears of grief halted any more speaking to any man born of woman. Melovic crossed himself, asking the Heavenly father for forgiveness, the blood from no doubt Goldmann’s now dead corpse under his fingernails.

Every other man in the group that had escaped the massacre of their own kind crossed themselves as well, with head bowed, except for Schneider. He delivered a Jewish prayer, to the sky. Sensing that he had a more direct and effective connection with the Almighty who would, or could, forgive them their necessary trespasses against Goldmann and the others not present, the Christians gathered around Rabbi Schneider as he led them in a Hebrew prayer they didn’t understand, but all felt.

Fedoroff and Telemann joined the congregation, allowing the men to think they were talking to the Creator, though they had to be more concerned with matters earthly than Divine.

After the living had finished praying for the dead, and themselves, the men gathered the materials they had taken from the nearly destroyed hospital, preparing to move on to wherever they were ordered to. The duo cursed with determining what those orders would be sat alone, skinning wolves that had been slain by the men who had escaped the hospital or they had encountered en route to this new campground. They sorted their body parts into bags, sacs and pails, the most eatable meat into a pot to be used for a badly needed meal of wolf stew.

“So, Boris Dimitri Fedoroff,” Telemann said, having finally adjusted to the manner of addressing a close friend in the Russian manner or using all of their names. “Your theory about what makes these wolves so unstoppable, and those they bit so...destructive?”

“Rabies, Hans,” Fedoroff replied, tempted to address his German Comrade by his full name, but knowing it would put him off. “That Goldmann contracted when the wolves, maybe the Alpha himself, bit his arm. Or maybe it was from a drug or some other kind of microbe those animals were carrying on their blood. That emerged from the bowels of hell.”

“Or maybe someplace more...earthly?” Telemann speculated. “And THIS time, NOT a German laboratory!” he asserted.

“Evidence for this speculation of yours, Professor Telemann, is?”

“In front of our noses... That we should not throw into our mouths.” Telemann pulled out a chunk of flesh from one of the wolves .

Telemann pulls out flesh from the wolf he has just dissected. “Needle tracts!” he noted, confirming his hunch regarding why the meat was so tender to the touch. “And around them, degenerating and discolored tissue.”

Fedoroff retrieved the chunks of meat about to be served up as stew, nearly cutting open the blisters on his fingers. “And inside a lot of that discolored tissue...broken needles.”

## CHAPTER 13

Piervy, as the Alpha Wolf liked to call himself, saw everything he needed to in the valley below. He was surprised that Telemann and Fedoroff had survived everything he and his fellow canines had inflicted upon them. He respected these two legged creatures whose skin bore no fur, except on the top of their heads and in strange patterns on their faces. He wondered what God they were praying to, and if it was the same one that wolves turned to, or imagined, when things got tough. But, as the song says, every Alpha, even



Piervy, has to at one time serve somebody above him. This time the voice from above came from behind him. “These humans,” it said in a tone that sounded demonic rather than Divine. “An increasingly intelligent species, but...” the human who called himself Umalo continued, possessed and empowered by some kind of power that Piervy both feared, but had to accept as real, and appropriate to obey. “They are not a deserving species like you, Champ,” the old mountain man now clad in new clothing more befitting the head of an Army from the Underworld continued as he stroked Alpha on the top of his head, then neck. “You are special, my son,” he said in the same way he spoke to the two legged furless beasts below.

While Umalo’s left hand stroked Piervy into feeling special, the furred out wolf noticed the furry faced man reach into his pocket, from which he snuck out a cylinder connected to a needle. “Who needs his medicine so he can become a god instead of a--“

Due to either a deep seeded wisdom, survival instinct and/or insight into whatever Umalo had really become, Piervy snapped at the hand holding the syringe. But as the wolf was a mortal and Umalo was something else, the only thing Piervy’s teeth bit into was cold air.

“Hey!” Umalo said to Piervy, pulling back his hand into a safe location. “I let me bite you last time, but this time it’s time for your medicine,” he said in human speak then in auscultations wolves used to communicate benign dominance, with a canine diction that Piervy used himself on more than one occasion when he had to growl some reason into his subordinates, for their own good.

While Piervy was trying to figure out why Umalo considered him so special amongst wolves, and why he and his pack were chosen to be part of what felt like a noble experiment that served his species, and maybe others, Umalo snuck an injection into the Piervy’s hind leg. Umalo diverted Piervy’s next defensive, or offensive, reflex, by feeding him meat from the burlap bag over his back. Indeed it was human meat again, with a different kind of flavoring than Piervy had ever had. Its aroma, texture and essence made him feel empowered again. He felt his body to be twenty feet tall, his mind drained of all self-doubt.

“Now...was that so bad?” Piervy heard his leader, and protector, say in human speak with his mouth, and wolf talk with his eyes. “Now. Go back into the woods, and get your friends, so we can continue our Mission, and the Experiment,” he continued in wolf tones, human words and boldly pointed fingers. That request, and honor, was appended by a hug from Umalo that make Piervy feel loved, valued and invincible. Whatever the experiment was didn’t matter, except that it had to succeed.

As for the opponents in the struggle to determine species superiority. The Russian and German soldiers spread out, setting traps along a wide perimeter, Fedoroff and Telemann leading the way both in terms of where to set the traps and how they should be constructed. “What have you or your men heard from your headquarters?” the Cossack

Communist asked the German Capitalist. “About the war, or the truce that both of us will pay for?”

“After one of YOUR men betrays us both to our superiors,” Telemann replied, directing Fedoroff’s attention to Petrivitch, the only soldier in the ranks who was not clad in a mixture of garb made in Berlin and Moscow. Though Petrovitch walked with the ‘shell shock’ shuffle, his eyes were directed to his black book, his hand making some kind of marks in it, or perhaps in the air above the paper. “But in the meantime, or unless someone can fix the radios that the wolves destroyed, we’re on our own.”

“Until the War finds us again,” Fedoroff replied.

“Or the Alpha wolf and his rabid minions do. It is us against them, so it seems,” Telemann offered through his frozen mustache that now stuck to his upper lip. “Do you think it will be otherwise?” he continued, digging harder into the ground with his pick, wondering if it was to be his grave.

“God knows,” Fedoroff replied, making the final knot in the rope that would hold whatever wolf decided to eat the specially seasoned ground round ‘Petitsia’ or sausage link ‘Bauer’ used as bait. “Or maybe ‘Jesus’ Umalo does, wherever he is.” The Cossack who would rather have his neck broken in a noose than to bow to another man lowered his head and crossed himself.

Telemann thought about doing the same, but felt it inappropriate until he knew who or what he was praying to.

On top of the hill, the wolves congregated around Piervy, watching to see what he would do, listening to what he had to say next. All eagerly awaited word from their leader. But one wolf had other ideas. Mama Three Socks decided that she and her naïve and still innocent pups were not about to remain conscripts in Piervy’s Army. After looking down below to the traps, the men and white snow that no doubt would be turned red very soon, she discretely asked, then told, her offspring to follow her back into the woods, where the eating was not so good, but the prospects of growing up with healthy minds and bodies seemed better. That maternal gesture was heard by Piervy, who used his towering height and strong as steel jaws to pull Mama Three Socks back into the pack, then got between her and the biggest pup in her litter saying ‘this boy will grow up to be a man under me, not a weakling under you’.

Hearing the trumpet call in his own language behind him, Piervy turned his attention to the rest of the pack, which had not a single dissenting member in it. He led them forward at a wide strided walk, then a brisk trot, spreading them out a line on both sides of him. He halted, looked behind him, and saw that all of the wolves had taken their appropriate place in formation. The mounted trumpeter with two legs, a bushy face, and determined bloodshot eyes rode the horse Fedoroff had saved from being killed by German firepower, or carved up as Russian stew meat next to Piervy. He raised a portable semi-

automatic machine gun up in the air, and howled in wolf speak 'Onward Lads! Time to take back what is ours!'

With that, the wolves and their mounted Horseman of this new Apocalypse broke the silence of the woods with a deafening power chant, kicking up so much snow en route that the second line could barely see the first.

The soldiers below dug in, taking cover wherever they were with whoever was with them. All except one. When Petrovitch's eyes saw the attack coming, the instinct to save his miserable, self-serving skin turned the other way about. The career, now shell-shocked, snitch remained standing, pulled his revolver from his holster with his shaking hand, aimed it at his temple and finally stopped shaking, as if to knowing that the end would come on his terms, and fast. But before he could do to himself what he indirectly did to so many others, Petrovitch was pulled down into a hole intended to be a wolf trap that now served better as a foxhole, by Telemann. Once down in the snow, Petrovitch shook like a leaf, in a fetal position, crying out with whispered, desperate breath for his mother.

"I hope you don't mind me saving your informant," Telemann said to Fedoroff as machine gun fire from a mounted Umalo kept the soldiers from picking off the wolves that had now outrun him in the deep snow.

"If you don't mind me saving your informant," Fedoroff said. He indulged in another look around to ponder the issue of who the snitch, or the snitches, in the German army were, as that lowest of creatures could be spotted when the going got tough. But for the moment, the creatures who had to be dealt with were four legged canines, and the two legged madman leading them into battle. A madman who not only seemed to know where to send the wolves so they could do the most damage and cause the most fear, but one who seemed to know where every bullet aimed at him was heading.

The wolves fought according to the way they had for centuries in countless skirmishes with two legged creatures who used their front paws for holding things rather than running. While the most powerful beasts attacked from the front, taking on more than their normal share of casualties, junior members of the pack did their job from behind. It was Fedoroff who noticed them first. He was astonished to find that the smaller they were, the craftier they were, stealing ammunition, food and medical supplies and pulling them back into the woods before the men who needed them knew they were missing. Amongst the most effective of the little thieves were two of Mama Three Sock's pups. She appeared in the woods behind them, staring at the events before her, sadness, regret and fear in her mournful eyes.

"Take your babies home, Mama Three Socks!" Fedoroff yelled at the female wolf behind him as he loaded up what ammo he still had left. "Let them grow up before they have to become---"

“----Them!” Telemann interjected, pointing Fedoroff’s attention to another wave of adult wolves moving forward.

“And before your pups become us!” Fedoroff begged Mama Three Socks as he felt himself absorbed in killing mode again. A reflex that came all too naturally to him, which he found himself enjoying yet again.

From the corner of his eye, Fedoroff noted that Mama Three Socks instructed her offspring to put back the ammo, food and medical supplies that they had taken, assisting them in the endeavor. “We thank you, and if there is a Wolf God, He, She or It does as well. But don’t let Alpha see you,” he found himself saying, the gunfire, wolf howls and screaming from three more men devoured by them deafening his ears to anything distinctive.

Meanwhile, between loading his rifle to save himself from wolves who seemed as good at dodging bullets than even Umalo, and his horse, Telemann assessed what his men were doing. Schneider hit a three wolves using as many shots. Such brought him to the attention of a larger wolf behind him, which resembled the ones he had killed. Melovic turned around and inserted his bayonet into the belly of the assaulting ‘relative’, tossing his dead body aside. Schneider thanked him in Russian. Melovic ‘your welcomed’ him in German. Melovic was then attacked from the front, yelling ‘say goodbye, stew meat!’ to the duo as he laid them to rest in the snow. With the last bullet in his revolver, Schneider shot the third member of that second squad in the head just as it was about to jump Melovic from behind. The men exchanged nods, then another article of clothing, then commenced to work as Comrades again.

Telemann surprisingly was not angered by the demise of six wolves, but seemed to smile with pride at how Melovic and Schneider defended each other from them. He looked around the field, nodded, then howled something in wolf talk. The Alpha wolf came to his side, joined by the rest of the pack as he sounded ‘retreat’.

It was a swift retreat, led by Alpha, and covered by machine gun spray from Umalo. By some miracle, none of those rounds caused any more damage. But it did allow the wolves to make it past the range of even Telemann’s rifle. After exhausting the magazine, Umalo turned the horse around, to get the steed to proceed towards the pack, but the horse had other ideas, backing up whenever the angered and frustrated rider on his back tried to kick, hit or yell him ‘forward’.

“So that horse of yours came home to you,” Telemann said as he raised up his rifle and aimed it at Umalo. “With a rider who---“

“---We need to take alive. Without killing the horse!” Fedoroff asserted.

Telemann cocked the hammer, allowed the site and his eye to become one, and took that extra two seconds that every good marksman always uses when it is available. “I’ll do my best,” he pledged.

“And I’ll do better,” Fedoroff asserted. He inserted left hand over the barrel of Telemann’s rifle. His right he put into his mouth, emitting a distinctive Cossack whistle that he learned from his grandfather.

The horse bucked Umalo off his back, then headed into the woods, in the opposite direction of where the wolves had headed. The possessed and multi-lingual commander of the canine army fell into the snow. The Alpha wolf ran down to his aid., But after being told something by Umalo in an obscure human language neither Telemann nor Fedoroff recognized, slithered away with lightning speed back up into the hills. Three tense seconds later, Umalo went into a grand mal seizure, as vulnerable now as he had been dangerous ten bloody minutes ago.

Fedoroff and Telemann approached Umalo and try to hold him still. Schneider pushed his way past Fedoroff and Telemann, reached into his pouch for a vial then placed three pills from it under Umalo’s quivering tongue between bites that nearly took off his fingers.

“What was that?” Fedoroff asked Schneider, in German.

“Magic Jewish medicine,” the German Sgt’s reply, in English.

“From Doctor Lt. Goldmann’s supply,” Telemann noted, recognizing the meticulous font that was never a mm out of line, or place.

“That he got from Umalo when he was...” Schneider replied.

Umalo stopped seizing just as Schneider seemed about to stumble upon or reveal another piece of the puzzle that Fedoroff and Telemann had to figure out, and were part of. The old mountain man of many personalities and vaster talented spoke. “When he was your Christian Savior,” Schneider said as Umalo pontificated in yet another language.

“ Who is speaking in tongues,” Telemann noted, feeling the Ancient nature of the indistinguishable language.

“ Hebrew,” Fedoroff related. “Which only a fellow Jew can understand,” he continued, looking straight into Schneider’s old face which bowed far more warmth, pain and pride than age.

“Which is also understandable to the Jewish villagers your Cossack and Aryian ancestors burnt out or killed, ‘Sirs’.” He blasted at his superior officers with an insubordinate tone that neither Fedoroff nor Telemann had heard . “Or maybe you both did to worse to get those?” he continued, pointing to the officers’ insignia.

The Jewish Seargent awaited a reply of innocence or guilt from the two Christian Captains, but was prevented from continuing such by a tug on his collar from Umalo,

followed by words spoken softly into his ear, but directed at the two officers, requesting with his hands that the men behind them back off.

“Which means, loosely translated?” Telemann asked Fedoroff, thinking he could read Umalo’s eyes or understand Umalo’s diction.

“That obviously you men should tend to the wounded and not your curiosities,” Fedoroff said to the German and Russian soldiers now under joint command. After they had left, Fedoroff addressed Telemann alone, and of course his own troubled soul. “And the rest is that we should both shut up and let him listen to what Jesus has to say through him,”

Umalo nodded in approval, and thanks, then pulled himself closer to Fedoroff and Telemann. His got louder. When it became more Ancient, he looked up to the sky. Sadness and determination both battled for possession of his voice, and soul.

“And?” Telemann asked Schneider.

“He says he wants to atone for his sins,” Schneider translated. “And ours.”

“By giving us the antidote to whatever he gave or did to these wolves that turned them into man eating demons?” Telemann pressed, noting the bodies of three men who had been dragged into the woods, and returned missing half of their muscle mass.

“By becoming the antidote...And...de-possessing the devil,” Schneider translated as Umalo’s final declaration on the matter at paw.

Alpha howled from the woods above, keeping his position visible only to Telemann and the telescopic site he now kept on himself and allowed no one else to use.

“The devil that is in all of us, starting with...” Schneider translated as Umal added another coda to his final statement.

“Starting with me,” Umalo said in English as another personality, or agenda took over his eyes and the brain behind it. He grabbed hold of the knife strapped to Schneiders’ belt and held the tip to his eyes. With his other hand, Umalo snatched Fedoroff’s revolver, pointing it at the Russian Cossack, the German Aristocrat and the veteran Sgt. Jew.

“If thy eye offends the Lord, pluck it out,” Umalo said, in English, regarding the blade about to cut out his eye. “And if thy mind offends the Lord, shoot it out,” he continued pointing the gun at the bottom of his throat, in the exact trajectory that any student of anatomy knows will hit the brain stem in one shot.

Again and again, Umalo repeated the credo, punishment and pledge, in English, then Hebrew, keeping Telemann and Schneider with the blade of the knife. He delivered a final prayer and conversation with the Creator, which was halted a mere mortal.

“Tell Jesus that suicide is a fucking sin, Sgt Schneider!” Fedoroff barked as he blasted Umalo straight in the eyes. “And that we still need him on this planet.

Telemann translated. Schneider delayed answering, seeming to become possessed himself. Fedoroff then Telemann noted that Schneider had been bitten by the wolves in this most recent attack.

“Now!” the Cossack who thus far had held back his temper yelled at Schneider. “Before it’s too late for YOU. And you become One of them! Whoever them is! While there is still some humanity in you.” Telemann translated, word for word. “Unlike what Lt. Goldmann became before you had to kill him and...”

“Lord,” Schneider said, kneeling next to the praying Messiah. “We do not understand you, but we need you. Please remain with us a little longer.”

Umalo’s brilliant, tortured and dangerous mind popped back into being himself. The self that could be reasoned with anyway. He let go of the gun pointed at brain. Telemann took it from his hand. “If I must,” Umalo said to the two officers and the very Jewish Sgt. “But if this is going to work, for all of us, you included, Father,” he continued addressing the Big Mench in the sky. “We have to do this my way,” Umalo said, turning to the Russian and German soldiers who he had kept fed with food, alive with medicine and, up till now anyway, inspired with Heavenly hope. Men who were torn between trusting him and tearing him apart to feed the wolves that his other personality had led in the most recent charge that had taken the lives of yet more of his own species. But, for the moment, the Russo-German unit was still a military unit, subjected, rightly or wrongly to orders rather than individual reason.

According to those orders, after a few hours, Umalo gave Communion to the Russian and German soldiers, giving them herbs under the tongue, and a swig from his canteen. Some of the men go along with it with rolling eyeballs to each other, commanded by Schneider (with a nod) to act like they believe in it. Others refused to eat anything else given to them by the multipersonality savior and/or madman. Others, most notably Petrovitch, buys into it as if it is real, kissing Umalo’s hand and not letting go.

“In the name of my Father, his son and the Holy ghost, Amen,” Umalo said to each of the blessed, or as some perceived it, the cursed.

Fedoroff looked on, bandaging up wounds recently incurred on his arm.

“You’re sure that those cuts on your arm are from Umalo’s knife when you took it away from him and not his infected teeth?” Telemann inquired.

“As sure as I am that Alpha wolf up, who’s taught his pack to take away our ammunition, food and hope, has more power over his pack than Umalo does,” Fedoroff asserted motioning for Telemann to discretely share his observation of the wolf pack settling in on another outlook, a naturally-camouflaged location that only his Cossack eyes could see.

Telemann snuck a look at Alpha, sitting, waiting and growling at any animal who wanted to venture over an idealized line in the snow he had designated as 'safe'. All of the wolves remained where they were, despite the temptation of fresh meat only three feet in front of that line. A line that Telemann calculated was twenty feet away from the range of any gun in camp. Such was nothing new. But what Telemann didn't understand was why that slab of meat was from one of the dead soldiers, or perhaps another animal in the wild that Alpha had killed to test the wolves' loyalty. "That horse of yours who got away again," Telemann noted, after confirming that the carcass was not of equine origin. "A horse that's safer for us to eat than rabies or drug infested wolf meat," he continued, reminding Fedoroff that an army, even one raised and trained in Russia, DOES move on its stomach. "And horse meat is also safer to eat than..."

"...human flesh?" Fedoroff replied, hearing both his stomach growling with hunger and Telemann's. "Which tastes like chicken, if you cook it well enough," he continued, looking over the dead, and the dying. "My grandfather told me that the army that is willing to eat its own dead honors them. As would yours, if you asked him honestly. Of course, what the history books will write...another matter."

"About the war between us, or the truce between us, Boris?"

"Or the chess game in which maybe we are both expendable pawns. The chess-master being.." Fedoroff looked towards Umalo, who had just finished giving Communion to the men. As if on cue for a musical score that Fedoroff had no idea was being played, Umalo motioned for Fedoroff and Telemann to follow him, into the bush. They gathered their gear, get up, walk towards him.

"Ours not to reason why, Comrade, but to obey," Fedoroff noted.

"And NOT die!" Telemann asserted.

"A German who does not follow orders," Fedoroff replied with a big smile, extending his bear line hand towards Telemann's shaking shoulder. "There are possibilities for you, Fritz!"

"Fuck off, Ivan," Telemann barked back, pushing aside Fedoroff's arm.

"Make that probabilities!" the Russian Communist Cossack said proudly regarding the German Capitalist aristocrat.

A tired old Umalo led a youthful, strong Fedoroff and Telemann through woods in different locations, deeper and deeper snow, it gets colder and steeper. With each location, a singing Umalo got stronger, carrying more of the load, the two younger men more out of breath, and weaker. Finally, they reach a LESS snow covered meadow, by which point Umalo's transformation from an aging Jesus with Insight into the Heavens to a sly Professor who knew everything about what happens on earth.



“And this is the spot, gentlemen,” Umalo declared.

“Where you kill us with exhaustion?” Fedoroff grumbled.

“Or with another verse of that chant or college football song,” Telemann barked out.  
“Or...”

Telemann’s anger-fueled witticism was halted by Umalo growling something in ‘wolf’ talk. It terrified both officers because of its intensity, and depth.

“That means, ‘shut your mouths and open your ears...please’,” Umalo said by way of translating it to English. Professor Umalo then provided both of his students with a wide smile, followed by another phrase in Wolfese, far lighter in tone but just as assertive.

“And that means?” Telemann inquired.

“I love you, and want to fuck you up the ass?” Fedoroff replied, jokingly.

“Or be fucked up the ass?” Telemann added, self-observing the humorous part of his soul over-riding his logical brain, feeling odd about that inner accomplishment.

“Close...but there’s still much you have to learn, gentlemen,” Umalo answered.

“Of course, Professor Morkov,” Fedoroff said, with a courtly bow..

“It’s just Umalo now,” the former Professor of Animal Behavior and Linguistics said with bowed head, a mixture of pride and regret in his voice. He seemed to be eternally lost in his past, but after five seconds that felt like fifty years, for listener and speaker, he snapped back to the present. “But, as my new students...We start the first lesson in this...experiment to end. All wars...between...all of my Father’s creations...eventually.”

Seeing a sick moose hobbling in woods, Umalo grabbed hold of Telemann’s rifle and shots it. After it fell to the ground, he crossed himself. “After some final sacrifices...And mercy killings,” he said by way of explanation.

Umalo instructed his two students to go into the bush and pull the moose out, with the aid of the sled this time. Upon its return, Umalo, with the help of his student conscripts, who provided all the muscle, dissected the moose in the manner of a coroner and pathologist rather than a butcher, the old man providing all of the direction. To the muscle of the moose, which Umalo insisted be carved out as whole muscle and not muscle chunks, he infused extracts from the medicine pouches he had strapped to his belt.

“Wolf talk for...I’m hungry,” Umalo said, after which he ascalated such in wolf-talk

Fedoroff and Telemann imitated the wolf whine, as they perceived it anyway, as best as they could. After a ten painstaking corrections for student and teacher with regard to inflection and ‘accent’, Umalo seemed satisfied with his interns’ linguistic abilities.

“Good...Now. Wolf talk for ‘danger ahead’,” Umalo said, followed by that low volume, high intensity growl. . Fedoroff and Telemann put all of their effort into trying to imitate the sound, this time requiring only five attempts, each of the young men looking at each other with a sense of accomplishment afterwards.

“Acceptable,” Umalo noted. . “Now...Wolf talk for ‘fuck off and stop making me do your work for you’.” The translation into Wolfese required use of throat muscles, lungs and manipulations of the tongue that exhausted both officers, but somehow enlivened them.

“Now...’Fuck off and mind your own business,” Umalo continued, voicing it next in the language of the wild canines. Fedoroff and Telemann got the diction and subtext of that phrase down very quickly, directing it to Professor Umalo, who shared their smiles and laughter.

It was then time for the students to assess the teacher. “And wolf talk for ‘tell me what the fuck you are doing with and to us’?” Fedoroff inquired of Umalo

“And why you are keeping us in the dark about it?” Telemann pressed the old man.

Umalo replied, in wolf talk, with ‘fuck off and mind your own business’, directed with a deadly seriousness to both officers. They got back to their work as assistant butchers, and/or pathologists, begrudgingly.

“Sure” Fedoroff grumbled as he extracted more meat from the moose with knives that were cutting more holes in his fingers than the slain sick animal’s flesh.

“Why not?” Telemann added, in the manner of a Russian whose body is under the whip of a Commissar but not his soul.

“You mean...” Umalo interjected, translating ‘sure’ and ‘why not’ into wolf speak. With his left hand the old man directed the younger men in the proper manner of speech for those musical phrases.

Fedoroff and Telemann competed with each other in who could speak better wolf talk, practicing their most recently learned phrases on each other. Meanwhile, Umalo, feeling a wave of exhaustion about to overtake him and put him into another sleep,, took his other hand, cut a small portion of flesh from his left thigh, injected it with all of the contents of a well hidden syringe, then offered it up to the sky.

“No...I can't go back to sleep to become...'him' again,,” he said to the sky, fearing another transformation that so often happened after nightmares, or the wrong kind of dreams. “Please, Heavenly Father, keep me awake...long enough for this to work.”

From above, an answer did come to Umalo. From his POV only, against the setting sun, Piervy appeared, alone this time. Umalo bowed, then nodded to him. Piervy nodded back, communicating in silent telepathic speak, a tongue that Umalo hoped that Fedoroff and Telemann would learn, but not learn too soon.

## CHAPTER 14

The rising sun the next day saw below it a snowy meadow filled with meat, pit and snare traps around them having been dug the night before so as to not be spotted. The woods looked on, providing to all who were willing to hear it its mystical and thunderous Silence. From the wolves nestled behind the trees on hills overlooking the valley of bait and traps, nothing.

“I thought you told me that wolves are more vocal this time of day,” a cold, tired and more frustrated than scared Telemann said to his Cossack Comrade.

“Normally they are,” Fedoroff replied.

“And that they are always hungry for moose meat!” growled at Umalo, whose face showed no expression except none at all as he looked up at the hills, focusing on one spot in the woods that, to even Fedoroff's eye, had nothing behind it but more woods.

“Moose meat tainted with OUR blood, that coincidentally came from our fingers when you gave use knives with splinters on the handle!” Fedoroff blast-whispered into the crazed and clairvoyant mountain man's other ear.

“And that good medicine that you hid in it?” the honorable Aryan aristocrat continued, with a sarcastic tone that he forbid his men to use but now was adopting faster than he would like to. “Blessed Medicine from holy places that makes vicious wolves kind ---“

“---That I wish I could force feed to all of YOU!” Umalo interjected with the voice of a kindly grandfather and the subtext of the harshest drill sergeant in any Army. “Down your throats and up your asses that---“. Umalo abruptly stopped communicating with his voice, reverting to the index and third finger of his right hand to do the talking. He directed such and the two ingrate human onlookers to a patch of area woods 30 degrees to his left, then motioned for the two men to remain where they were, instructing them to adjust the wolf hides on their backs so that the wolf heads would cover their human faces.

Emerging from the woods was a horde of wolves, led by Alpha. More than Fedoroff or Telemann had ever seen before. In plain site of the three men in the meadow, Alpha led the pack into the meadow, where he took his position at the highest elevated location in

the meadow, where food for him was specially placed. He sniffed it but does not eat it. The wolves disperse to where the rest of the food was. Their eating the food was stopped by growling out what felt like 'No!' in the language of any human tongue or four legged species.

"They need some more convincing," Umalo whispered, with that look in the eye that Fedoroff and Telemann knew all too well as 'ok, plan B, which better work because there is no plan C'. "All together now."

Umalo led the next howl, saying 'good eating, get it before it's gone', joined in by the two Captains in voice, then action, said action involving putting heads down to meat in front of them, then simulating growls of gustatory satisfaction. Alpha took a few small bites of the meat, followed by the pack devouring the portions allocated to them.

"So what do we do to make them they stop eating us after they're through finishing the moose meat, Umalo?" Telemann inquired of his 'Alpha'.

"Speak to their leader," Umalo replied.

"Which is you?" Fedoroff reminded the old mountain man.

"No, thank God. Their leader is him," Umalo said. "You call him Alpha, but he calls himself Piervy, loosely translated. If he was in Germany, you'd call him."

"Erst?" Telemann interjected. "First' if he wandered over the channel into the UK."

"And his name in wolf talk is?" Fedoroff inquired.

Umalo growled a sound that Fedoroff and Telemann found difficult to imitate, but still they tried to pronounce it. Midway to their sounding half-way believable, Umalo pointed to Piervy as he rose up to look at the pack, and the valley he brought them into.

To both Captains, Piervy seemed bigger than any of their previous perceptions, or imaginations. They crouched down, but were stopped from doing so by Umalo tearing off their wolf costumes, then shedding his own. Umalo stood tall, looking straight at the giant beast. He motioned Telemann and Fedoroff to do the same, then pulling them up by the backs of their necks after the third refusal to do so.

Umalo addressed Piervy directly, using vocabulary in wolf talk that Fedoroff and Telemann for the most part did not recognize. The pack, having finished most of their meal, looked on at the conversation, eyeing the two Captains from head to foot. After Piervy decided that it was time to talk to the humans rather than eat them, and conveying such to his subordinates, for the moment anyway, it was time for Telemann and Fedoroff to address the wolf pack leader, and his pack. They did so with the best vocabulary they could in wolf talk. Simple baby talk, including, "me friend", "we mean you no harm" and variations of "we are sorry about everything that's happened to both of our species,

and take full responsibility for it,” and of course “all both of us want to do is to go home to our families, or what’s left of them.” In desperation, Fedoroff and Telemann removed pictures of their most beloved fellow humans, showing them to the wolves. Piervy seemed to be listening. Others in the pack seemed to be amused by their simplistic and non doubt grammatically incorrect diction. A few showed their teeth, choosing to eat the semi-literate humans rather than endure their banter.

Piervy finally spoke to Telemann and Fedoroff. Umalo intervened, translating between them. It seemed to work, as, without Piervy saying anything, the ridicules and threats to the two unfamiliar humans ended. Indeed they seemed more like lambs than lions, playful pups rather than fierce wolves. Telemann and Fedoroff entertained the idea that it was something they had said rather than something the wolves ate, but such would be determined later, if indeed there was to be a later for either of them.

As to what to do about everything than happened, and what was going to happen, Umalo whispered to his two human companions, “I hope you dug that hole deep last night.”

“Deep enough,” Fedoroff said.

“We’ll see,” Professor Umalo replied. With that, he walked forward towards Piervy, conversing in wolf talk to the big, strong, growling (and angry) alpha, which he translates into English, line for line, as he tried to woo the alpha into the hole that had been dug the previous night. “Come...My four legged friend. We will dialog together in the depths of hell. To purge the demons inside of us both. To end the rein of terror which was necessary for this experiment. This experiment to make two legged wolves come together as one pack. Four legged wolves to band together as one pack. And, with one bold step, kill the evil in both of us so that—“

Piervy finally took the final two steps that landed him into the pit in the ground in front of him. Umalo, reaching for the knife hidden in his boot, slipped on a piece of ice, falling into it as well. Neither spectator humans nor wolves saw what was happening in the pit, but they heard lots of arguing, then fighting. Then, screams of pain, the kind where a mercy killing was the only act of kindness life afforded you.

Telemann and Fedoroff reached for their rifles and sidearms, only to find them snatched by wolves who were keeping their distance, surrounding them in a circle organized by a new Alpha whose agenda was to prevent anyone from going to the pit.

“That metal bone is mine,” Telemann said in wolf talk and sign language to the new head wolf holding his custom made tempered steel long range rifle in his sharp, non-metallic teeth.

“I don’t think so,” the wolf growled back, appended by “fuck off”.

“Ok, those thunder sticks are yours,” Fedoroff said to them, in as best diction as possible. “But we have to go help our friend in their, and yours,” he said in English, and broken wolf talk.

Fighting from hole gets more intense. Telemann and Fedoroff made another move to get through wolves, the former reaching for his dagger, the latter his sword. Mama Three Socks got in the middle of the exchange before it got ugly, or deadly. Regarding the fight in the pit in which screams of wolf and human agony were getting louder, she said “That’s none of your business,” to the two men.

“Fuck yes it IT my business,” Fedoroff asserted, in English and wolf talk..

“It’s ALL of our business,” Telemann added.

Maybe it was what the two men said, how they said it, or something that Three Socks said to the new Alpha regarding the situation. The circle of wolves gave way, the holder of the thunder-sticks letting go of their metallic bones. They allowed Fedoroff and Telemann to grab their weapons and go to the pit. The pack, led by Mama, followed them.

As they ran to the pit, Fedoroff and Telemann, along with the wolves behind them, the mixed specied rescue squad was stopped by a burst of wind that knocks trees over the pit, disallowing anyone to see inside or get through. It was too much wood to uncover, though men and wolves tried their best to get through it. From inside they hear more intense whelps of pain from both sides.

“Lord, into your hands I commend OUR spirits,” the two men heard from their fellow human, and sometimes Savoir, from the bottom of the pit.

Piervy said something to his pack that caused them to back off. “Two shots ring out from the deep abyss, then dead silence. Wolves mourned the passing of their comrade inside, as did Fedoroff and Telemann. They consoled each other, with nudges and wolf talk.

## CHAPTER 15

Winter decided to be merciful to Fedoroff and Telemann as they worked their way back to the camp where they had left their two Armies. But still, even with a sun that had some warmth to it, a sky that decided to not dump more snow on the ground, and wind that was subtle rather than fierce, they had much to cart back on the sled, as the wolves let them take home the ammo, medicines and even some of the food those canines had stolen from them, most particularly compasses and maps.

The two men took a break on a small hill that according to their maps, the compass and the sense of the Four Directions in BOTH of their souls, was a half hour at most away.

After letting his ass hit the ground, and re-discovering that his legs were a lot more tired than he thought they were, Fedoroff retrieved a flash from his breast pocket.

“The really good stuff, from home. Made with potatoes and grapes from the Steppes rather than worm-infested vegetables and wild roots obtained in the trenches,” Fedoroff explained to Telemann as he retrieved three tin cups from the sled, pouring the contents of such into them. “One for you, one for me and one for...”.

“Umalo...Or whatever he really was,” Telemann replied, taking hold of his drink. “Or is,” he continued, looking over his shoulder at a burst of wind that flew in the trees behind him. “Yes, I can feel something of him lingering here, too.”

“It’s not just a suggestive thought that you ideate into you construct of reality?” the mystical-oriented Russian Cossack volleyed back in a German accent doing his best imitation of godless German psychoanalytical scientists.

“Your working hypothesis, whatever it is...provisionally accepted, Umalo,” he said to the wind.

“And welcomed!” Fedoroff added.

With that, the two men downed the vodka. Fedoroff poured another round, taking out another tin cup to make it a drinking party of four, as he had heard Melovic trying to be sneak up on him from the left.

“As are you, welcomed as well, Private Melovic,” he said in Russian to the slow moving wind to his left behind the snow-covered pine branches.

Melovic, seeing that he had been found out, stepped on snow normally, but appearing differently than previously. “With a new rifle, a new uniform and a new insignia,” Telemann said, in German. “As are you, Sergeant Schneider,” he continued to the ‘ghost’ behind the trees to his right, motioning to Fedoroff to pour yet another round.

“Also in a new uniform,” Fedoroff noted.

“And a higher rank, Lieutenant Schneider,” Telemann said.

“And new weapons, Sergeant Melovic,” Fedoroff continued, noting a thunder-stick and pistol that looked far better than anything he had been offered, or was told about. “Issued by...”

“Them,” Telemann interjected, directing Fedoroffs attention to the meadow below. A flat, pristine looking valley on which to the East, new Russian troops and artillery were being put into position, and to the West, an equal number of Germans ‘setting up shop’ in gulleys that they were converting into trenches.

Thinking with the same mind, and SOUL, this time, Fedoroff and Telemann reached for their rifles. Fedoroff gave voice to the idea first. "I see. Headquarters has sent us more men to fight the onslaught of more wolves, Sergeant Melovic."

"Fighting killer wolves together, so we can all go home alive, Lt. Schneider."

Before the two senior officers could get their weapons, the business end of their subordinates' rifles shoved into their backs. Melovic and Schneider showed absolutely no remorse, and even felt proud of themselves as Fedoroff and Telemann put up their hands.

"The killer wolves are all killed," Schneider said, in English.

"And rest of the wolves gone," Melovic added.

"As we will be soon, no doubt, when you turn us in," Fedoroff said as he was relieved of his rifle, pistol and sword.

"And I suppose that those bulges in your pockets, contain an appreciable sum of money for their turning us in," Telemann added, as he was stripped of his weaponry, then his insignia, then felt ropes tightening around his wrists. "Turning us in for---"

"---Saving each other's lives!" Fedoroff interjected as his hands were tied behind his back. "So these SCUM can Collect their thirty pieces of silver."

"Why, Lt. Schneider?!" Telemann demanded of his old friend, the veteran who had saved his life so many times before and now would be responsible for ending it. "For God's sake, why?" he continued, using the Lord's name while actually meaning it.

"Rich Jews who are also officers," Schneider explained as he looked proudly upon his new insignia. "We can have more influence in the Army and back home. I can protect more of my fellow Jews from you Aryans in this war, and the next."

"And you, Sergeant Melovic?" Fedoroff demanded of the subordinate who he considered harmless on all days, helpful on some. "You were always a compliant soul. A SERVING soul."

"And still am," the aspiring chef whose cooking could turned off the palate of even a hungry hound replied, with a new sense of confidence. "But for my new bosses. Who were the same as my old bosses."

Gust of movement blew through trees. Fedoroff and Telemann looked towards it.

"Eyes left!" Sgt. Melovic commanded Prisoner Fedoroff, directing him to the Russian lines.



“Right.” Schneider calmly ordered Telemann, pushing him in the direction of the German trench.

Fedoroff and Telemann looked at then into each other, with the same thought in mind. The ghosts behind them spoke through a burst of wind that blew low lying branches away from their trees, and fallen logs down towards their feet.

“Eyes left!” Melovic barked out, his confidence turned into terror.

“Right!” Schneider barked out, his own apprehension converted into rage.

“After I say a few words,” Fedoroff asserted.

“A condemned man has the right to say something before he dies, as we Germans are a civilized society,” Telemann reminded Schneider. “Right, Umalo?” he continued, addressing the wind behind him.

“Yes, Comrade,” Fedoroff reminded Melovic in a calm, professorial tone. He turned around to the wind, continuing. “Together we stand, separate we---“

“No more pontifications about a Socialist Workers Paradise!” Melovic barked back, in Russian.

“And no more boasts about Aryan German culture!” Schneider growled in German.

“Naturally,” the racially inferior Cossack replied in perfect Hoch Deutch, sniffing something very friendly in the air .

“Of course,” Telemann added in expressively Slavic Russian, taking in a whiff of hope.

Fedoroff and Telemann continued, in wolf speech. Coming to their rescue from the bushes was Mama Three Socks, who attacked Melovic, pulling him down from the leg. Piervy, leaped upon Schneider’s shaking shoulder, bringing him to the ground, then his knees.

Fedoroff and Telemann backed up into each other, untying the restraints that had been put around their wrists. “Should we let our new friends kill our new enemies?” Fedoroff inquired of his fellow ‘dishonored’ Comrade. He reached into the blood and urine covered snow and removed two coins that had fallen out of Melovic’s pocket. He flipped it into the air. “Heads, we let them die....Tails we...”

“Don’t; become what they are,” Telemann said as he caught the coin before it falls to the ground. “For the sake of what they are,” he said of turncoats begging the wolves to spare their miserable lives. “For the sake of our own children,” he said, reaching for the pictures of his own family bsack home. “And theirs,” he continued, bringing Fedoroff’s

attention to the wolf pups in the bush coming out to greet their 'Uncle Boris' and himself, licking the grime, sweat and hardship from their battle-hardened faces.

Fedoroff and Telemann conveyed their sentiments to Mama Three Socks and Piervy in their own tongue, but the taunting continued.

"Hey! That means back off, guys!" the Cossack asserted.

"Now! Please," Telemann added, after which they attempted to speak in wolfese again. Their diction was corrected by another voice emerging from behind the trees. It came from a half human, half-whatever rider atop the horse Fedoroff had rescued several discoveries about life and himself ago, ponying another steed behind him.

Umalo's was finally able to convince Mama Three Socks and Piervy to back off Melovic and Schneider, who were still alive, but hurting very badly. "You lads really have to work on your pronunciation," he said to Fedoroff and Telemann as he leaped off the horse and examined his two new patients. "Right?" he said to the wolves.

Mama Three Socks and Peirvy barked an agreement to Umalo's comment as they leaned on the two men in the manner of a loyal dog, or loving woman.

"I thought you and Piervy, here, were...dead," Fedoroff said to Umalo.

"Or resurrected," Telemann added.

"Officially, yes to the former," Umalo said. "And in other ways, yes to the latter, because of you, fellow healers of the flesh, and the world," he continued as he directed his two fellow doctors to the medical kit on the lead horse's saddlebag.

"He deserves to die," Fedoroff said regarding Melovic as Umalo gave him a shot of morphine to put him into a less painful slumber, but not a permanent one.

"They both do," Telemann added regarding Schneider as he was put into a surgical, but not eternal, sleep.

"No...we need them to LIVE," Umalo said as he commences stitching up their wounds, which no doubt would be very ugly and noticeable scars. "To convince their comrades that we wolves are still a threat. That there is a common enemy to you humans...So you don't kill off your own species."

"At the expense of more of your species, or theirs?" Telemann said, pointing to the soon to be possibly married couple of adult canines, and their very human children.

Umalo answered his fellow humans in wolf talk.

“Which means ‘one noble morality experiment at time’?” Fedoroff replied, kneeling down to assist the old man in the kind of medical work that would exhaust even a young one.

“A risky experiment, that worked this time, for some of us anyway,” Telemann added, taking his position as scrub nurse.

“As is the risk you, Comrade Fedoroff, will have to take going home to join the hopefully international and God LOVING Revolution that is about to happen in Russia, to the East,” Umalo continued. “And you, Citizen of the World Telemann, have to tell the world about the second miracle truce you were part of to an American reporter who is trying to make a name for himself just over the hill, to the West.”

“America is not in the war,” Fedoroff replied.

“And needs some convincing to stay out of it. So they don’t get caught up in or contribute to the perversion of compassion into selective compassion. Over-caring for friends, family and countrymen, while demonizing or dehumanizing everyone else which makes for...”

As if on cue, Fedoroff and Telemann heard the war below begin again, led by two new Majors enthusiastically led their men into slaughter against each other. Slaughter against men who they had fought with against the wolves days earlier.

The horror of the war below was broken by desperate cries from the already wounded on top of the, so far anyway, bush covered hill. Waking up from their sleeps, experiencing their limbs as a source of pain and paralysis, Melovic and Schneider both screamed out for the mothers.

“Pain, Part of their healing process,” Umalo said to his two proteges regarding his new patients.

“And your healing process?” Fedoroff inquired, noting blood seeping out of a wound on Umalo’s chest, and wrists again.

“Seeing that you get out of here, both of you! And tell the world what you became here,” Umalo related with a smile of victory.

With that, Fedoroff and Telemann mounted the horses provided to them by the ‘ghost’ whose continued survival would be reported by Melovic and Schneider, and rode away, in separate directions but with a common Purpose.

