

The Order of Saint Ailbe

I remember it, the first dream I saw him. It was a normal dream I was playing in the field with my brothers and I saw him. A huge hound in the distance, I could barely make him out before he was gone. Every night I dreamt he came closer and closer til I could see his yellow piercing eyes and I could smell his every breath and his wet matted fur. Every night my dreams became more fitful and every night he got closer. Till one night, my dream was different, normally he was just in the background watching never interfering just watching like a wolf choosing his prey. This night was different I was in a dark, twisted forest and I was running. As soon as I slept I was running. I remember every misstep, every frantic climb, every breath. I remember when I fell. I remember when his claws dug into my back. I remember when I fell. I remember when he sunk his teeth into my neck. I remember the howl and I remember the feeling of going cold. I don't remember waking and I don't remember checking for a wound. I don't remember finding blood in my bed. I remember my family begging me to see the priest. I remember refusing for fear of being called a witch or worse. I remember refusing til the next night. I was the beast. I was the hunter. I was the wolf. I snarled. I bite. I hunted. When I woke, I saw the priest standing above me. I tasted the blood in my mouth. I felt the roar in my throat. It was a few days later that the priests of Ailbe came to collect me. For I was no longer a daughter of Brittany. I was a hound of ailbe. A black hound. A beast of gevaudan. A Cŵn ailbe. ~ interview with a Hound of Ailbe

Overview

Among the trenches, there is a rumour or a whisper of a regiment that hunts like wolves, they howl prayers in the dead of night, they wear the skins of wolves and heretics, there are even rumours of them feasting on the battlefield and eating the dead. The truth is more complex though no less unusual

History

Officially the Order of Saint Ailbe was founded after Avignon fell. Unofficially there are scattered records of people having nightmares and fighting with bestial fury. Stories of heretics killed and skinned by men wearing wolf pelts.

According to papal records, the order was founded with the Abby of Saint Ailbe on the Catacombs of Gevaudan. Buried deep in the forests of Gevaudan its official location is unknown to all but the order and the papacy.

Originally created to hunt and destroy the peasants who seemingly were possessed by an unknown force. It was Brother Kerrig Gwaz who discovered the truth. These peasants were Soldiers of Christ, not heretics. The order was renamed in honour of the saint of wolves, Saint Ailbe. It took years of experimenting before the right rituals and practices were perfected.

After fifty-seven years the first hound of Ailbe was unleashed much to the horror of heretics. As packs of men and women dressed in nothing but wolf pelt sharpen teeth and cold iron claws descending upon their lines.

Rituals

When a dreamer is found, they are taken to the Abbey stripped of all their worldly goods and taken to the catacombs. When the moon is full they are taken to a stone cell and given a copy of the Prayers of St Ailbe. They are told to recite from the book. For 28 days and 28 nights, they are given nothing but water and a wolf pelt. After this time they are released into the forest surrounding the Abby. They are stalked by other members of the order. They watch to see what the dreamer does. Most are driven mad, most but not all. Some hunt driven by an unseen force, they hunt the wolves. It is their first meal and the pelt they will wear from now on.

Ranks

The rank is as a dreamer brought to Abby, it's not a true rank more a word used to describe those who have had the dream but have not been introduced to the mysteries. After they have completed the correct rituals they are inducted into one of the clans. Which is made up of packs. Each clan has different rules and traditions but all are ultimately accountable to the head of the monastery.

The next rank is as a yearling this is the lowest rank each pack has its own rules on how to pass this rank. Some packs say you must draw blood with your fangs, some say you must survive a lunar year and some say you must bleed for another pack member.

The next and most numerous rank is the hound covering everything from medics to troopers to rare specialist roles. Even most officers are in this rank.

The next rank is pack mother or clan father given that a pack can be anywhere from a squad to a battalion in any other army. They are often seen on the battlefield inspiring and terrifying their troops

The last that is seen on the battlefield is the Great Wolf or Clan mother or Clan father. They are vicious and cunning having seen thousands of battles. Rarely seen on the battlefield they have tamed their wild natures to direct the pack across endless fronts. Aggressive enough to keep the packs in lines but calm enough to work with others. Rarely do they take to the battlefield but when they do they can change the tide of the battle.

The last rank is the Grandmaster of the hunt, none outside of the clan leaders have seen her and all speak in the terrified whisper about them. What is known is they are the oldest of the wolves and strong enough to bring even the most aggressive clan to heel. Some say she is the blackhound, some say she is Saint Ailbe and some say she was the first wolf made by Brother Kerrig Gwaz. What is known is that speculating about such things near a clanleader is a fast way to an early grave.

Added to this are 'titles' add to ranks such as clan father 'greymaw' for an old clan leader or hound 'ashsnout' for a hound who has burned an enemy camp.