

Light's Vengeance

By Dekafox

What am I?

I find myself contemplating this question once more despite all the steps that brought me here. It is not the first time I have asked this question, yet neither is it the last. In many ways, it is much easier to consider what I once was, though the memories of that past seem now much like a dream.

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Once, I was a Vigilant of Stendarr. Growing up in the Imperial City, I could see man and mer and beast, all living hand-in-hand under the providence of the Divines, but it was Emperor Varen Aquilarious's actions that inspired me to take up Stendarr's Light. Though I heard but rumors, his quest for the Amulet of Kings was a noble one; could I do less?

Then everything went to Oblivion.

Daedra appeared in all districts at once, and no one could seem to find the Emperor. My order helped guide the citizens out of the city to find some refuge elsewhere, but the bodies of the daedric creatures were like an endless wave. It crashed against our bulwark, but we held. Oh, how we held. Brothers and Sisters gave their lives to ensure that those we protect could seek safety.

After a period that was both too short and too long, I found myself alone, slipping through the alleyways towards our final fallback position. I was nearly there, but a child's voice reached my ears. Giving no further thought, I immediately turned, following that voice through the twists and turns of some of the oldest parts of the city. Finally, I heard it around the corner, but when I rounded it I found myself face-to-snout with a daedroth, who, almost as if mocking me, repeated the very sound I'd been following.

At that point, everything went dark. There were brief flashes after - chains, prisoners, an altar, and the King of Worms himself, Mannimarco. And then I was... I became.. something different.

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In truth, You could say I died that day like those who fell beside me. Even now, memories of my father, my mother.. the puppy I played with in the Temple District... my first kiss... they all grow

ever indistinct in my mind, with only the strongest events remaining, the ones that defined the core of who I was- who I am. But that is the nature of the Soul-Shriven.

Yes, when I awoke I was like many others that were sacrificed to Molag Bal, in the wake of Varen's disappearance. No longer flesh and blood, I was made of this watery... stuff, though I did not know it at the time. All I knew was that I was in a cell in what could only be some dark corner of Oblivion. By the grace of the Divines though, we were freed in a jailbreak by one of Varen's own Companions! She led us to a mysterious old man only known as the Prophet, who revealed to us what we had become.

Only a few of us however managed to return to Tamriel after that, and the haste with which we departed scattered us across the lands - at least I assume that is what happened, from stories I heard of others like myself, and the fact I woke up alone, on the shores of Stros M'kai

With nothing around me but my own thoughts, I finally allowed myself to grieve for the loss of Imperial City, White Gold Tower, and the men and mer that had fallen in its defense. I also allowed myself a small moment to grieve for my former life. Still, I was still alive- or a passing facsimile thereof- and idleness had never been a fault of mine.

Before long I had involved myself with a small group of what I could only call adventurers, as they seemed to have no commonalities, other than to help their homeland. Though sharper than the memories of my former home, these memories also are faded- I suspect from one too many deaths.

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The first time I was run-through was quite an experience. I could feel the blade piercing my armor and flesh, rubbing against bone as it severed vital portions of my body, and the warm spurt of blood that splashed out and ran down my chest. The pain was intense, but quickly vanishing as my seemingly lifeless body thumped against the ground.

Rather than fading into blackness or light however, the world itself seemed to turn blue. I couldn't move, but I was still somehow able to see and hear everything going on around me, though the angle my head lay at gave me a poor view of what was happening. I wondered if I was going to be trapped in this body, unable to affect the world around me yet aware of it all.

It was the scream that did it. As the bandits advanced on the merchant's cart I had been trying to defend, a girl screamed and the world suddenly snapped back into *being*. I've never seen it happen to myself, but I've seen others like me rise back up in the same way: The body turns into something very much like water, wounds disappearing as it flows upward, then retakes the shape of the body, once more upright and whole. Resurrecting like this is an intense feeling, and it takes a moment to shake off the aftereffects, but I made it in time. That time, at least.

That was also the first time I learned what it was like to be looked at as a monster. Despite saving the merchants, I could see the fear in their eyes at this inhuman creature that had returned from the dead, wearing the face of a human just like them. They tried to hide it, but the tremble of their voices as they thanked me and the haste with which they declined my offer to escort them laid bare the lie for what it was.

And it was not the last time either.

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I found myself growing restless, as I moved continually eastward, helping who I could and protecting those who could not protect themselves. It was as if I was searching for something, though I did not know what I sought. Not until I ran into a stranger in Evermore, one who while unknown to me, also felt very familiar somehow.

It was from her that I learned that Hircine had claimed me as well.

A couple weeks ago I had helped hunt down a pack of werewolves who had been preying on passing travellers, and dispatched them with my usual efficiency. I was scratched in the fight, but I had suffered similar wounds before from other werewolves without ill effect, so I had put little thought to it, but it seemed Hircine himself had stepped in and blessed the one that struck me to ensure I was infected with his "disease." The moodiness, the restlessness, the increased temper - it all fit. And now he had sent a messenger to bring me to his Hunting Grounds.

I nearly tore her throat out right there. I could feel a shifting beneath my skin, muscles trying to expand, but I drew on my discipline as a former Vigilant and the urge to change faded. This woman was not the one responsible for my... predicament, and slaughtering a supposed citizen in the streets would not endear me to the guards, no matter her nature.

So it was with trepidation that I followed her outside of the city, until we were well clear of the city walls. As I mounted my steed, I offered to let her ride behind, but she shook her head and instead *changed* before me.

The sight of her taking on her other form made my skin itch again in desire to join her, but keeping my horse under control as he nickered at the sudden appearance of the grey-furred predator took most of my attention, until it was over.

I kept pace as she loped along on all fours towards our destination, well off the beaten path, but I could tell she was holding herself back for my horse's sake. Even with me slowing her down however, it was not long before we stood, former Imperial and werewolf, before the altar to the Lord of the Hunt.

Throwing her head back, she let out a howl that I found myself echoing in my head, and in response a portal opened before us. Wary of an ambush, I let her go through first, then quickly followed, light already gathering in my palms.

On exiting, everything was as she had said. We stood before Hircine's altar as the Prince looked down at us from above, bearing the visage of a stag. With no immediate threats around, I let the power I had gathered dissipate. Ignoring the female werewolf's attempt to introduce me I stepped forward and asked the one question on my mind.

"Why me?"

That drew a laugh from the Prince of Wolves. "So the pup asks its master why it was chosen. The very impudence tells me I chose well!" After a short pause, he continued. "While you bear the stench of Molag Bal, I sense a true hunter within you. You stalked my pack with a skill I seldom see, especially from one of Bal's spawn. That impressed me." Again, another pause, longer this time as if he expected a response. I did not give him one, but waited, arms crossed.

"Very well." His voice no longer had any sense of joviality in it as it echoed through my head. "I offer you my blessing. You may take on My form and hunt as one of my wolves, or you may leave."

"And if I choose the latter?"

"Then you become my Hare. For a very long time." I could sense the satisfaction in that final statement, and knew he spoke truly; not that he had any reason to lie to me. Since I could not die, or at least I didn't know what it would take to actually kill me in this state, I would be a perfect hunting toy to train his pets on. I would no doubt take many with me, but I would suffer potentially an eternity of being hunted. For perhaps the first time since my landing at Stros M'kai, I closed my eyes and asked Stendarr for guidance, though I stood before a Daedric Prince, in the heart of his realm.

"Well, pup? Will you join my pack?" I never knew that one with a power as great as a Daedric Prince could sound... impatient. As I reached out within myself to touch the light, I felt the wolf within me stir as well, but not out of restlessness or hunger. Stendarr's light almost seemed to surge within me as I reached for it with whatever tattered remnants of my soul remained, and to my surprise, a wolf's paw joined mine, the touch soft, yet firm as the wolf within suffused itself with my inner light. I could feel the protectiveness within that paw, as well as a hint of gentleness within its savage nature, and I knew I had my answer.

As I opened my eyes, we- I- gave a wolf-like grin. "I will hunt in your name, but on my terms. If you don't like that, then I will leave here and hunt your wolves for however long it takes to purge Tamriel of their presence."

While my nearby guide recoiled at my words, I sensed nothing but bemusement from the great stag-man above. "Oh, the pup has some bite after all. Very well. Take my form, and hunt the largest creature in this glade. Bring it down, and I shall deem you worthy. Fail, and perhaps my hunting grounds may have a new quarry."

My first change was painful, yet the pain was soothed by the light of the Divines. Bones stretched and muscles expanded as fur sprouted and grew, my very figure seeming to exaggerate itself as I truly became one with the inner wolf that had been lurking since the day I was scratched. As the change finished, I padded over to a nearby pool, and found myself looking at a large female werewolf, similar to that of my nearby former guide but stronger, bulkier, and covered with golden-white fur. Briefly, I reached for the light, and it flowed into me as easily as it had before my transformation, my eyes almost seeming to glow gold with its power. I let it go for now, as I had a feeling that Hircine might consider using it on this hunt 'cheating,' but it seemed that Stendarr had accepted this wolf into his fold.

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Compared to my encounter with Hircine, the rest of the hunt was a blur - not from loss of myself to the feral, as the light had tamed that portion of myself, but from my nature. While my soul was eventually returned to me, my original body was long since gone, and my new body is not what it once was either. With each death, a few more memories are lost, but I find it a worthy bargain for what this body can accomplish.

Thus I have a mortal soul, contained within a body made from the essence of Molag Bal's Coldharbour itself, infused with Hircine's blessing, and powered by the light of the Divines. I am of all these things, yet I remain myself. Many would consider me a monster. Perhaps, in some small way, they might be right. But this monster is on their side.

What am I?

I am Light's Vengeance. Let the enemies of Tamriel beware.