

About a hundred or so years past 10,000 B.C., in one of the northernmost regions of the present United States, humans were slowly making their lives in North America and spreading about the continent. Somewhere between the Great Plains and the Great Lakes, a large animal was weaving its way through trees and underbrush. The animal, a male gray wolf, kept alert as it searched for a possible food source. Being without a pack, it was hard to keep sustained, especially when the hairless creatures that were constantly growing in numbers like rabbits killed everything they came in contact with, even without actually touching anything at all.

Speaking of rabbits... there was one now! The wolf's amber eyes lit up at the sight of fresh meat, and its body lowered to the ground so it could sneak up on its prey. Just as the wolf was about to pounce on the unsuspecting rabbit, however, there was a noise just outside of his field of vision, then another canine burst into view. This one was a lot younger than the male—it looked to be a yearling while he was nearing four years—and seemed to also be inexperienced since the rabbit quickly took notice and bolted off. Before the younger wolf could ruin his kill, however, the older male, who shall henceforth be known as Solgir, leapt deftly out from his hiding spot, chased the rabbit down, then snatched it up in his maw and snapped its back with a deadly crunch.

The younger wolf first stood back in awe, shocked by the sudden presence of the older male. However, that surprise quickly waned after it fully realized what had just transpired. As soon as it figured out that its potential meal was in another canine's mouth, it quickly ran up to the larger male and attempted to grab the kill that it failed to make. Of course, Solgir wasn't going to have any of that, so he growled deeply, raised his tail, and showed what he could of his fangs that were mostly buried in the rabbit's flesh. However, that only caused the yearling to take a few steps back, and after that, the younger male began whining and started to nose Solgir. To the older male, this was odd behavior, especially considering that they didn't know one another in the slightest, but the behavior was tiresome either way, as it reminded him of noisy scavengers trying to annoy him away from his meal.

In this instance, it was working rather well, since even trotting away with his catch to eat didn't make the pup leave him alone. Only when he felt he had no other choice, Solgir released his prey and proceeded to chase the younger male. The yearling slipped away with but a nip to his hindquarters, then grabbed the dead rabbit and made a run for it. The surprise in having the rabbit taken so easily didn't last for long, as the wolf quickly followed the foolish pup so he could get his food back. However, when he finally caught up to the yearling, Solgir found that the pup was hiding in a small cave. The cave didn't have an entrance large enough for the adult to pass through easily, so all he could do was wait outside, pace, and growl into the opening. Of course, these efforts were fruitless, and after a while, he simply settled down in front of the cave to wait until he could catch the cub and give him proper punishment.

Not too long into his wait, Solgir began to hear muffled noises from within the cave. They were sounds he hadn't heard any animal make before, though they sounded a little like the whimpering of a newborn. Sitting up, then edging forward towards the hole of the cave, Solgir pushed his muzzle through the opening and sniffed a couple of times before he crinkled his nose and pulled it back out. There was something strange in there that smelled faintly familiar to him, but he couldn't quite remember where he'd smelled such a scent before. Along with that

smell, however, there was one he did recognize: death. The dead thing also held the familiar scent, he realized, and thus he concluded that the two things must be related.

When he stuck his nose in again to get a better sense of things, Solgir was surprised to feel something on the other end this time: the bearer of the scent he did not know. It was touching his nose, but before he could take a bite, the thing seemed to be tugged out of the way. The older male jerked his muzzle out when there was a hard nip to it from the yearling on the other side. Whatever was in there with the young wolf, it was obviously protecting it.

Solgir waited only a half hour longer before standing and trotting off to find a different meal. No way there was anything left of that rabbit now anyways, so why bother sticking around and waiting. Despite that, he still felt like there was something interesting about that cave, so as soon as he had caught himself something to eat, the wolf returned to the opening to investigate further. After a while of sitting at the front, the male began to sniff around for other ways into the cave, for he figured that there had to be at least one other way to get into that place.

It took nearly no time at all to find out that there was another entrance, but that did him no good at all because it was blocked off. A large pile of rocks and debris covered what was once a six to seven foot entryway, and at this spot, there was also the smell of death and of the familiar, unknown scent. Upon the realization that there was no other way in, Solgir returned to the alternate opening and waited patiently a short distance away in the bushes. While waiting, he took a nap, and when he woke sometime at dusk, the yearling was outside.

Feeling that now he could deliver proper punishment to the whelp, Solgir crept forward on his belly, trying to get as close to the young wolf as he could before being spotted; he wouldn't want the youngster to run back into hiding again. However, before he could get too close to the yearling, the older wolf noticed that scent again and saw that the wolf was not alone on his ventures outside; he'd brought what he'd been sharing the cave with along, possibly so they could both get some fresh air. This creature, Solgir realized, was very similar to the hairless beings that walked on two legs, but it had a few key differences: it was very small (less than half the size of the ones he'd seen) and it walked on all fours—albeit a bit awkwardly. It was a tanned little animal, shaggy dark hair on its head but nowhere else, had a short—one could say, nonexistent—muzzle, and had very poor excuses for claws.

What the yearling was doing with this thing, Solgir did not know, but the confusion put the wolf's plans for vengeance on hold. He would need a closer look at the little thing, to both determine just what it was and whether it was a threat or could be a possible meal. The older male stood the rest of the way and paced towards the two a bit more daringly (now that they were a considerable distance from the cave), but before he got too close, the yearling's ears flicked in his direction and the young male turned about quickly to face Solgir, fangs bared. Surprisingly, the little wolf was determined to protect the smaller creature; the yearling stood in front of the hairless thing and blocked Solgir's path, growling and snapping, despite the fact that the young male wouldn't have a chance in a real fight against the older wolf. However, the older male backed off a bit, not really put off by the threat, but also too interested in the little creature to try forcing his way past, since that might result in the two youngsters bolting.

Walking casually around to the yearling's side, Solgir ignored the fact that the wolf was still blocking his way from any direction but instead focused in getting a better look at the hairless creature whom was also growling—though it seemed as though it was merely imitating the young wolf instead of doing it of its own accord. This scene perplexed the older wolf so much that he simply sat down and watched the two until they, too, seemed to be confused (or at least the wolf did--the other creature didn't seem to understand what was going on). The yearling made unsure whimpering noises as he looked back and forth from the older male to the young creature beside him. Solgir decided that he'd just watch and wait until he better understood the situation, and it seemed that that was what the young wolf decided to do as well since he had finally quieted and sat down as well. The young hairless creature followed suit, but it still seemed more interested in other things than the strange wolf before them.

Eventually, the wolves lied down, and Solgir rested his head on his paws, simply watching the two lazily. After a while, the yearling began inching forwards on his belly, pausing only once or twice as he was still rather unsure of the older male. When the young wolf finally did make it to Solgir, however, he sniffed at other wolf's muzzle uncertainly, ears pulled back, tail almost between his legs, and whining very softly. Solgir, in response, growled quietly, then sniffed at the other wolf's muzzle, his own position more dominant as he slowly stood up, allowing the younger wolf to lick him under the maw, a sign of submission. The hairless creature looked on with nary a clue what was happening, but when Solgir moved away from the yearling—his position non-threatening—and came towards it, its eyes widened a certain degree and it looked from the larger wolf to the smaller one for reassurance. The younger wolf kept just behind the older one, still wary of the stranger but seemingly trusting enough to allow him access to the precious being it protected.

When Solgir got close enough to touch the young thing, he put his nose on it, smelled it, and examined it with his eyes. It was as strange to look at up close as it had been from a distance, and its smell reminded him of the hairless creatures he'd seen before, as well as of the other scents from the caves that held death with them. Not too long into his examination, the hairless cub put its grimy little paws into his neck fur and began pulling and tugging. This action wasn't exactly painful, but it was unfamiliar, so the wolf jerked away rather quickly and growled at the creature. The hairless thing was none to pleased with this, so he began to make an awful sound that wasn't a whimper nor was it a whine yet it still had the same effect on both wolves. It hurt their ears to a certain degree, and when Solgir would have nipped the thing to make it stop, the young wolf instead padded up to the cub and nuzzled it with his face until it was quiet. This was strange to the older male, but he hadn't raised cubs before either way, so that was not much of a surprise.

After these events passed, Solgir decided that he would stay with the two younger creatures and watch over them. It was an odd thing that compelled him to do this, but he felt that both youngsters needed his attention and care, despite that they could both be rather annoying at times. They left that cave place not too long after his arrival, as he did not enjoy that scent that lingered within it and he could also not go inside of it, which was just as troubling to him. The young wolf and the hairless cub

(referred to hereon as Otez and Denali, respectively) were both cautious around Solgir for the first few days—especially Otez—but they all eventually got to know one another better as

the older male would bring food back to the two. It had been a long time since Solgir had last been in a pack, and even though these two couldn't really count as one, they were very much like family to him as the months passed.

Months turned into years, and as the three lived, traveled, and grew together, so their bond became strong. Never again since that first meeting did Solgir think of hairless man-creatures when he saw Denali. The thing which had once been a human toddler was now a young boy, but now, any human who saw him would likely not consider him to be even remotely related to a man. On the outside, the boy was very dirty and gangly with matted hair, long nails, tough palms and feet, and an all-fours walk that he had used so long that his very bones and tendons had adjusted to it so that he could no longer walk on two legs as the average human could. His teeth were as sharp as his senses, as many years living with his two wolf brothers had adjusted his hearing, smell, and sight so much that he was more animal than human. He hunted with his brothers, ate and fought over meals with them, slept curled up with them in their fur, and howled with them. He was a wolf in their eyes and the eyes of any animal that they hunted or that got in their way.

In his five years of traveling with his pack mates, he had killed small game like rabbits, birds, and even fish, larger game like deer and moose (very rare), and even came face-to-face with larger predators like bears and big cats (though those, they mostly avoided as best they could). However, in all that time, he had never seen another human being like himself. Solgir wanted to stay as far away from human-infested areas as possible, so they kept to the mountains and areas where humans hadn't touched yet. With the way humans were spreading, though, it became harder and harder to avoid them all, and eventually, they would have to run into them.

The time came for that to happen just shortly after Denali turned eight, not too long after summer's end. The trio had ventured southward to avoid colder weather and were very close to the Great Salt Lake, taking a path that they had once taken before a few years prior. After an unsuccessful hunt, they had come to rest on the bank of a river. Solgir was getting old and had lost an eye, so his ability to hunt wasn't as good as it once was, which made it more difficult for any of them to catch large prey to eat. On the other hand, Otez and Denali were excellent at hunting, though the wolf was certainly more superior than the man in this instance, so they would leave the aging male to find their own food and share it with him once they'd had their fill. There was a wolf pack residing not too far from where they were that Solgir was leading them to because he seemed to know his time was near an end and that the two youngsters would do much better in a group than on their own. By following the river, they would be able to enter the wolf pack's territory with relative ease, then be able to slowly join the pack, if first accepted.

Before they could get too far down the river, however, they found that their path was blocked by certain unusual structures made of sticks and dirt. The materials formed a sort of short wall, blocking off easy access to both the river and the path that was once clear along the bank. When the three arrived at this barricade, they could find no easy way through, so they decided to take the best route and go around. However, that could not be accomplished as

quickly as they'd hoped, for there were things within the wall that moved about, preparing for some sort of celebration that continually left the safety of the wall to gather things from outside. These creatures—though Solgir recalled seeing them in the past and Otez shared a few sparse memories of being raised by them—were alien to Denali and both intrigued him and frightened him. He, like his wolf brothers, was wary of these beings that walked on two legs and made odd mouth-sounds and gestures with their forelimbs. They almost reminded him of giant, featherless birds the way that they stood and how they made so much noise. Despite that, he didn't feel inclined to try to eat them, both because they were foreign to him and because his brothers did not seem interested in interacting with the things at all.

Unfortunately for the lot of them, however, their plan of sneaking by unnoticed did not go so well; a young man, out to fetch some wood for the fire, spotted them in the light of his torch. He cried out in shock, seeing first the wolves, then in terror upon seeing the wolf-child, running back and calling to his people that there were dark and evil spirits in the forest. This caused a commotion within the walls, and the trio ran off, not bothering to see what those in the village were going to do about their new and unusual problem.

The next morning, the three were resting beside the river once more, nearly three miles from the village. None of them seemed worried about the chaos they had unknowingly caused, but Denali still could not get the images of the strange beings out of his head. They were not familiar to him in any way, as he could not possibly remember that he had been raised by humans like them for nearly three years of his life, when he was very young, and because the wolves seemed to not trust them, neither did he. Despite that, he still felt very curious about the things and decided that he would lead the hunt with Otez in that direction while Solgir slept. Otez was not very excited about this, but they had seen what could be possible game the night previous, just waiting in the field behind the small patch of woods, so they headed in that direction, if only for the prospect of a meal.

Instead of going the route they had originally come, they kept a distance from the river so that they were making a diagonal path towards the field and avoiding running into any humans near the village. They did not know that their tracks from the previous night were being followed—how could they?—so the two continued on without worry of being hunted, for they had never been hunted before.

It was a very short distance to the meadow, especially when compared to their previous travels. When they arrived, though, they spotted something that they hadn't before when they were passing through: a hairless creature on the other end of the field (which was currently inhabited by a small herd of deer) holding some sort of curved stick in one hand and a straight, pointed stick in the other. It put those two together in some odd fashion, then the straight stick seemed to disappear, only to reappear in one of the deer. Denali was amazed by this and didn't seem to notice that the rest of the herd was running off until Otez delivered a sharp bark in his direction and they both burst from the bushes and gave chase. The wounded deer with the arrow in its flank was the slowest one, so their attention turned mostly to it; not only that, but Denali was very interested to see just what that stick was to have magically traversed such a long distance in such a short time.

The man who had shot the arrow was just about to shoot another when two hairy things jumped out of the brush a few hundred feet to his right and began chasing his deer. He hollered, got up, and made to chase them with an axe-like weapon before he realized that the two things were not both animals. He stopped his chase shortly before the two took down the deer—the human-like creature biting into its throat and the wolf pinning it to the ground. The sight of that primeval hunt so shocked the man that it took him several minutes of watching the two kill and begin eating the deer before he finally caught himself and ran away to tell others. By the time he'd made it through the woods, back to the village, explained his story as best he could (for the language at that time was still very simple), and returned to the field with reinforcements, the two beasts were gone—and so was half the deer carcass!

After Denali and Otez had had their fill of the deer, they brought back a chunk of meat each in their mouths to give to Solgir. It wasn't much, but it would sustain the old wolf; they knew they weren't going back there where that bizarre thing was roaming about. It took them a bit longer to return than it did to leave because their bellies were full, and they were left fully gorged and slow because of it. When they neared where they had left Solgir, they had to slow their pace further because of the scents that attacked them as soon as they got close. The two quickly buried their meat for later, then paced ahead to check out the situation. As they got closer to the edge of the river, they noticed unfamiliar tracks in the dirt, as well as the strong scents that reminded them of the village.

They found that they could get no closer to where Solgir was, however, when they found many two-legged creatures wandering about, seeming to be looking for something and carrying more sharp sticks. It was nightfall before the humans left, and during that waiting period, Denali and Otez had to lurk a distance away, keeping hidden from those creatures that they did not know. When the men finally did leave, however, the pair got their chance to search for Solgir.

The pair was unable to find a body at first and howled for their lost brother who did not respond. Their howls frightened the villagers in their homes who could hear the distant cries, but the two did not know nor would they have cared if they did. Hours passed without luck, but after following the trail that a few humans had taken, they finally caught a scent that they were more familiar with: blood. Nearly a mile away from where Solgir had been sleeping earlier that day, they found him.

The old wolf's body was mangled and cut deeply in multiple places. Human tracks surrounded the body and some of the sticks the hairless creatures used were still on the ground and in Solgir. At first, neither Otez nor Denali understood what had happened. They made many attempts to “wake” their fallen friend, but all were in vain, for soon after the sun rose, they came to realize that their friend was gone.

It was nearly a week before they left the area. Many humans had continued searching for the two, but they kept away, knowing to not get near the savage killers. They did not feel vengeance in their hearts, for they were simply beasts, but they did mourn the death of their father-figure. When they were able, they came to his body multiple times, and even though it was decomposing and slowly losing resemblance to their friend, they still showed their

respects and sometimes would howl sadly for hours. They would chase scavengers away and did their best to keep the humans from nearing it (mostly by distracting and scaring them), but eventually, they knew it was time to go, so they left.

Denali and Otez followed the river that Solgir had left them on, headed towards the pack lands they knew little about, hoping for a new start and better life. Within a few days, they had traveled over a hundred miles, and it was then that they found the wolf territory that Solgir had meant for them to go to. The two had to ease into it on their own, not knowing how the system of territory worked but only loosely from dealing with a couple of packs in their past. The pack took notice of them being in their territory within a few days, and after wary and somewhat violent greetings, the alpha pair allowed the two to stay.

Though it took many weeks for the two to be fully accepted into the pack—even longer for Denali, whom the wolves had many doubts about and would avoid and harass in the beginning—in time, they made a living in the pack. When he became a strong, young adult, Denali raised in rank above the rest and became the alpha male. Otez died of old age before he could see that happen, but the two lived and prospered together within the pack while they were together.

It would be many more years before Denali encountered another human being. He killed any humans he faced from then on, knowing that if they were around, they would present a danger to his pack. People would tell stories of a creature that may have looked like a man but was surely an evil wolf spirit not to be trifled with. Man would never set foot in that land until Denali died after thirty years with the pack. Even after then, there were stories that would still haunt locals and keep them respectful of the wolf pack living there, for many generations until stories became legends and legends became myth and slowly the story disappeared into history.