



Speed Write: A Hunt Gone Awry

Written by Victor Waite
Time: 205 min Word Count: 1314



Many years ago, a massive dire wolf began terrorizing the many small villages nestled within the Sea of Trees. He would snatch furs from their beds at night and swallow them whole, leaving nothing but a vacant space. The local hunters and trappers could do nothing to stop him, and word of the great beast soon spread. Furs from all around gathered to claim the gold and glory offered in exchange for the wolf's head. Many accepted the quest, but none returned. They likely befell the same fate as many defenseless villagers had, but it was tough to say. There ancient wood was a dangerous place, after all.

With every fallen hunter and huntress, the reward for slaying the beast grew. They called him Ran'Kor, and in a few short months he became a living legend. Mothers told their children of his appetite for misbehaving little boys and girls, even as they feared him themselves. The cycle of renewed hope and rehashed dismay continued with startling regularity , until six of the greatest huntsmen the land had to offer teamed up to claim their prize. Days passed without their return, and the villagers slowly lost hope altogether. One by one, they packed up and left their homes for more welcoming territories. The Sea of Trees is largely deserted now, but Ran'Kor's bounty still stands.

A lust for gold and a hint of hubris is what eventually drew Nylea to the desolate forest. The fame that came success was merely a bonus. She had heard the tales of Ran'Kor since she was but a little vixen kit, but they had the opposite effect on her. Instead of filling her with a fear for luminous eyes and flashing teeth, they instilled her with a yearning for adventure. Could such a creature really exist? How many of the stories were actually true? These were the questions that ran through her head as she lay awake at night.

When she came of age, Nylea chose the life of a huntress, much to her family's surprise. Most girls walked a more traditional path, but she was able to sway her parents by splitting an arrow with another at fifty paces. She would grow to become the pride of her village, able to track and capture anything that walked the earth or soared the heavens. Then one day, she simply left with nothing more than a note in her bedroom. "I will return a hero," it said, "wrapped in the pelt of Ran'Kor with enough coin in pocket to last us fifty lifetimes." Her parents wept over the loss of their child that day.

Had Nylea not been occupied with tracking the legendary beast, she may have taken the time to regret that decision. Ran'Kor was leagues above anything in her homeland, both in scale and wit. Judging by his tracks alone, he easily filled the dimensions stories provided. Normally an animal of his size would have trouble concealing itself, but Ran'Kor was aware of this. He left an unwieldy trail that often doubled back or looped into itself, making it nearly impossible to pin down exactly where he was lurking. The wolf was clearly playing mind games with her, and to the outside observer, he appeared to be winning.

For hours upon hours Nylea followed his maddening traces, fearing the next twist would put her face to face with him. The vixen would often peer over her shoulders, expecting Ran'Kor to pounce from behind and end their little game. It took a heavy toll on her mind, and there was no stopping until

one player emerged victorious. She was wise enough to keep the old legends in mind, and she knew any rest beyond a quick nap would spell the end for her. Even that would be risky. She could not let this hunt draw into the night.

Unfortunately for the poor girl, her fears were realized. The sun dipped below the horizon, plunging the forest into nearly perfect darkness. Nylea was more than capable of finding her way between massive trees in the low light, a blessing from her vulpine heritage, but Ran’Kor still had the advantage. Things only got worse for her as a low rumble rolled in from the distance. She recognized it immediately as the prelude to a fierce storm. If she didn’t find or make shelter soon, she ran the risk of exposure to the unforgiving elements. At the very least, the rain would erase her trail as it would his. Mother Nature is fond of her double-edged swords.

Nylea got her first lucky break since venturing out on this increasingly foolish quest when she found a hollow in the base of one of the larger residents of the forest. It only took a few minutes to clean out the rotting litter that covered the floor, and it was big enough to house both the worn vixen and a small campfire. She gathered enough wood and kindling to last her the night before the downpour arrived, and tended a small flame in an alcove. She would fall asleep in its warmth, her head filled with thoughts of home.

The vixen was completely oblivious to the danger she had put herself in. In her haste and exhaustion, she never made sure the little hole was abandoned. Not long after she passed out, Ran’Kor returned to one of his favored dens to find that his dinner had practically offered herself to him. A pleased growl rumbled from his hulking chest, prompting Nylea to stir in her sleep. Ran’Kor lumbered to where her orange furred head lay, and quietly opened his colossal muzzle. Her lean form was easily slender enough to rest between his teeth.

It is hard to say whether Ran’Kor’s eating habits were more or less humane than those of his smaller brethren, but all ethics aside, he had acquired a taste for live, whole prey. He carefully worked his jaw under Nylea’s shoulders, the back of her head now resting on the slick pillow of his tongue. The muscle wormed its way under the rest of the vixen’s body, and he was soon able to encase her upper body in his great maw. In the soft glow of the fire, the battle-scarred wolf lifted his head and tipped his muzzle back. Only when she began to slide towards the back of his mouth did the huntress finally wake.

Nylea was completely disoriented in her flesh and ivory cage, until the muscular ring capping his gullet crested her head. Her screams were muffled by crushing pulses of undulating tissue, and each wave drew a frighteningly large amount of her deeper. Extensive experience along with a little help from gravity made for a thankfully quick trip, but some would argue that the worst was yet to come.

The slimy sac was ready for her, and was churning around her before she could even free her arms. The air in his gut was thin and rotten, but she wouldn’t have to endure it for long. A crass belch rang out from the den, followed by a sated chuff. Any air that followed the vixen down was expelled, and the gut wrapped her tightly in its acidic embrace. The lack of oxygen mercifully robbed her of consciousness long before the harsh fluids could claim her.

Ran’Kor’s belly sagged nearly to the ground as his meal gave up the fight and accepted its destiny as fuel for the legendary beast. The wolf laid down by the fire Nylea so graciously built for him, curling around his hefty middle and settling in for the night. This one had proven to be the most worthy prey yet, having held her own far longer than any of the others. He did not know why so many two-legs chased after him, but he welcomed a good hunt and a filling meal all the same.