

Baerstolwef:

Part 1

My character's name is Baerstolwef. She is a dwarf from the mountain of Stok-- that's the community name for it, you can make it whatever mountain you want. Her community was very primitive and paternalistic. The Stok dwarves live deep in the heart of Stok, very remote from the outside world. While they have forms of artificial and natural light- the denizens of Stok rarely venture outside of the mountain- that right is reserved only in times of necessity and only for those that are properly trained for it. The Stok community is very ritualistic and regimented. Its society is almost caste-like: marriages are arranged from a very young age and rarely ever outside of a family's social standing.

Baerstolwef was born to Maulstoch and Maulstochweaf. Maulstoch was near the bottom of the social strata-- he was a tunneler. Tunnelling in Stok is a very dangerous and undesirable job with a high mortality rate. Thus, a family that tunnels (if the father tunnels than it is presumed the sons will tunnel barring extremely unusual circumstances). When Maulstoch's daughter was only three months old, they arranged for her to be married to a young boy (3 years old at the time of the arrangement) from another tunneling family. When she was eight, she married Baerstol and became Baerstolwef.

The names in Stok are indicative of the regimented society. Women are possessions to be married off to hard working men. Except for royalty, all women of Stok are subjected to near slave-like conditions. Men cannot be punished for abusing or mistreating their wives, unless to do so is wasteful for the society (which it often is if a wife is killed). All women were eventually married. The men of Stok could take as many wives as needed (again, as long as it is not wasteful). Most males in Stok had several wives. The mortality rate amongst males was so high that most had four or more.

Back to the names. Women are possessions, thus they are not named until they are betrothed (always under a year old). Technically, according to Stok religion, the women weren't supposed to be named until married, but for practical reasons, they went by their married names after it was arranged. Part of the marriage ceremony is the "naming" of the woman-- where the woman is bestowed with her name in the eyes of Slorstok, the dwarven God.

Side Note: Which brings up a point that the dwarves of Stok only believe in one god- Slorstok- God and Creator of the Mountain. The dwarves believe other God's exist, but they have to gain entrance to the mountain's summit (heaven) just like any other person. In other words, if you weren't a dwarf of Stok you probably couldn't get in. Thus all gods are subservient to Slorstok.

Back to names (again). A woman's name is broken into parts determined by her husband's name. Males' names are determined by their birth order. All names have a surname- followed by Sto (to designate Stok)- followed by a suffix to tell which child that male was. Example- Baerstol was the second son to his father Baerstorm. Baer is the family name- Sto is for Stok- L is the prefix for a second son. Baerstol's father was a third born (rm is the suffix for third born). My character's father was a first born (ch is the suffix for first born. BTW- ch is pronounced as a hard "K." Thus the first born is given the honor of having the last part of his name pronounced the same as the mountain. The problem that this naming system leads to is that there are many men with the same name. If Baerstol had two sons, the second would be named Baerstol and the first would be named Baerstoch (like my character's husband's brother). Because the mortality rates for males is so high, however, it is not such a problem as you would imagine.

Okay enough confusion. Women take their husband's names with a suffix to denote which wife they are. My character's name is Baerstolwef- wef denoting that she is the first wife of Baerstol. A second wife is denoted with a waef, and a third wife is denoted with a wyf. For sake of the record, my character's name is pronounced: BARE-stole-wif. I'm sure there's a million things I'm forgetting about the society, but I'm going to send this and the next post (which I'll do right now) will involve Baerstolwef's personal history.

Part 2

So Baerstolwef is to be banished. Here's the ritual. Banishment is very rare-- only done in the cases of women whose husbands die and can't be accepted by a brother. Almost all other crimes are punishable by death.

The banishment is a highly secretive, private ceremony. Baerstolwef did not know what it entailed until it happened. The high priest of Stok took her to a ceremonial room near the surface of the mountain. There he stripped her of her clothes and proceeded shave her head. After she was bald, he rubbed a highly acidic, extremely painful balm into her scalp. He tattooed ancient dwarven script on the backs of her hands (almost like hieroglyphics) which covers the backside of her hands on both sides nearly up to her elbows. The writing on both hands is identical and the high priest told her what it said: "Before you is the unnamed. Never open the gates of Storstock for she is without a soul." The balm on her scalp was to permanently scar Baerstolwef's head to ensure that hair would never grow on her head or face again. The significance of this was that when she tried to ascend to the realm of Storstock, she would not be recognized as one of Stok breed. She would be seen as an outsider and the gates would remain closed. To this day, Baerstolwef is completely bald (no hair, eyebrows, nothing) and her head is horribly scarred. The tatoos on the backs of her hands are still as bright black as the day it was engraved on her.

The high priest sealed her out of the cave completely weaponless and naked-- All remenants of the Stok community had been stripped from her. She never saw the inside of the mountain again.

That's it for her involvement with Stok. My e-mail is fucking up- so I don't know when you'll get this, but I'm going to wait until tomorrow to go into my post-mountain history.

Part 3

Fuck! My chair collapsed, I accidently hit the escape button on my keyboard and it erased the whole history I had typed. Fuck! I don't even know where I started! Fuck!

At least I sent the society info. Let my try this again.

Baerstolwef and Baerstol had a very happy marriage. She was fortunate to have married Baerstol who was considered very goodlooking by dwarven standards. Baerstolwef, on the other hand, was quite plain and homely. Not that this mattered to Baerstol- he was unquestionably faithful, loving and attentive to Baerstolwef. In many ways he didn't fit in to the Stok community. First- he was extremely intellectual and enlightened. He was a hardworker who spent his waking hours (he only slept 2-3 hours per night) talking with his wife or reading on his various intellectual pursuits. He taught Baerstolwef to read and write, which was nearly unheard of in Stok community even for royal women (although Baerstol and Baerstolwef kept this a secret). They spent hours discussing philosophy, history, mathematics, etcetera. Due to her marriage, Baerstolwef was probably the most educated female in the mountain. Most importantly, Baerstol never took another wife, finding all the companionship he needed in Baerstolwef. He viewed her not as a possession but as an equal.

Baerstolwef's informal education led to her "enlightened" views on women's rights. When the women would congregate to crush coal into coke, she would make scandalous comments like, "The man who takes his hand to his wife needs to be careful of whose hands are preparing dinner." Baerstolwef had a reputation as a troublemaker.

Unfortunately, when Baerstol died in a tunnel collapse, Baerstolwef was not able to produce children yet. She was only 15 and in the unhealthy conditions of Stok it was common for women not to be able to have children until 16 or 17. In the Stok culture, when a man died, his oldest brother had the option to take his wives (which usually happened because a man with many wives is a wealthy man). If the eldest brother refused (rare) or was dead (likely) then they went to the next oldest brother, and so down the line until the youngest brother had the option. The widow would go through a "renaming" ceremony (a truncated version of a wedding) and would take on the brother's name, but in the lowest priority of wife. Thus, if Baerstolwef was accepted by Baerstol's eldest brother, she would be renamed Baerstochwan (fifth wife of Baerstoch).

Baerstol came from a small family with only three brother's alive when he died. His oldest brother and two younger brothers had all refused Baerstolwef because they beleived her ideas on women's equality would "poison the well" of their existing wives. Thus, no brother would have her- which suited Baerstolwef fine because she couldn't stand any of those demanding slavemasters.

In Stok society, when a woman is not accepted by any of her dead husband's brothers (or if they are all dead) she is banished from the mountain. Once she has been intimate with a member of the Baer family, she cannot be

intimate with another family. It would taint both family's and bring dishonor to her widows family. Similarly, infidelity is punishable by the death of the woman if she is of another family from the adulterer (but no punishment if they are of the same married family). But that's another story. The long and short of this is that Baerstolwef had to be banished.

Part 4

Okay here's the rest... of the story.

Immediately after being banished, Baerstolwef was nearly infantile. The light was so bright she was practically blind. The surroundings were alien and unforgiving. Even though it was early spring (chilly, but not snowing), she had no clue how to survive in this unknown world. For the first several hours she simply sat, covering her eyes with her hands to hold back the pain of the bright sun.

The very day she was banished- she was captured. While curled up in the shade of a rock, dumbstruck by her new situation, a trio of young, male bugbears stumbled across her. They literally stumbled over her because they were piss drunk and had no clue she was there before they inadvertantly kicked her. Overpowering her did not take any force- she went almost voluntarily in her confusion- the entire time the bugbears grunting and hollaring at their fortunate find.

The bugbears took her back to their encampment- a total mess of decadence, testosterone and alcohol. The group was approximately 75-100 male bugbear warriors. Baerstolwef had heard of this group while she was in Stok- they had been making unsuccessful attacks on the dwarves for quite sometime. From the few captives that the dwarves of Stok had taken in the skirmishes, it was learned that this group of bugbears (who were supposed to be on some obscure campaign to claim some land as a trophy for a lord back in their homeland) had become sidetracked when they heard a rumor the dwarves of Stok industriously mined gold out of the mountain all day (the rumor apparently was made by a small community of hobbits 50-60 miles east in a successful attempt to divert the bugbears from enslaving the hobbit community). For the past two months the bugbears had been assailing the dwarves of Stok in search of their massive horde of gold (which of course did not exist). Bugbears, by the way, were not uncommon in these remote areas, the marauding hordes came through several times per year in search of something to demand tribute from to take back to a needy lord. Normally, however, the bugbears left the dwarves alone due to the considerable defenses of the dwarven tunnels. This time, however, the bugbears were unusually persistent due to their ill-conceived notions of piles of gold so high that each of them could be a lord in the homeland commanding useless footsoldiers to go fetch unheralded treasures.

When Baerstolwef was led into the encampment, she was met with little reaction from the rest of the troop. Everyone of the bugbears was either: 1)passed out (it was approximately 6pm); 2) gambling; 3)wrestling or otherwise engaged in a game of strength; or 4) sleeping (hard to distinguish from choice 1). No one seemed to notice the scabbed, naked dwarf being led in roughly by the trio of young, drunken bugbears.

Baerstolwef was led to a tree which had chains hanging from its upper limbs. A neck manacle was clamped around her neck and attached to the chains. The manacle was like an iron collar, a little loose on her due to her diminutive stature. The collar had three links- each of which was attached to a hanging chain. Once fully attached. She was effectively locked in place by the collar, attached from above. Her feet touched the ground, but she could not sit or even stoop down without hanging herself on the collar. After clumsily locking her in place, the three bugbears that originally captured her wandered off to other activities of excess, it was as though they forgot they had even captured her. The rest of the evening, she was left alone, except for the occassional bugbear falling into her accidentally and then rolling (or being rolled away). At approximately midnight (although Baerstolwef had no way of knowing the time) the entire encampment was asleep- no one yet having acknowledged the presence of their new found captive.

Part 5

That first night was hell. Baerstolwef was exhausted from the unbelievable events that had occurred in the past 24 hours, yet she was rushed with adrenaline nearly the entire time. She couldn't sit to relax, she couldn't lay down to sleep. Her legs ached with the effort of being forced to stand so long. She stood, her legs pillars of fire from the pain, and watched the bugbears snore, vomit and wheeze as they slept. The sounds and activity of the

night in this new world was terrifying. The shadows constantly moved with life, loud noises carried long distances. This was nothing like the tunnels and caverns of Stok.

The next morning, as the sun rose, all the bugbears remained asleep except one. Obviously a shaman, Baerstolwef (who still hadn't slept) was approached by this tremendous looking beast. The bugbear shaman looked like the others, but had odd wooden charms and symbols tied throughout his fur. His arms were pierced perpendicularly with long rods approximately a foot in length. Small bags with different powders and trinkets were tied to each side of each rod. He carried a long heavy staff, made of the shiniest, glinting bronze that Baerstolwef had ever seen.

To Baerstolwef's surprise, the shaman spoke quietly to her in Stok tongue (albeit broken and heavily accented). He said, "Hello tunneler. Later you talk me gold. You talk fast, you talk slow. I hurt you bad if fast or slow. I hurt you bad if gold or no gold. Me talk you now- I hurt you always. You know. You talk." The rest of the day went even worse. As the bugbears woke up, sober and hung over, they took their aggression on their newly discovered captive. Beating her for reasons beyond the understanding of Baerstolwef. Sometimes they stopped beating her to beat on each other, on to begin beating her again. Once the shaman came out and yelled at the entire congregation, pointing animatedly at Baerstolwef. Apparently he said something about being careful about not killing her because for the next two hours she was beaten with less force (of course the bugbears eventually forgot this and began in with new ferocity depending on their whim shortly thereafter). There was no pattern to it. There was no organized campaign to keep a sustained, tortured beating on Baerstolwef. It just happened as someone thought of it. Then someone would see it and they would want in and only by the grace of the fates everyone's interest waned. This went on for nearly a week. Baerstolwef discovered that she could wiggle her hands into the inside of the collar and give herself a little support so that she could go into a half-doze at night without strangling herself. She stood in a growing pile of her own waste. She was never allowed out of her collar. Indeed, she never left the stop she was practically suspended from.

Too lazy to clean up from under her, the bugbears eventually grew tired of stepping in her shit to beat her and the beatings (for the most part) tapered off. After a week of this, however, the torture wasn't in the beatings as much as the fact that she was being forced to stand naked in the cold for the last seven days. Every morning the shaman fed her a half cup of water and several mouthfuls of an unknown meat. It was enough to keep her alive, but only barely. She was nearly delirious now with hunger, exhaustion, and pain. She had little idea who she was, why she was there or what was happening to her. After the first week, in this condition, the shaman began questioning her as he fed her in the mornings.

The questions were difficult to understand, but the shaman never angered at the miscommunications. He would patiently re-explain his questions. She would try to answer them as best she could (it was hard to talk with the constant pressure her own body weight was putting on her neck via the collar). He would ask her the locations of tunnels. He would ask her about gold. He would ask her about the structural integrity of the tunnels and caverns. She always told the truth- she owed no loyalty to the citizens of Stok—the very community that had turned its back on her at her most vulnerable. But the information was not very valuable. No gold. Tunnels inward for many miles- downward three times as many. Tunnels most unstable at the new construction on the eastern side of the mountain (where the dwarves were seeking to improve a water source). Even if the shaman didn't like her answers, he didn't question her about the same subject again or get angry with her. He was well aware that she was completely without a will to lie to him and that each word she spoke was the truth as best she knew it.

After the third morning of questioning (approximately 10 days after being held captive) the shaman turned her to face the mountain and even supplied her with a makeshift chair to sit on. He told her to watch for in an hour he would do something he can only do every fifteen day-cycles. He wanted her to observe and tell him, upon his return if there are more advantageous places to conduct his activities. Not understanding, Baerstolwef complied- simply happy to have a seat.

With nearly two thirds of the group, the shaman ascended the mountain. Baerstolwef could barely make out the figures as she hiked up to a rocky outcropping of the Mountain of Stok. She could clearly see the shaman going through a bizarre ritualistic dance. This continued for approximately 20 minutes and culminating in him raising his staff and striking it into the ground with all his force. Magic pulsed the ground from this strike and rumbled viscously like a minor earthquake. Rocks and debris began sliding down the mountain as the earth heaved with the might of the shamans spell. For the first time in the past 10 days, Baerstolwef's wits flew back to her in a startling moment of clarity—this shaman was causing an earthquake to collapse tunnels in the dwarven community. Upon later reflection (many years after these events) Baerstolwef would realize that the shaman's

questioning of her was to try to figure out the subterranean structure so that he could wreck as much havoc on the dwarven population as possible without completely collapsing the main arteries of the community that he believed would lead to the hidden hordes of gold. At that moment- however, Baerstolwef realized none of this. All she knew was that the shaman did this every fifteen days. It was fifteen days earlier (to the best Baerstolwef could figure out) that Baerstol had been killed in a tunnel collapse. At that moment Baerstolwef realized that this shaman had killed her husband with his bugbear magic.

Part 6

The remaining handful of bugbears that had remained in camp were still asleep. Only two (one of which was one of her original jailors) had awoken and watched in awe of shaman's magic being worked on the mountain. One of the two bugbears was standing close enough for Baerstolwef to reach. Sitting on her stool, she had gained enough strength to fish out (with her feet) a large rock smeared with her own feces. Sitting back on the stool, she picked up the rock with her feet and passed it to her hands. The bugbears, still mesmerized, took no notice. With the strength of sheer hatred and revenge, Baerstolwef brought the rock down on the bugbear's head, cracking it open like it was paper. The bugbear died instantly. The only other bugbear awake ran over to aid the first. Having grabbed the dead bugbear's knife before his body could fall to the ground. The second bugbear should have killed her immediately, except that he didn't think this chained woman dwarf posed a threat- until she cut his throat before he could bend over to aid his brother bugbear. Quick on adrenaline, Baerstolwef grabbed this second bugbear before he could fall to the ground. The effort of holding up this deadweight nearly killed her as the collar dug into her neck. She could hardly remain standing holding this dead creature.

Holding him with one arm and rifling through his pockets with the other she found what she wanted- the key. They all had one- it was a generic key that worked all the shackles (even though she was the only person imprisoned). Indeed they were quite careless with them, but before now Baerstolwef could barely breath, much less think, much less think rationally, much less plot an escape. Now, however, she was acting on sheer instinct and a will for revenge. She wanted to avenge the death of her husband. These vile creatures that had meaninglessly killed her husband over a ridiculous rumor of gold at the heart of the mountain. Unlocking her collar, Baerstolwef picked up a sword and went to work. The dozen or so bugbears that remained were all passed out or sleeping. She moved swiftly to each one and swung the blade with all her force across their necks. They each died without making a noise. They each died without waking the next victim. After she had killed them all, she surveyed the scene. The shaman and the rest of the pack were still dancing on the mountain- whether it was ritual or celebration, Baerstolwef didn't care. Knowing she still had time, she scavenged the camp for what she'd need: a pack; a tent; rations; flint and steel; knives; the short sword she already used; some loose fitting clothes; two blankets, a pot to cook in and, most importantly, a map. Having collected it all (and put on the clothes) she still did not rest even though she was nearly dead with exhaustion. She then systematically gutted each of the dead bugbears and smeared their entrails around the camp. She went into the shaman's tent and pulled all his clothes and bedding and threw them on the fire that was still going in a circle of stones. As the fire flared up she gathered all the food she would not take with her and (after the fire was nearly too big to control) threw all the food in. By this point the bugbears on the mountain took notice of the fire and were obviously trying to decide whether or not to return to camp. The campsite was obscured by trees, so Baerstolwef was confident they could not see evidence of the massacre. Gathering her things with a quick glance at the map, Baerstolwef ran.

She ran away from the remaining bugbears and deep into the woods. Even after everything she had been through she ran for at least an hour. Even though she was still able to go on, she stopped at the perfect hiding place- a secluded cavern with a small hole barely big enough for an emaciated female mountain dwarf- far too small for a bugbear. Inside the space was enough for her to lay out- and dark enough for people on the outside not to be able to see her inside. She immediately laid down and exhaustion overtook her. She wanted nothing more to sleep, but knew that she had to force herself to eat something out of fear of dying of starvation and never waking up. She devoured an entire loaf of bread and slept- for three full days. When she awoke she was feeble- but her mind was now acute after the sleep. She knew to keep her wits about her and be careful of the bugbears. She stayed in the shallow cavern for two weeks- the duration of her supply of food. She only came out at night to get water from a nearby stream. After the two weeks, she had recovered, mostly, from her torture at the hands of bugbears. She still had several broken ribs and deep bruises, but she was functional. She didn't see that particular troop of bugbears again, and when she went back to the camp several weeks later, she saw what looked like a hurried departure (not surprising considering the pride of bugbears) with the dead buried in a

surprisingly deep grave marked with many stones in an intricate pattern. Baerstolwef removed the stones, knowing that the bugbears would forever lay buried unrecognized and forgotten.

Part 7

[I've been typing to much- so here's the rest in a nutshell:]

Baerstolwef spent the next four years learning to live alone in the northern forestlands. She did not have some unexplained "ranger knack" for relating to animals. It was something she learned from careful observation. Over the years she has learned to approach and "communicate" (through body language) with the animals of the forest—but this really translates to most creatures.

You know how she feels about sentient creatures. She's indifferent to them. She feels they are an abomination of nature. She doesn't hate them, but she has no compassion for them—they are no more important than a small stone at the base of a tree. By far, intelligent creatures are far less important to her than "natural" (including magical) creatures. Not that she doesn't kill animals- she does on a regular basis for food- but she is truly neutral. She is not an ecofreak, but sees most things that sentient creatures do as "wasteful" and unbalanced. She has seen the ordered society of Stok and the chaotic hell of the bugbears and she similarly disdains both. She exists because she must. She believes in no gods and no purpose to life. She is here because she is a creature born in a complex, interrelated world.

When the bugbears raid the land every few seasons, she takes the opportunity to practice her guerilla warfare. She steals no food from them, only new weapons to use in her battle against them. Otherwise, she has no contact with society. From careful observation she has taught herself to speak in basic bugbear. She is barely fluent, but can get by. If you can't tell- bugbears are the only sentient things she is passionate about. She hates them for killing her husband and she holds them in the greatest level of spite.

Baerstolwef saw Rob's character be attacked and brutally robbed by some bugbears. She saved him and slayed his attackers. Rob was near the point of death, mortally wounded. Baerstolwef returned him to her abode (a nicely hidden and fortified cavern she converted into a permanent camp) and nursed him back to health over several months. She is still unsure why she displayed such an uncharacteristic display of compassion for Rob. Maybe it was the bugbear attack, maybe it was that he was a stranger in a strange land. Either way she took him in. He is the only intelligent creature she feels any emotional bond with. Having healed him back to normal health over time, she actually has a trickle of loyalty to him, something unheard of since her banishment. Over this time she learned to communicate with him in his tongue. Hardly friends, they had a mutual respect for one another and a mutual bond- a complete hatred of bugbears.

I don't know what Rob's purpose is, but as for Baerstolwef, she has decided that there is a purpose in life- to decimate bugbears. She feels guilty for living so complacently in the wild, while the bugbears still live in large communities hundreds of miles away. She has decided to join Rob on his adventures so that she can learn about how the bugbears are organized and where they live (obviously Rob's character was not much help here). Her ultimate goal is to mount some attack on the large bugbear communities- killing many of their numbers. Before Rob she was nocturnal, but over time trained herself to sleep at night so that she could venture out with Rob.