

Hywel "Barzerker" Bleddyn – Backstory

Hywel Bleddyn was born the third son to Caradoc Bleddyn. First came Madoc, first born and first in everything else as well; he would be the first to claim the family's modest business providing lumber for their small village hidden up in the Cambrian Mountains, and the first to pick up a weapon to defend them in times of peril. He was a formidable boy who grew into a well-built man, aptly suited to work the mountain and carry on his father's name. Caradoc was thankful for his first son, for he served his family well. Second came Elyan, strong like his brother, but less suited to lead by example due to his frame and disposition. Fortunately, Elyan was quick-witted throughout his childhood and developed a great mind for numbers, therefore becoming invaluable to his family's livelihood. Over time, Elyan took more and more control over his family's finances, growing their business with his shrewd mind. Caradoc was thankful for his first and second son, for they each served their family well. Third, and rather unexpected, came Hywel. He was not built like his brothers, but was rather small and unimposing – if not for his dark eyes and dark hair, Caradoc may have claimed his third son to be a bastard. From birth, Hywel was introspective and quiet, and enjoyed himself by taking long walks alone or whittling small statues out of wood scraps rather than wrestling or training with his brothers and their friends on the mountain. Over time these walks needed a purpose, and so Caradoc put a bow into the hands of his youngest son and set him with the task of providing game for their family (and whomever else might need feeding in the village). Hywel took on this new role gladly, for it allowed him to leave for many hours a day and he eventually became a fairly skilled hunter. Caradoc was thankful for each of his sons, for they served their family well.

Hywel took great pleasure in his days spent hunting, and would often be gone for days on end for he had found some new path to explore. He heeded the words of his village, and never went outside the boundaries of their land. It was said that if any man or woman from the village left the boundaries, they could not return for they would bring death back home with them. It was superstition to be sure, remnants from the old days when the founders of the elven village had settled high in the mountains to escape the destruction that would befall them at the hands of the tribes on the plains and the other men who landed ashore with greed in their hearts and blood on their hands. Hywel was a curious young elf, however, and so he scouted further and further out, often coming right up to the boundary and climbing a particular tree to look out upon the world he could not explore. He wanted so much to set out from there, the way the sun shone down on the plains in the early morning made the world look so inviting. On one particular morning, Hywel was sitting in his usual spot to watch the sunrise, his bow at his side. There was a noise nearby, a shifting of leaves and so Hywel reacted, readied his bow and watched for his prey. The rustling moved just a bit further a way, so Hywel crept along following it. Again and again, the creature darted to a further bush, another hollow, so Hywel followed; he was only vaguely aware that he was nearing the boundary separating his world from the rest of the world, that is, until he crossed it and the rustling of the leaves suddenly came closer. The rustling became louder and louder, and switched from bush to bush until every leaf around Hywel was

shaking, as if a gale were coming through. As the sound roared, suddenly there was a column of leaves spinning upon the air.

Hywel watched the spectacle, his breath caught in his throat, for as the leaves turned in the air, an elf clad in shining green robes walked out. His hair was dark and fell about his shoulders, and his face had a strange glow to it. Hywel stood his ground, his bow aimed at the strange elf before he croaked out a terrified “Stop where you are.” The elf laughed and moved a hand, and Hywel’s arrow transformed into a branch before his very eyes with leaves sprouting here and there. “Silly boy, I’ve come to make you a deal,” said the strange elf. His voice echoed through the space between them, like music does around a fire. “Come now, there’s no sense in worrying about what my deal will bring to pass – you’ve already left the safety of your village behind.” The elf smiled, and it grew wider as Hywel gulped nervously. It was too late, he’d already crossed the boundary. Hywel put down his bow, as it was ineffective at this point – he was not stupid enough to doubt that he was in the presence of a god. The man laughed, clasping his hands, pleased with the young elf’s understanding. “Ah, yes that is the warning – once one leaves the boundary of the village, he shall bring death upon his return, but did you not know of the gift? I made the decree, and yet they only tell half the story?” The man let his shoulders slump, as if disappointed. “You see, the way this works is that I draw you out here... and then I offer you a gift if you do indeed leave. It’s always the same gift of course, and that’s untold adventures out in the world – you know, the big world out there.” He motioned out toward the plains with a hand, then stopped to stare at Hywel for a moment, his eyes gleaming. “Of course, to truly accept this gift, you must never return home, for the safety of your village. Well, more like the safety of your entire family, bloodline, everything. Oh, and yourself and whatever place you remain for too long, etcetera etcetera unto eternity,” He waved his hands, as though he were bored of the words pouring from his own mouth. Hywel stood frozen, staring at the mad god and wondering what god he was speaking to currently, he had ideas and all of them were bad news for him. That was always the problem with gods; they got *bored*. The god raised his hands, as if he knew he was interrupting Hywel’s thoughts in order to make him focus on what was important in this moment – him. The elf’s eyes shone brightly as he raised his hands, and the sound of his voice increased in volume, like a thunderstorm crashing about and echoing in the forest. “Hywel Bleddyn – you elf of the mountain, may never return to the hearth of your birth, nor create thine own – if a life of adventure is what you seek, you shall seek it for all of your days, until the earth once again claims your spirit.” With a loud crack, the sound of a tree splitting and heading toward the ground, the elf was gone in another rush of leaves and Hywel was left standing there in the clearing, cursing the god for proposing a bargain and then taking away his choice in the matter. Some bargain indeed. But then again, that was always the problem with gods.

That was the first day of Hywel’s curse, and the young elf knew the god would be true on his promise to destroy his village if he ever returned, but that meant that the mad god was also likely correct about the untold adventures waiting for him. Hywel left that day and never looked back: he missed his family and everyone he’d ever known, but their safety was important to him and now he had a whole world to see. He traveled from town to

town, discovering all the different kinds of people and places, staying at inns for a week or so before moving on again. He eventually picked up the ways of the lively taverns he loved so much as a way to pay for his lodging, which made it easier for him to go from place to place. His life was a repeating process of coming and going, ale and singing, and never the same company for too long until one particularly confusing tavern brawl. A large group of travelers had entered the tavern Hywel was currently helping out, most marked with a blue scrap of cloth emblazoned with a sword, two bolts of lightning, and a language Hywel had only seen a couple of times in his travels. At some point just as Hywel was attempting to deliver a frothy ale to one of their number, a phrase was passed about, which caused each and every one of this group to not only repeat a longer phrase all together, but also to become either very angry or incredibly entertained. With their chant, the tavern grew silent, just in time for the first blow to land. Then it was madness, punches flying everywhere, and occasional shouts of "WHO SAID IT?!" Hywel was so very confused, and he made his way around the tumult timidly, balancing the mug of ale carefully. The brawl went on and on and Hywel was forced to dive out of the way repeatedly, doing his best not to spill the ale he had been trying to deliver since before the commotion as he dodged flying fists and legs. Then, in the midst of a tangle of arms, he saw the man who had ordered the beverage and found his opportunity – he began his descent into madness once more, diving to avoid limbs and finally, finally reached the man. Hywel tapped him on the shoulder and offered him the beverage, the foam still sitting on top. The man was pleased. Eventually the commotion ended, and all parties involved were laughing and clapping each other on the back, admiring bruises. Hywel shook his head, as he truly did not understand anything about what had just happened, and turned to head back to the bar, but the man reached out a hand and held him still. It was then that Hywel was asked if he could serve his drinks on the run, and there where his untold adventures truly began. He travelled with the Berserkers, from that day forward, and because the Berserkers never settled in one place for too long, Hywel never had to leave his friends or fear for their safety. Hywel had outsmarted the elven god, it seemed, for he had found a home that moved.