

Peregrine - гімн героя

by David W Brown on March 5, 2022. ©

From my perspective on the twenty-fifth story, they would look like a fearsome, unstoppable column to human eyes.

But the devil's in the details, and I instead, see the truth.

The loose threads hanging from the hastily basted regimental patches; the brand new boots; the numerous youthful faces bearing telltale signs of neophyte shavers.

They form the bulk of the lengthy, ominous row marching through the empty streets. I look to the rear and see that like wolves, they have the strongest protecting their most vulnerable. These men bear true scars of war, but their real strength is that they have seen death and lived.

There is no mystery for them in what an end might be, and they walk with a commensurate swagger.

An ancient woman appears at the roadside, holding a hand lettered sign with a grammatically incorrect curse in the language of the wolves marching past.

Her toothless mouth emits a high, warbling melody that I recognize to be an anthem.

Behind her, I sense perhaps two dozen of her countrymen ensconced in the meagre safety of a partially destroyed building. Their hearts beat with the brave matriarch's, but their brains keep their mouths closed, silently praying to fight another day.

One of the wolves at the rear of the column shouts at her to be quiet, insulting her people which draws laughter from his fellows. She spits, most of the saliva dribbling down her chin, and begins to sing the words to the song.

The wolf indolently slides a pistol from his belt and turns her into a martyr. I feel the last breath leaving her frail body as if it were a clap of thunder and can watch no more.

As I ride the downdraft from eighty meters above, my heart rate slows and vision narrows to a pinpoint on the back of the wolf's skull. He is dead before the doyenne's body touches the ground and I whirl through the remaining pack like a tornado with teeth.

The last wolf is falling when I hear voices rising as one in song from the burned out building; a hymn to their martyred matriarch.

They are still singing as they begin to cut down the frightened lambs, who learn with finality the mystery of death.

Author notes

гімн героя = hero's hymn