



WARGS DOMINION

. D . ALLEN . RUTHERFORD .

. ILLUSTRATED BY COLLETTE JELLIS .

Wings

Dominion

D. Allen Rutherford

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ISBN: 978-1-329-69168-1 (sc)

ISBN: 978-1-329-69158-2 (e)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015919269

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Lulu Publishing Services rev. date: 11/18/2015

Chapter 1

“Victor, behind you! SHOOT, SHOOT! No Marcus, come back!”

Matt’s nightmare woke Freya, and she sat up in bed trying to wake him, “Matthew, wake up! It’s ok, you are at home.” When she touched his shoulder to try to wake him, he felt like he was on fire. “Oh, my God, please not again.” She said aloud to herself. Turning on the lamp next to the bed, she could see Matt was drenched in sweat, slobbering at the mouth and trembling. Freya frantically fumbled with the phone to call Doc Bertram. When Allison answered the phone, Freya was in tears.

“Freya? Is that you?”

“Yes... Allison I need to talk to Doc right away. Please hurry!”

“Ok, he’s coming. What’s wrong?”

“It’s Matthew; he is having another LTV seizure and it’s bad.”

“Freya, this is Doc. Tell me what’s going on.”

Intermittently, between crying and near hysteria, Freya managed to relate Matt’s condition. “Doc, it’s bad, what do I do? I can’t move him by myself... Oh God, tell me what to do.”

Doc could hear Matt shouting in the background, obviously hallucinating, “Freya, calm down and breathe, it’s going to be alright.”

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“Doc, I can’t wake him and he’s....” Freya choked up and began to cry.

“Freya, listen to me! Get hold of yourself and calm down. It will be alright, it’s just a phase of the LTV he’s going through and it will pass, but I need you to do something.”

Sobbing, Freya tried to focus on Doc’s voice, “What do you want me to do?”

“Make a bowl of ice water and use it to wet a wash cloth and keep it on his forehead. See if you can roll him on his side and try to keep his mouth clear.”

Freya did as Doc directed, doing her best to roll Matt on his side and propping him with pillows. By now Matt’s screams and shouts had subsided to inaudible mumbles mixed with strange growling sounds. “Ok Doc, what do I do now?”

“You are doing fine, he’ll be alright.”

“Doc, I can’t do this alone. I’m afraid....,” Freya began to cry again.

“Freya, listen to me; it is just a phase he is going through and it will pass.”

Intermittent with sobs and trembling in her voice, Freya acknowledged Doc’s attempt to calm her. “Doc, I’m afraid. I’m here alone...” she choked up again and began to cry.

“Freya, Allison is packing a bag and I’m gathering some meds. We’ll be leaving here within the next few minutes to come help you. Just hang in there, we are on our way.”

Freya looked at the clock on the nightstand, “One o’clock,” she muttered to herself. She calculated in her head that it would be close to five a.m. before Doc and Allison got to the cabin. Four hours alone, “God please help me,” she prayed.

Matthew was still unconscious, but his trembling had subsided to shivers and cold sweats, and he seemed to be resting a bit easier. Settling in for a long four hour wait, Freya lay down next to him and stroked the side of his face in a passive attempt to help him relax.

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Freya heard Doc and Allison's car when they arrived at the cabin. She rushed to the door and opened it before they had a chance to knock. As soon as she saw Allison, Freya embraced her and broke down into tears.

Stepping passed Freya and Allison, Doc sat their bags inside the front door. "How is he doing?"

"He is resting better but he is still burning up with fever." Freya replied, pointing down the hall to the bedroom.

Doc grabbed his medical bag and proceeded down the hall to examine Matt while Allison led Freya over to the couch and sat with her to comfort her. "Just relax, we're here and Doc will take care of Matthew."

"I was so afraid. This episode is almost as bad as the first time it happened." Lifting her head she looked into Allison's face, "he was making strange growling noises that frightened me."

After examining Matt, Doc returned to the living room area where Freya had curled up on the couch with her head in Allison's lap. "Well, I gave him a sedative that will help him relax. We will keep an eye on him but I believe he'll be alright."

Freya did not look up or respond. Doc noticed she looked unusually stressed as he and Allison exchanged curious glances. "Freya, what's wrong? It's not like you to fall apart like this."

Freya did not respond. Instead, she just lay quiet with her head in Allison's lap as Allison stroked the side of her face and hair to relax her.

After exchanging gazes with Doc, Allison's facial expression changed from caring compassion to one of surprise bordering on fear. Cupping Freya's face in her hands, Allison looked her straight in the eyes. "You're pregnant!"

Once Again, Freya said nothing, simply staring back at Allison with a fearful look and tears forming in her eyes.

Allison looked up at Doc without saying a word. There was no sign of joy in her face as Doc sat down in the chair across from them, speechless.

Turning her attention back to Freya, Allison began an inquiry, "How long have you known?"

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Sobbing, Freya responded, "About two weeks."

"Have you told Matthew?"

"No, not yet. I wanted to wait until we got back to Graymere and I had a chance to see Doc and confirm it and discuss..."

Freya began to cry almost hysterically.

"Shish," Allison whispered as she began to coddle Freya, while looking at Doc with an obvious sign of distress on her face.

Without saying anything, Doc got up, walked out the door, strolled down to the pond, and sat down on the bench staring at the calm water. He knew better than anyone what was in store for Freya and Matt if the child carried full term and survived birth. How was he going to explain to Freya what to expect over the next few weeks or months. Obviously, Freya had some idea of the prospects; otherwise, she would not be so worried, nor would she withhold the news from Matt.



It was mid afternoon, and Doc was checking Matt's pulse when he slowly began to come around. "How are you feeling?"

"Doc!" Matt rubbed his eyes and realizing it was Dr. Bertram sitting next to him. "I feel like death warmed over. Where am I?" Looking around, he realized he was in his bedroom at his cabin, but the presence of Dr. Bertram confused him momentarily.

"What are you doing here? Did I have another LTV episode?"

"Yes, you gave Freya quite a scare last night. When she called me, she was distraught trying to handle you alone. So, after I got her calmed down we drove down to help her out and lend morale support."

"We? Is Allison with you?"

"Yes, she is in the kitchen with Freya. She'll be alright. I'll let her know you are awake."

Matt sensed hesitation in Doc's voice along with a tone of concern. "What's the matter; is there anything wrong with Freya?" Matt began struggling to sit up, still weak from the LTV seizure.

Realizing he had almost said too much regarding Freya's condition, contrary to her request, Doc tried to downplay the situation, "Oh, she's fine. She did not get much sleep last night and the whole ordeal stressed her out. Although she is a strong woman in many respects, she can allow her compassion for others to take a toll on her emotionally."

"Yes she does." Matt responded apparently satisfied with Doc's explanation.

"Well, get some rest. The girls are cooking dinner. When it's ready, I will come and help you up to the dinner table. You need to get some food in you so you can get your strength back."

Matt rolled over and closed his eyes, "Thanks Doc," he muttered.



"How is he Doc?" Freya asked anxiously when Dr. Bertram entered the breakfast nook and sat down at the table.

"He woke briefly. I'll get him up when dinner is ready and we can start getting food into him to help him regain his strength."

"I called James, his friend at the university and told him that Matt was extremely ill and could not come into work today. He said he would cover his classes. I'm afraid he may come here this afternoon to check on Matt."

"Well, let's set an extra plate at the dinner table," Doc winked at Freya in a lighthearted effort to calm her fears of having guest. "All the better, his family doctor is here on a house call and can validate his absence."



After dinner, Doc suggested he and Matt go outside to feed the ducks. With Doc supporting Matt, they put on their jackets and slowly made their way down to the pond. Sitting on the bench at the water's edge, they enjoyed the view and breathed in fresh air. "It's obvious that your lupine transgenesis hasn't fully run its course and judging from the progression of your physical

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mutations you most likely will not be able to continue your work at the university for much longer. Have you and Freya discussed any plans for the near future?"

"Not exactly. I had planned to sit down with her this week to discuss the situation. I'm hoping that the transgenic mutation will not progress any faster so I can finish out this semester. I need to tender my resignation soon; the Dean will need time to find a replacement before next semester."

"What about your future as a scientist and family man? Where are you going to live? Have you given any thoughts to these things?"

"I draw a disability pension from the military and I thought I would be able to supplement that with writing. Freya receives a stipend from the government as a landowner in Misty Hollow. My savings, investments and retirement accounts should cover us in case of emergencies. Beyond that, I think it's a given that we'll be forced to live in Misty Hollow, whether we like it or not. In any case, the scope of the work ahead of us in dealing with the virus and the warg threat will consume most of our time over the coming months."

"What about any thoughts of family, is your family aware of your circumstances? And, what about plans for children?"

"My uncle knows I have been infected, but not to any degree of physical mutation that I've experienced so far. I asked him not to say anything to my mom or grandmother for the time being." Matt paused and chuckled, "as for children, I know Freya would love to have a child and I have envisioned being a father at some point in my life. However, I've never given it much thought until Freya entered my life. I would guess any thoughts of starting a family would have to be sooner rather than later. I'm not getting any younger and neither is she."

Unknown to Matt, Dr. Bertram was laying the groundwork for the news that Freya would eventually have to reveal. To make it a bit easier for the both of them, Doc wanted to get Matt thinking about the subject ahead of the revelation awaiting him.

"Looks like you have a visitor," Doc said pointing at a truck coming up the road to Matt's cabin.

Matt recognized the vehicle, “That’s James, a colleague from the university.”

“Ah yes, Freya said he might stop by to check on you.”

With help from Dr. Bertram Matt stood up and waved at James as he pulled up next to the cabin and got out of his truck.

“How are you feeling buddy?” James asked as he approached Matt and Dr. Bertram.

“I’m doing a bit better than last night.” Matt replied.

“Well, you still don’t look so good. Sit down before you fall down. I just wanted to stop by and check on you. I told Freya I would try and come by after I finished up at the office.”

“James, this is Dr. Bertram, my family doctor. Doc, this is Dr. James Anderson, a friend and colleague at the university.”

As the two shook hands, they exchanged greetings. Doc began explaining to James that he was retired from formal medical practice but still took care of a few old family friends. After Freya called him in the middle of the night, he and his wife came down to make a house call and visit for a day or two to insure that Matt was all right and to help Freya. Doc tried not to go into much detail about Matt’s condition other than to say that he was experiencing a relapse from the infection he acquired from the wolf attack back in the summer. He assured James that after a day or two Matt would be strong enough to resume his duties at the university.

Satisfied that Matt was recovering, James excused himself, assuring Matt the Dean of their department was aware that he was very sick. He encouraged Matt to take whatever time needed to recover and he would make sure his classes were covered until he got back on his feet. “If you don’t mind I need to get to the house, my wife is waiting on me to serve dinner. I’ll stop by the cabin and say hello to Freya on my way out.”

“Thanks for stopping by, I truly appreciate it.”



Doc and Allison spent the night with Matt and Freya to make sure Matt was recovering from the LTV fever before returning to Graymere the following morning. In her parting comments,

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Allison encouraged Freya to sit down with Matthew, tell him about her pregnancy, and discuss the prospects of their child's chances for survival, as well as, the possible *complications*. Allison emphasized that Matt should be prepared for what to expect once the child was born. Freya promised Allison that she would do so, as soon as she could find the right moment.

Chapter 2

“Matthew, I made some fresh, hot tea; would you like a cup?” Freya asked.

“Yes, please. I’ll be done after I put this last box away in the study.”

It was an unseasonably cool day for late September, even for Graymere. The light steady rain which had been falling for two days put a chill in the air which was hard to escape. Matt was building a fire in the fireplace when Freya brought in the tea and curled up on the couch.

Watching the growing flames flicker as they licked at the logs, Freya reflected on the events of the last few months. “Matthew, I’m so very sorry that all of this has happened to you.”

Matt sat on the couch next to Freya pulling her close. “None of this is your fault. Besides, I agree with William’s comment that, ‘it was Divine Providence that brought me here’ and everything that has happened was meant to be.”

After returning to the university in the fall, Matt’s lupine transgenic mutation had accelerated. Until now, he was able to conceal the physical changes from the casual observers, but he was finding it increasingly difficult and he knew he could not hide it for much longer. Following Matt’s recent viral relapse, he and Freya decided that, at the end of the semester, he would resign his tenured position with the university and they would

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move to Graymere, making it their permanent home. Matt would then devote his full attention to helping Dr. Bertram develop a cure for the Lupine Transgenic Virus, as well as, help Victor deal with the warg threat. Anticipating a day when the nightmare would be over, Matt planned to be a researcher and writer, something he could do from the seclusion of Graymere in spite of his transgenic mutations.

“I’m glad you guys are back,” Sarah said as she came downstairs and proceeded to snuggle up on the other side of Freya, pulling the blanket over her legs and feet.

“How is the lab work coming along?” Matt inquired.

“We’ve completed the DNA profiles on all the residents within the valley. Doc started working the genomics but the numerous generational variants are making it more difficult than we expected.”

“What about the samples we collected from the wargs? Have you finished analyzing them?”

“We sequenced the original samples and we get a new sample every now and then from Victor’s people. I just started working on the DNA Profiling a few days ago. So far, most of what I see is inconsistent with what you expected in terms of the warg genome admixed with human genome. However, I have noted a couple of interesting patterns starting to emerge. I’ll show you in the morning if you come by the lab.”

“I’ll stop in first thing in the morning before I head out to the Lancaster place.”

“Are you guys going to celebrate the holidays here?” Sarah asked.

“Probably, I was hoping that my family could visit us here for Thanksgiving and we will more than likely spend our Christmas here in Graymere.” Matt replied.

“What about you?” Freya asked Sarah.

“I am planning to visit my mom for Thanksgiving and then maybe take an extended break to spend a little time with her around Christmas.”

“I’m sure your mom and grandmother will be happy to have you at home for the holidays.” Freya suggested as she gave Sarah a gentle hug.



“Good morning Doc,” Matt said as he entered the lab.

Looking up from his computer monitor, “Ah Matt; good to see you back. How was your drive up from the city?”

“Same as usual,” Matt shrugged his shoulders.

“How are you feeling? You appear to have recovered much of your strength.”

“I’m alright, ready to get back to work,” Matt said, followed by a wink in a passive effort to down play the severity of his last relapse of LTV fever. “Yes, Sarah mentioned that you had completed the sampling and profiles.”

“The profiles gave us a clearer picture of the hereditary characteristics associated with LTV. My next step is to determine if we can isolate the LTV from the genome, if we can, we should be able to identify the base virus or viruses. We’ve been operating on the assumption that two or more viruses went through homologous recombination resulting in the evolution of a hybrid or mutant virus. The recombination of DNA would then represent a genetic variation in the offspring of the host, which in turn enabled the virus to adapt and evolve. What we are dealing with is some strain of retrovirus but it is going to be difficult to identify it due to the fact it has mutated several times over the last two hundred years.”

“What about rabies; rabies is a strain of retrovirus is it not?” Matt queried.

“Yes, but rabies is a negative sense RNA virus. Rabies by itself could not function as a vector for the lupine transgenesis.” Dr. Bertram explained.

“So, we may be looking at an entirely new virus altogether?” Matt suggested.

“That’s a possibility; I’ll know more when I can isolate the LTV and analyze it further. We finally got the compact electron microscope set up and I will be able to start working on the

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pathology of the actual virus. But the virus mutates each time it passes from one host to the next and it's going to take time to sort them out."

Matt motioned with his hand in the direction where Sarah was working. "I need to visit with Sarah and see what she has to show me." Doc followed Matt.

"Just in time," Sarah said looking up from her computer screen.

"What do you have for me?" Matt asked.

Sarah opened up an analysis page on her computer and pointed out a couple of anomalies in the DNA profiles of the wargs she was analyzing. "Do you see it?"

"What am I looking at?" Matt replied.

"On the left is a DNA profile from a normal gray wolf, on the right is a DNA profile from a warg. Do you see the anomalies in the warg DNA here?"

"That could be the human gene inserted into the DNA strand," Matt suggested, while studying the data.

"Maybe, but I don't think so." Sarah switched screens. "On the left again is the gray wolf which has seventy-eight chromosomes, on the right is the warg with seventy-four chromosomes."

"Seventy-four," Matt said with a puzzled look on his face.

"The maned wolf has seventy-six and a gray fox has sixty-six, which indicate that not all members of the canine family have seventy-eight chromosomes, but it does indicate that..."

"That the wargs are not mutated gray wolves," Matt interjected. "We assumed that the Wargs are a mutated gray wolf, the chromosomal differentiation seems to rule out that theory."

"Not quite," Sarah responded. "On closer examination it appears that the gray wolf and the warg do share some common ancestry but the gray wolf did not evolve from the warg or vice versa. At least, that is what it looks like to me. I would need some more samples of gray wolf DNA to confirm it. However, it appears the wargs already existed as a species long before any possible mutation due to the transgen virus. It is the alpha which is the mutant, resulting from a cross infection of the LTV

acquired from humans. Well, at least that is what we think is the most probable scenario.”

Matt sat quietly for several moments trying to digest all these new revelations. The others remained quiet exchanging glances waiting for Matt to collect his thoughts. “You indicated that additional testing and analysis is necessary to confirm your findings; focus on following through with that. I need to head out to the Lancaster homestead and get caught up on the situation there and then I’ll come back and check in with you later this afternoon.”



After seeing Matt drive out of the village, Allison ran over to the inn to visit with Freya. Finding Freya in the kitchen, Allison gave her a big hug. “I’m glad you are back, how did it go?”

“The trip took a bit longer than usual, due to the rain, but otherwise uneventful,” Freya responded.

“No silly. How did it go when you told Matthew you were pregnant?”

Freya did not respond. Instead, she turned her attention to washing the pan in the sink.

Allison leaned over the sink in an attempt to look Freya in the face, “You didn’t tell him! Freya, you’ve got to tell him!”

Frustrated with Freya’s attempt to ignore her, Allison grabbed her by the shoulder and turned her face-to-face, staring her directly in the eyes. “Freya you have to tell him. He needs to know what to expect. This will not go away by ignoring it.”

“Allison, how do I tell him? After all he has been through over the last five months, how do I tell him about this?” Freya threw her hands up into the air in frustration. “The man has been through so much and now this. I can’t, not now.”

“Freya, you can’t wait forever. You heard what Doc said, we are not sure how long the gestation period is going to be. Normal human gestation is nine and a half months, but yours could be nine and a half weeks!”

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“I know, I know!” Freya said slamming a pan into the sink. “I’ll tell him soon enough but not right now. Please promise me that you will not say anything to him.”

“I promise not to say anything right now, but you have to tell him soon or Doc will.”

Chapter 3

Arriving at the Lancaster homestead, Matt was truly surprised at the progress made transforming the farm into a training facility. He had been away for three weeks, two weeks longer than he planned. So much had changed in that time.

When Matt pulled up to the Lancaster house, Victor was waiting anxiously for him.

“Matthew, it’s good to see you buddy,” Victor said excitedly greeting Matt as he was getting out of his vehicle.

“I’m sorry for being away for so long. After I was laid up for a couple of days, I was snowed under with student assignments and preparations for mid-terms this coming week. So, bring me up to date.”

Victor led Matt into the house and gave him a summary of all that had happened during the past three weeks. “Training has proceeded as you directed before you left, and as of roll call this morning, we have twenty-four responders in addition to the twelve special ops personnel you’ve been working with. All personnel have been equipped with the tactical shotguns you specified, except for the six sharpshooters who are equipped with the .308 bolt-action rifles. Each person has been issued a .45 caliber pistol and we have stockpiled a large quantity of ammunition.”

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“Good,” Matt acknowledged. “What about warg activity? Have they resumed their incursions into the valley?”

“Things have been unexpectedly quiet since the skirmish last month.” Stopping at the map of the valley mounted on the wall, Victor pointed out, “Here we patrol the north road regularly but we haven’t encountered any warg packs. I sent out two recon patrols into warg territory, which reported about a dozen wargs and two alphas in, or around this area here. The same area you and I took the first patrol back in August. I have restricted all actions, outside the valley, to reconnaissance only. We did kill and sample a young alpha who wandered solo down from the ridge near Lupine Rock.”

“A lone alpha, running solo? That’s a bit unexpected?” Matt said aloud to himself, turning to focus his attention on the map. “To tell you the truth, this whole situation with the wargs has me baffled.”

Victor could see that Matt was in deep concentration thinking through the situation trying desperately to identify patterns in warg behavior. Victor was as confused as Matt was in understanding what was behind the previous warg raids on homesteads and even more puzzling the ambush they were involved in last month. In almost two hundred years of living side by side with the wargs, they have never experienced such behavior by the wargs. In the past, a lone warg would stray down into the valley creating mischief, but never a pack.

Only once before, that anyone could recall, had the wargs ever created a nuisance. That was back in the 1930s when the forest service had crews in the area cutting trails and fire lanes. The elders believed that the wargs felt threatened by the flurry of activity near the wilderness. They believed the wargs were exhibiting aggressive behavior in defending their territory. An increased number of warg intrusions into the valley at that time, resulted in several attacks on forest service workers and residents. Ultimately, the situation prompted the valley residents to organize hunting expeditions to hunt down and exterminate the wargs within the areas surrounding Misty Hollow. Since that time, the valley residents have rarely seen a warg venture into the

valley. Sightings have been so rare that the younger generations believe the wargs to be creatures of myth, subjects of legends told by the elders. Far from legend and myth, the wargs are real and proving to be an ominous and menacing threat that no one could have imagined.



Victor was giving Matt a guided tour of the Lancaster homestead, pointing out the improvements they had made. Matt was particularly impressed how the barn had been converted into a barracks complete with a dining facility.

Hearing a call from a distance, Matt turned around to see a runner approaching. "I wonder what this is about."

"Dr. Kershaw, we received a call from Ms. Sarah and Dr. Bertram and they asked that you come to the lab right away."

"Thank you," Matt replied acknowledging the message. "I hope nothing is wrong. Let's get over there and see what's so urgent."



Dr. Bertram and Sarah were intently focused on reviewing DNA analysis data when they heard the outer door open and close. They looked up to see Matt and Victor enter the airlock. Sarah called out through the glass, "Dr. Kershaw! You have got to see this!"

Dr. Bertram motioned for Matt and Victor to wait for them in the locker room, outside the lab.

"What's going on?" Matt inquired as Doc and Sarah stepped into the locker room.

"I'll let Sarah explain," Dr. Bertram replied. Then he nodded for Sarah to answer Matt's inquiry.

"Oh man, this is huge!" Sarah began. "The sample from the alpha Victor's people killed indicates that it did not evolve naturally from the indigenous warg population."

"Whoa; back up!" Matt was dazed and shocked by this new revelation.

Dr. Bertram spoke up to try to bring clarity to what Sarah was telling them. “We will need to conduct some additional testing and analysis but here it is in a nutshell. The alpha that Victor’s people sampled is much younger than any of the previous alphas sampled and there are definite markers that indicate the alpha’s DNA has been altered outside of the natural evolution of the LTV.”

Matt and Victor both sat down and stared blankly at Dr. Bertram and Sarah.

“Isn’t this great!” Sarah said excitedly. “Not that the situation is great, but that we were able to begin sorting it all out. But, it is not so great that someone is jacking with the natural evolution of things...”

“OK Sarah,” Matt held up his hand indicating for her to slow down and pause for a moment. Looking at Victor and then to Dr. Bertram, Matt sat back in the chair and stroked his face in deep thought.

“So what exactly, is different about this alpha?” Matt asked.

Sarah pointed to data on the printout to explain, “All of the wargs, rogues and alphas alike, we’ve tested previously, showed a consistent DNA pattern with a particular subset of almost identical markers. The occasional alpha prime would be born due to the natural emergence of the recessive LTV linked genes. But, in either case, the DNA sequence appears to be consistently similar as would have been expected. However, in this particular alpha, the DNA sequence appears completely different. His DNA exhibited identifiable markers which didn’t appear in any of the other samples previously analyzed. In other words, it’s the same as you would observe when you analyze the DNA from six or eight generations of a race of white, Anglo-Saxon Europeans then suddenly it becomes admixed with pure Asian or African DNA. The resulting offspring DNA would stand out like a sore thumb.”

“Are you sure what you are seeing is not a natural mutation?”

“That’s highly unlikely. The markers are too radically different to have occurred through natural evolution within a single generation. I believe the anomalies are a result of someone

spiking the punch, so to speak, by artificially blending human genome into the original warg genome.”

Doc looked at Matt and said, “It appears that your suspicions are correct.” Referring to their earlier conversation when Matt shared with Doc and Victor his belief that someone was manipulating or even trying to exploit the LTV.

“Ok, for the time being, let’s keep all of this information between the four of us.” Matt instructed.

“What about William? Shouldn’t we tell him what Doc and Sarah found?” Victor asked.

“I would prefer to wait until they have a chance to confirm their findings before we start waving flags in front of William.” Matt cautioned. “Right now everything is hypothesis and conjecture. We need solid answers.”

“I think Matt is correct,” Doc said.

“Victor and Sarah would you please excuse me and Doc for a few moments,” Matt said ushering Dr. Bertram to the airlock to talk privately.

Matt confided in Dr. Bertram. “Doc, this whole situation is really unnerving beyond description. We are truly stumbling around in the dark trying to sort it out. I still have a sneaking suspicion that someone from the valley may have a hand in exploiting the Transgen Virus. I particularly don’t like the idea that someone is sitting back watching this whole thing play out.”

“I know exactly what you mean. So, what do you suggest we do?” Dr. Bertram asked, assuming Matt had a plan working in his head.

“I think it is time we pay Dr. Hobart a visit, or better yet have him join us here as a guest for a little while.” Matt’s suggestion had a tone that implied something a bit nefarious.

“Do you think it wise to get him involved, moreover bring him here?”

“I have a gut feeling that Dr. Hobart has a great deal of information to offer that will clarify our understanding of the wargs and what we are dealing with. I also believe he may have something to contribute in helping develop an effective gene therapy to eliminate LTV. There is no doubt in my mind, that

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whatever we might disclose to Dr. Hobart or what he may see while he is here, is but a drop in a bucket to what he already knows. I'm certain he knows a lot more than we do about LTV and the wargs."

Dr. Bertram nodded his head. "But, how do you suggest we go about getting him here?"

"From what I was able to find out from browsing the internet, it seems that Dr. Hobart has been blacklisted since he left the DOD research program on Plum Island. He lives alone in a small town in Pennsylvania. By all accounts, he has become somewhat of a recluse. I propose that we just go nab his ass and bring him here with a hood over his head."

Dr. Bertram chuckled, "as much as I'd like to see that, I think a more subtle approach may attract a lot less attention and result in a more cooperative spirit."

"Ok," Matt sighed, "I'll try and make contact with him when I get back to the office on Monday. Maybe by opening a dialog with him, seeking his collaboration on a research project may capture his attention. I will do my best to get him to visit the university for a few days."

Dr. Bertram smiled, "I'll leave it up to you. Let me know if you need anything from me. But I suggest you do not mention my name at all when you talk to him. It would be better that he does not even suspect I know you until we meet here."

"Ok Doc," Matt acknowledged. "Victor and I need to get back to the Lancaster place. I have a mission brief I need to conduct. I will leave it to you to inform William regarding Dr. Hobart."

* * *

Matt was unusually quiet on the drive back to the Lancaster compound but, Victor decided not to press him for any explanation assuming Matt would open up and discuss whatever was on his mind when he was ready.

As they neared the compound, Matt told Victor, what he and Dr. Bertram had discussed in private. He explained the program Sarah had told him and Dr. Bertram about, wherein the

government was seeking to create a human-animal hybrid as a weapon of war. He highlighted his fear that the government was using the valley as a proving ground for developing the wargs as quasi soldiers. The recon mission that he was going to task the team to conduct, would be a deep penetration into the wilderness area, to locate a camp or base, he suspected would be found to the north of the warg community. If his suspicions were correct, the scope of their problems were about to expand exponentially.

“Victor, can you arrange to have a walk-in cooler built? We need a place to hold several warg carcasses for more detailed examination.” Matt asked just as they were pulling into the Lancaster homestead. “Sure; do you have any particular requirements?”

“Preferably something either underground like a cellar. And it should be kept at or around thirty-eight to forty degrees.”

“The Lancaster’s have a root cellar behind their house, I can have it cleaned out and I will have Peter fix it up.”

“As soon as it is ready, I want any wargs or alpha’s killed to be stored there until we have a chance to examine them in detail and run some test.”

“Sure thing,” Victor acknowledged.

“Also, give some thought to building a holding cell, capable of holding a warg rogue or an alpha.”



“The special ops team is assembled in the briefing room waiting for us,” Victor informed Matt, as he stepped into the doorway of the office observing Matt staring out the window.

“OK, thanks,” Matt replied turning toward Victor.

Walking down the hall Victor told Matt, “You need to put on your happy face. You’re looking a bit stressed out.”

Matt did not reply verbally he just looked up at Victor with a very serious look on his face as if to confirm Victor’s observation. Just before stepping into the briefing room, Matt paused and gave Victor a slight smile.

Matt opened the door and stepped into the room. “Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen.”

The group responded in unison with a hearty good afternoon.

Matt began to explain why he and Victor had called them together. “This is a warning order for an upcoming patrol that is vitally important and equally dangerous. I ask that you listen to the mission brief carefully and then we will take volunteers. I want to stress upon you, the need to keep any information shared during this briefing secret, not to be shared with *anyone* outside this room.”

Victor outlined the scope of the mission to scout an area north of the known wargs colonies. Pointing to the map, Victor laid out the plan for a two or three person team to enter the wilderness area far to the east and circle wide around from the east and northeast in order to scout areas indicated on the map. Their objective is to locate a suspected camp of humans and human-warg hybrids. The patrol objective will require the team to operate deep in the wilderness area for several days and they would be outside the range of radio communications with the valley. Therefore, if they got into trouble they would be on their own without any hope of support from the valley.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Matt began in a somber tone. “I can’t stress strongly enough the need to be constantly vigilant throughout the entire mission, from the moment you enter the wilderness area until you return. We have no idea what may be lurking in the area north of the known warg colony. You can’t let your guard down for a single moment.”

When Victor queried the team for volunteers each and everyone raised a hand. “Thank you ladies and gentlemen,” Victor told them, acknowledging their courage and commitment. “We will meet back here at six o’clock in the morning for assignments and mission brief.” Victor dismissed the team shaking their hands and giving them a pat on the back as they left the room.

“Victor, will you have dinner with me at the inn this evening and then we can spend some time working out the details for the patrol plan?”

“Sure, I’ll see you at seven,” Victor replied.



The ops team had assembled in the briefing room early, eagerly awaiting Matt and Victor's arrival. The room was abuzz with chatter in anticipation of the mission details when Matt and Victor arrived.

"Good morning ladies and gentlemen," Matt greeted them.

Over the next hour, using the map and whiteboard, Matt briefed the group on the details of the mission to recon northeast of the valley. The plan, as he laid it out, was to enter the wilderness area at the far southeast end of the valley and then to navigate north. Their objective is to probe the area north of the valley to ascertain the extent of the warg territory and map the location of any warg clans they find. Matt pointed to a location on the map due north of the known warg colony and instructed the recon team to scout the area. He cautioned all of them that he was not sure what they might find and for them to be extremely cautious in approaching this particular area.

Matt detailed the main points of what he needed from the scouting party. "Make notes of anything you see. Record the location and quantity of any wildlife such as mule deer, elk, bear, wolf, mountain lion, etc. If you encounter any wargs, stay as far away from them as you can, avoid contact if at all possible. Avoid detection while doing your best to ascertain the number and location of any warg dens, or anything strange or unusual."

After concluding the briefing and dismissing the team, to begin making their preparations, Matt walked back to the map and stared at it for some time.

"What are you thinking?" Victor asked.

"I can't help but think we will find a key piece of the puzzle somewhere around here," Matt said pointing at a particular location on the map. "There is an old dirt airstrip used by the forest service located here. Near this airstrip is where I believe we will find any human activity, if any exist. They would most certainly be using the airstrip to ferry in supplies."

"I will call you and update you as we get reports in from the recon patrol. I will task the ops team members who are not in the

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primary scouting party to set up communication relay stations. We will try and maintain radio contact with the scouting party as far and deep as we can.”

Matt replied turning to face Victor. “Don’t call me. From now on, we will not discuss anything associated with the wargs, or our patrols into warg territory over the phone. I will be back in Graymere Friday evening. Hopefully, the patrol will have returned safely by then and will be ready to give us a report.”