

EC 2013 VEKN storýsine

Ragnarök, the Final Battle

prologue

Camille watched as snow fell softly from a sky the colour of concrete and settled silently like a white blanket over the landscape. The thick fir trees of the forest were frosted like the icing of a cake. The ground was completely covered too, with white drifts coming up to her knees.

As a Kindred Camille didn't really feel the cold any more, although she still wore a thick, fleece-lined coat to keep her dry and protected from the wind. Her sturdy walking boots helped her maintain her footing. Trudging through the snow with her companions, the soft sounds of their movement cut through the stark silence of the wilderness.

Camille glanced around at the other three members of their group, who were working their way forwards with grim, but quiet determination. Their leader and guide was tall, athletic and blonde - a model Scandinavian in fact. She had said little since their journey began, and had never offered Camille her name.

The others were all Valkyrie, members of an elite network of Gangrel Kindred that Camille had recently learned now operated throughout Sweden. Camille herself was not one of them, but she hoped to be. This journey marked the last stage of an initiation process that had begun months ago when she had first arrived in Uppsala with her

letter of introduction from the esteemed elder Brunhilde herself.

After the Gangrel leader Xaviar declared that the clan should sever its ties to the Camarilla, Camille had fallen in with some Anarchs in Paris. When her friends heard the call to form a new Free State in Sweden under she decided to tag along. Proving her worth in combat driving the Sabbat and the Camarilla out of Stockholm she caught the eye of Brunhilde, who told her about the Norse warrior sisterhood that was intended to be the country's first line of defence against the forces of evil and chaos. Brunhilde spoke not of Gehenna however, but of Ragnarök - the end of the world foretold by the poets of old. And so here Camille was, at the end of her training, struggling through a snow-covered forest in rural Sweden seeking a shrine to the old Norse gods to complete her initiation as a Valkyrie.

Eventually she decided to break the silence. "So how much further?" she asked the blond-haired warrior a few metres ahead of her.

"Not long," was the reply. The woman's voice was not terse, and Camille had observed her long enough to conclude that the woman's moods hardly ever changed: she clearly just wasn't much for talking.

Instead she tried the Kindred to her left, a shorter, slimmer woman with a shock of fiery red curls. "I don't think I've ever been so far from civilisation before," Camille said, "is it safe?"

The Valkyrie grunted in reply. "There are wolves out here," she said after a moment, "but they will not bother us."

By wolves Camille knew she meant lupines - shape-shifting creatures that normally hunted and killed Kindred on sight. "Really?" she queried, with some disbelief.

"Yes. Here in our land it is not like other places. We protect the land. We worship the same gods. We have the same enemies."

"Enemies?"

"Yes, of course. For example, there are Jotun - giants - in the mountains. They are far more dangerous than any vampire or werewolf."

Camille didn't know what to say to that. She had never seen a giant - and had never even believed that they existed. Contemplating this, she forged on in silence.

A few minutes later the trees gave way to a clearing. In the centre there was a mound of snow-covered earth. Stone pylons carved with faint but intricate spiral designs were placed at intervals marking the perimeter of the mound. On one side of the structure there was a gaping hole like a giant wound, and debris was scattered all around from its forceful opening.

The Valkyrie whispered to each other in Swedish and readied their weapons. The blonde guide brandished a spear in one

hand, and a pistol in the other. The other two sported modern-looking assault rifles. Following their lead, Camille took hold of the Uzi sub-machine gun slung under her arm. She could hear nothing however - the clearing seemed to be deserted.

The four of them crept forward, circling around to get a better view of the ragged entrance to the mound. Their guide bent down to examine the snow. Camille could see what looked like large animal tracks.

"Wolves?" Camille asked. The guide did not reply, so she turned to the red-haired warrior beside her, who sternly shook her head, and put one finger to her lips, encouraging Camille to be silent.

At the blonde's signal they moved towards the entrance, all weapons pointing at the dark hole. The last member of their party, tattooed Kindred with short-cropped hair died a vivid blue, hurried forwards to place her back against the side of the mound next to the entrance. She peered into the darkness, her glowing eyes a similar blue colour. She signalled with her hand and the others advanced to join her. Camille followed, feeling a little nervous.

Concentrating, Camille activated her own powers of Protean so that she too could see clearly into the darkness of the structure. All that was visible however was a tunnel descending in a steep spiral into the ground.

The Valkyrie exchanged a few more words in Swedish. Camille frowned at them and the blonde turned to her and said, "They will stand guard. You will come with

me.” Without another word she ventured forth into the darkness. Camille followed her as instructed.

“What is this place?” Camille asked as they crept forward, slowly descending the narrow, sloping corridor.

“It is the resting place of the All High,” the other said, “the greatest of ones.”

“The All High?”

“The King of the Aesir.”

“You mean Odin?” Camille was incredulous.

“You’ve got to be shitting me.”

“The very same. He sleeps here until the day he is needed. It is the final step of our initiation to come here and pay our respects to him.”

The blonde paused then to examine some markings on the wall. Camille could see the bare earth and stone was marred by a series of parallel gauges made by what seemed like giant claws. They continued, and quickly entered a low-ceilinged square chamber. In the centre was a stone platform large enough to support an outstretched man, although it was currently empty. Camille could see that the edge of the platform was marred by more claw marks.

“He is gone!” the Valkyrie said, with surprising emotion.

“Did he get up and leave?” wondered Camille, “or did something come for him?”

The two women exchanged a look but before they could say another word, suddenly the ground shook and they heard muffled sounds of gunfire. As one they rushed back up the tunnel to see what was happening outside.

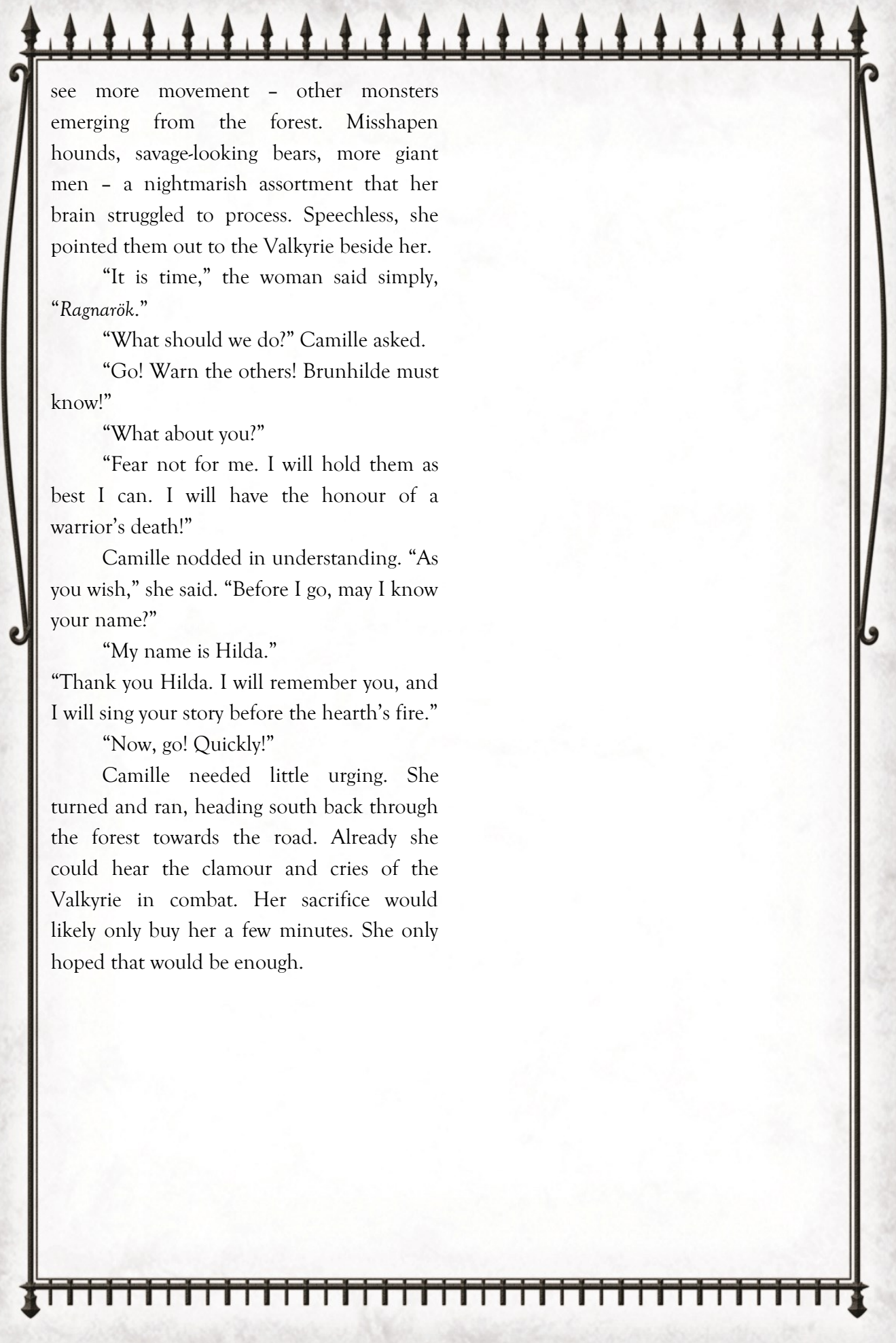
Camille halted at the entrance and

surveyed the scene with horror. The red-haired woman from their group lay crumpled and motionless on the ground in a deep depression in the snow. Standing beyond was a large man-like creature perhaps five or six meters in height. Unkempt, hairy and dressed in ragged clothes, in one hand he wielded a tree branch like a weapon. In his other hand he clutched the last member of Camille’s party, who was wriggling hard trying to break free. As Camille watched the giant squeezed his fingers, and with an audible crunch the Valkyrie in his grip went limp. He tossed the body over his shoulder like a rag doll and peered forwards at Camille and her companion. With surprising speed he sprang forwards, raising one foot aimed at the structure of the mound.

“Run!” shouted the blonde warrior, who wasted no time in sprinting out into the clearing, raising her pistol to fire several wild shots up at the giant. Camille quickly followed her. She both felt and heard the thump of the giant’s foot smashing down on the mound behind her, and she stumbled as the ground shook beneath her.

Reaching the edge of the clearing she glanced over her shoulder. She watched in astonishment as the Valkyrie turned to face the giant. The monster lashed out with its tree-club but the woman ducked under the blow and hurled her spear upwards, piercing one of its eye sockets. It flailed backwards into the snow, howling in pain and rage.

Beyond the wreckage of the shrine and past the thrashing giant Camille could



see more movement - other monsters emerging from the forest. Misshapen hounds, savage-looking bears, more giant men - a nightmarish assortment that her brain struggled to process. Speechless, she pointed them out to the Valkyrie beside her.

"It is time," the woman said simply, "*Ragnarök*."

"What should we do?" Camille asked.

"Go! Warn the others! Brunhilde must know!"

"What about you?"

"Fear not for me. I will hold them as best I can. I will have the honour of a warrior's death!"

Camille nodded in understanding. "As you wish," she said. "Before I go, may I know your name?"

"My name is Hilda."

"Thank you Hilda. I will remember you, and I will sing your story before the hearth's fire."

"Now, go! Quickly!"

Camille needed little urging. She turned and ran, heading south back through the forest towards the road. Already she could hear the clamour and cries of the Valkyrie in combat. Her sacrifice would likely only buy her a few minutes. She only hoped that would be enough.