

THE WILDERNESS WAS AS
BEFITTED SUCH A CREATURE.

FOR WHERE ELSE WOULD THE DRAGON MAKE
ITS LAIR BUT HIDDEN AWAY IN A SECRET CAVE,
CARVED FROM THE UNFORGIVING BONES OF
THEIR MOTHERLAND?

ONLY THE STRONGEST COULD SURVIVE
IN SUCH A PLACE. THIS WAS THE BOSOM
OF THE MOTHERLAND, A PLACE OF ICE
AND OF STONE.

IF YOU POSSESSED THE NECESSARY WILL,
YOU WOULD SURVIVE, SHE WOULD FORGE
YOU INTO SOMETHING STRONGER. IF NOT?

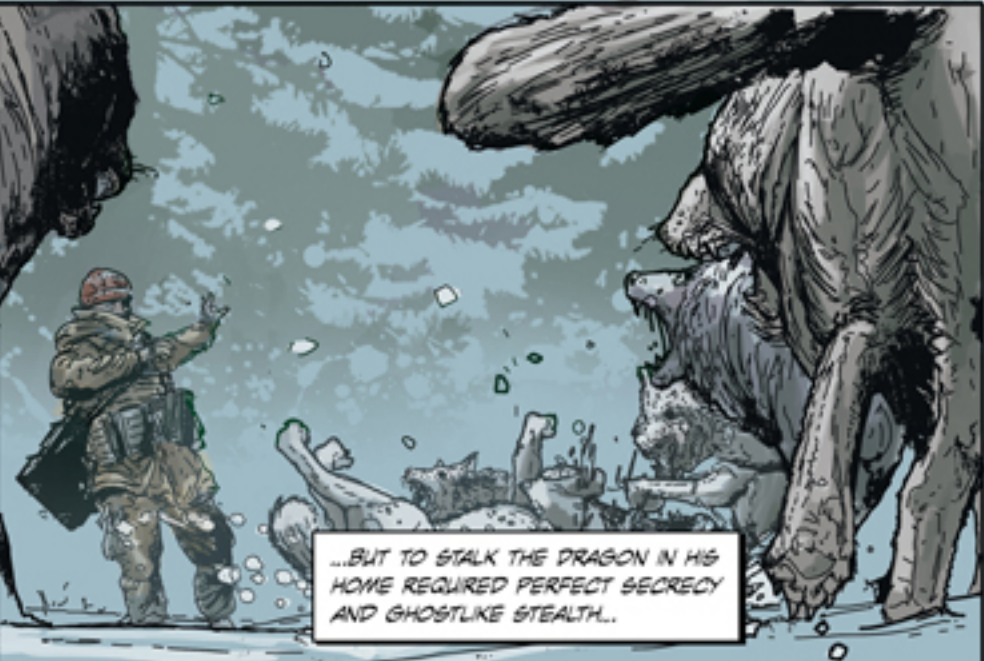


THE MOTHERLAND
ALWAYS HAD OTHER
CHILDREN TO FEED





THE HUNTER CARRIED MANY WEAPONS THAT WERE MORE THAN SUITABLE FOR DEALING WITH THE PACK...



...BUT TO STALK THE DRAGON IN HIS HOME REQUIRED PERFECT SECRECY AND GHOSTLIKE STEALTH...



...AND SOMETIMES, THE HUNTER THOUGHT THE OLD WAYS WERE BEST. THERE WAS VIRTUE AND PURITY IN HONORING THEM.



BONE, MUSCLE, AND STEEL AGAINST TOOTH, CLAW, AND HUNGER.

THE OLD MUSIC, FOREVER PLAYING ACROSS THE LAND...



...TO ITS CRESCENDO.

HE QUIETLY GAVE THANKS TO THE WOLVES FOR THEIR SACRIFICE, SEEING IN THEM FALLEN BROTHERS, FOR THEY HAD BEEN THE WHETSTONE, AND HE, THE BLADE.

SHARPENED BY PAIN AND THE EXULTANT RUSH OF SIMPLE SURVIVAL, THE HUNTER WALKED ON.



KILOMETER ATOP KILOMETER, THROUGH ETERNAL FOREST, STONE BIT HIS FEET, ICE FILLED HIS BOOTS.

HIS BODY SANG WITH FATIGUE AND PAIN. HIS SKIN, RUBBED RAW, NOW RIMED WITH FROST.



UNTIL, AT LAST...



...HE REACHED THE DRAGON'S LAR.

