



The Tale of the Cursed Hunters

A long time ago, there lived two brothers Aidan and Arlen. They were famed across the land as the greatest hunters every lived. They were proud of these claims and would get many a free drink in taverns on tales of their great hunts. One day in a tavern in south west Caledonia they heard a tale of two fierce hounds which inhabit the woods around the Loch Doon Circle, which is why few ever use the circle after dark. The story teller claimed that many a hunter had tried and failed to slay these beasts and that they could only be slain using a cursed blade. Plying the story teller with more drinks they were able to learn that this cursed blade was believed to be buried in a borrow in the woods that the beasts roam if they could dig up the blade before dark they would be able to slay these foul beasts.

The next day the hunters set out to search the woods of Loch Doon. It took them the best part of a day to find the barrow, and sunset was approaching as they started to dig. About an hour after sunset they finally unearthed the cursed knife. Aidan picked the knife up from its tomb holds up the blade to examine it in the torch light. As his brother approaches the some strange force take him and he swings the knife at his brother striking him across the arm. Confused as to why he had done it Aidan tries to apologies to his brother, but they start to argue, as they do they fail to notice the beasts approaching, circling the clearing from the shadows.

With a death curdling howl the dark hounds of the wood attack. The brothers are suddenly fighting for their lives; Arlen keeps one of the hounds at bay with his shield and hunting spear, but Aidan cannot seem to want to release the knife, and so faces the

other hound with only the cursed knife to defend him. The creature sees the fear in Aidan's eyes and leaps forward. Aidan stumbles backwards falling to the ground with the beast on top of him. For a moment he is stunned and confused, but then he realises the beast lies as a dead weight on top of him with the curse dagger sticking into its throat.

Arlen fights on against the other beast. An experienced hunter and warrior he can keep the hound from reaching him with his shield and strikes blow after blow with his spear but to no avail. With the wound his brother inflicted to his shield arm he can feel himself tiring and knows that soon the beast will get past his shield. At the last moment when Arlen thinks he can hold off no longer and the hound readies itself to strike, his brother jumps forward stabbing the hound from behind with the dagger. The hound staggers forward and with a final howl it dies at Arlen's feet. The brothers cheer, they have lived and they have slain the fearsome hounds.

What the two brothers did not know was, the beasts were the beloved hunting hounds of a dark and powerful Celtic Fey Ancestor. As the hunters finished skinning the fallen hounds the Ancestor appeared before them in the glamour of his most terrible form. At the sight of the create and powerful lord the two brothers drop to their knees begging for forgiveness and mercy, protesting they did not know these fearsome creatures belonged to the Fey Ancestor. Enraged at the fate of his slain hounds he cast a terrible curse on the two hunters. As they had taken the skins as trophies they were to wear them as such for the rest of their lives, placing the furs over the shoulders of each of the hunters they melded with the skin of the hunters. And as the woods no longer had his beasts to guard it they would be the new guardians of the woods to answer to his command, so he bound them to the

woods so they could never leave the board of its lands, never to leave until he came to claim them for his eternal hunt.

At first the hunters could still talk but as time went by they lost more and more of the humanity, becoming more beasts than men. It is said that to this day the beasts still have traces of what they once were, if you get close enough to stare into their eyes. As to the cursed blade, none know what became of it...

The End

