

A Short Story by Ethan Daly, 3rd Year.

The wind blew softly over the dunes and swept the sand up towards the rising sun that was creeping slowly over the horizon. The parched plants that dotted the rough desert floor swayed lightly in the gentle breeze. The sky was perfectly clear but was losing some of its colour. The harsh sun rose slowly up to beat down on the rugged and coarse landscape below, casting shadows over the shallow dunes. From these shadows came the vague outline of a tall figure. It moved slowly and unhurriedly up the side of the tall dune and, when it emerged from the shade, it formed the shape of a man.

The man was of robust figure and stood tall on two strong legs. He had a long but patient stride that left footprints in the sand behind him, before they were blown away by the constant breeze, vanishing as quickly as they came. His face was concealed by a shemagh. It pulled down to reveal a tough but worn face; the face of a man that had experienced combat. A tight black bandanna covered the top of his head, holding back his shaggy, cropped hair. He had an eyepatch covering his right eye and he had jagged, vertical scars above and below the left.

For a moment the man stood there, looking out at the rolling dunes and at the rising sun that was slowly making its way past the dark silhouette of the mountain ranges that covered the entire region. He glanced back to see another figure from the shade of the dune. It came into view to form the shape of a wolf. It had golden brown fur running up along its back and down the sides of its ruff, with little splotches of black at the tips of his ears. He had long, sturdy legs and his pale blue eyes were sharp and fierce.

The wolf trotted happily over to the man and lay down beside him, panting away cheerily to himself. The man bent down and stroked its head, adjusting the combat vest it had on to make sure it was fitting comfortably. He stood back up again and observed the small village that was beginning to take shape under the sun before them.

The village was half destroyed, its buildings peppered with bullet holes and torn apart by explosions. Some of the bigger buildings were still intact, although some had begun to start smoking from inside. The ground was littered with bullet casings and small craters, and among them there were bodies of dead soldiers scattered throughout.

As the man looked over the ruins of what used to be a hostile village, the faint rhythmic beat of helicopter blades sounded in the distance. The man looked back down at his trusted companion and it tilted its head back at him, as if to show that he was ready to move at a moment's notice.

"Come on, boy," he urged him on. *"Let's go."* The wolf responded with a bark, and the two trekked down and up the dunes to where the helicopter was waiting.