

THEN THE W.O.L.V.E.S. CAME

BY JEFFREY BEATY

And then the wolves came. Or W.O.L.V.E.S. if you prefer. Speak of the devil. Grampa had just been telling the young'uns the old Wolf Tales when we heard the howling.

Surely you've heard the stories yourself? How everyone went from posturing all huff and puff, to the point where W.O.L.V.E.S. were blowing everyone's house up; whether they were made of straw, sticks, bricks or steel. From fat little piggies, to those with eyes too pointy, or with wrong-colored skin; from women with hair on their chinny chin chins, or men who had nothing down below and cried wee wee wee as the wolves showed what big teeth they had. And finally even those who were quiet and live-and-let-live for being so-called fence-sitters.

Yes, they've become fairy tales now. But the tales hold truth.

Some records indicate the first were likely W.O.L.F.'s (Warriors Of Liberty and Freedom). Other records provide strong evidence it was a response to the first S.O.W.s (Social Opinion Warriors). Regardless, there were as many flavors of wolves as there were opinions. And just like the old joke about opinions and assholes, they all stunk. Which is why so many now know only the current acronym of W.O.L.V.E.S., most commonly thought to stand for Warriors Of Lethally Vicious and Extreme Stinkyness.

The theory was the wolves bromhidrosis (extreme body odor) and hypertrichosis (excessive hair growth) had to do with the accelerated metabolism created by the neural bypasses and supercharged adrenal system genetically engineered into the first volunteer armies. The goal had been hair-trigger reflexes, enhanced strength, and remarkable pain tolerance. They'd gotten all that, but the result was something resembling the old myths of werewolves. Werewolves that looked more like the equally

mythical Sasquatch – a rabid one. Very fast and strong, sweaty and hairy, berserker humanoid creatures genetically programmed to hunt a wide range of targets determined by one faction or another.

But that soon changed. The rewiring that made the zealots such great warriors, also made them incredibly animal-like. So memories and instructions were added to the base “lizard” brain of each creature. Later some faction designed a way to convert the warriors of rival factions. Their idea was that as the warriors fought, their soldier would scratch and bite the other and the nanites in the saliva and blood would enter the rival’s, and alter that enemy’s programming. The plan was partly successful; the new programming was added, but the old programming remained. The instructions merged, and other unintended genetic changes followed. Eventually all wolves’ programs were corrupt, and that corruption was contagious, even to non-wolves.

And so when the smell-o-meter alarm howled as the stench approached, Grampa’s storytelling turned to a far better lesson: Teaching the young’uns how to hunt W.O.L.V.E.S.

“There is no middle ground
Or that's how it seems
For us to walk or to take
Instead we tumble down
Either side, left or right
To love or to hate”
Peter Murphy - “A Strange Kind of Love”

THE END