

# DARK LANDS

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**EXT. COASTLINE, SCOTLAND - DAY**

A CRASHING wave showers white spray over ancient granite. The sea withdraws for another SWELL exposing jagged rocks, dominated by a towering cliff-face.

A white-tailed EAGLE soars above. It SQUAWKS and heads inland.

**EXT. BIRD'S-EYE VIEW, WESTERN MOUNTAINS - DAY**

High peaks blanketed with clouds. A melancholic land of rough scrub, streams and marshes lies below.

**EXT. MOUNTAIN RIDGE - DAY**

Grey rock soaked in thick CLAG. Visibility is down to a few feet. A bitter wind groans...

Rapid FOOTSTEPS pound rock and gravel.

An unarmed SOLDIER with a busted eye bursts from the whiteness in full flight:

She's filthy, laced in cuts, and gulps air like a punctured lung.

The SCREECH of an eagle pierces the wind.

The soldier glances up and diverts, heading downwards.

**SOUTHERN SLOPE**

She cuts across loose shale with FORCED BREATHS. Face flooded with sweat.

The HOWL of a WOLF echoes behind. It's joined by another, shorter and sharper in tone: *there's more than one.*

She checks her six-- trips and tumbles into a cloud of fog.

**BASE OF MOUNTAIN**

She hits the bottom in a ragged heap slamming against a boulder. RUNNING WATER...

She clocks a small river it seems like she recognizes it: *a marker of sorts.*

A WOLF HOWLS. Closer.

She scrambles up and plows through the water, crashing through to the other side.

Guttural GROWLS and BARKS emanate from the encroaching whiteness. The animals sound close and on three sides.

### HILLSIDE

She races up and for a brief moment the view clears. In the near distance is a dimly-lit farmhouse.

A FLASH of hope crosses her face. She pushes on, arms flailing.

### THICK FOG

Running HARD. Legs outstripping BREATHS. FULL PANIC.

In her peripheral vision she glimpses obscured shadows: The size and shape of LARGE WOLVES drawing on her heels.

She gasps for breath with expending adrenaline. Legs failing. SPENT.

She stumbles and crashes down with a THUD.

Throaty GROWLS all around. Pain and fear smother her.

A blurred silhouette of a hulking wolf emerges behind. She crawls uselessly. Dribbling snot and spit.

The creature grips her ankle and drags her back.

She CLAWS the ground in desperation. Weeping.

A bone-crunching SNAP. She SCREAMS in agony and is ripped from sight.

### EXT. FARMHOUSE - SAME

SCREAMS. An old FARMER and his SHEEPDOG look up. He picks up a shotgun and scans the white landscape.

The dog growls--

FARMER

Shh!

It stops. Still as a stone they gaze outwards. The SCREAMS die away. Replaced with distant HOWLS.

**EXT. ARMY CAMP, ENGLAND - DAY**

A parade square: Twenty-odd SOLDIERS drill in unison, berated by an angry SERGEANT.

Several TRUCKS trundle along a narrow tarmac road past lines of brick barracks.

A SQUAD jogs around a green field.

**INT. MAJOR KANE'S OFFICE - DAY**

A few presentation SHIELDS and TROPHIES do little to liven the military-grade dourness.

MAJOR KANE leans back in his chair poring over a file.

Across the desk from him is LIEUTENANT PARKER, early-twenties, sat bolt upright. Glacial. Polished.

She looks disparagingly at the grimy window. A SQUAD jogs by.

MAJOR KANE

Hmm.

Her attention flicks to the Major.

MAJOR KANE (cont'd)

Highly unusual.

PARKER

Sir?

He looks up.

MAJOR KANE

Why are Intelligence so keen for your participation?

PARKER

They thought I could help.

MAJOR KANE

In what capacity exactly?

PARKER

I am familiar with the local culture, its geography and linguistics.

Kane eyes her plain expression. Steady gaze. Unreadable. He returns to the file and skims the last page.

MAJOR KANE  
It's a missing squad from up north.  
Probably set up camp in a pub  
somewhere, waiting for the weather to  
clear. Hardly Afghanistan.

She winces as he tosses the file onto the desk. He studies her once more.

PARKER  
More than likely, sir, but orders are  
orders.

KNOCK at the door.

MAJOR KANE  
Come.

LIEUTENANT GREYSTONE strides in, a narrow shouldered type with a supercilious air.

MAJOR KANE (cont'd)  
Parker-- Greystone. He will be  
leading the patrol.

She stands, they shake. He offers her a curt thinned-lipped smile.

GREYSTONE  
It's a bit rugged out there, sure you  
can keep up?

PARKER  
I won't slow you down.

GREYSTONE  
See to it you don't.

She forces a pinched smile.

MAJOR KANE  
From now on you answer to him.  
Remember, you are there as an adviser  
only.

PARKER  
Understood.

MAJOR KANE  
Dismissed.

She salutes and exits. Greystone takes a seat and picks a small piece of fluff from his uniform.

MAJOR KANE (cont'd)  
 Bloody London. Always sticking their  
 oar in.

GREYSTONE  
 (re: Parker file)  
 Any chinks in the armor?

MAJOR KANE  
 Flawless. Apart from the obvious.

They smirk. Greystone adjusts Kane's name-plate on the desk.

GREYSTONE  
 I'll keep her on a tight leash, just  
 to be sure.

MAJOR KANE  
 Good man. Utilize Jackson.

GREYSTONE  
 Certainly, sir.

**INT. SERGEANTS ROOM - BARRACKS - DAY**

Narrowed eyes flick over the text of a worn and crumpled  
 personal letter: *rereading for perhaps the hundredth time.*

SGT JACKSON lies on his bunk. Hitting thirty and in great  
 shape. He draws a hand over his mouth. Eyes focusing on a  
 particular section.

Lips form silent words...

He screws the letter up and LAUNCHES it into the waste bin.

JACKSON  
 Bitch.

He looks out of his window... fidgets... gets up and  
 retrieves the letter.

**INT. BARRACKS - DAY**

Nine SOLDIERS in various states of undress prep kit. Mostly  
 young LADS(18) with a couple of older GUYS:

SMUDGE, 22, wound tight generally, tears through his bergen  
 flinging kit on his bunk.

BOBBY, 25, has a giggle at his expense.

BOBBY  
 (Scouser)  
 You alright ar'kid?

SMUDGE  
 Fuckin' can't find me head-torch.

Bobby smirks. Suppresses his enjoyment and employs a straight face.

PRIVATES, RITA and BOND, look on with amusement from their bunks.

Bobby SUCKS air through his teeth.

BOBBY  
 Gonna defo' need it pal.

Smudge glares.

SMUDGE  
 I fuckin' know that! Don't I!

Smudge puts his head in the bergen. Searches more.

BOBBY  
 You wanna hand like?

Bobby shines Smudges head-torch inside and peers.

SMUDGE  
 You prick!

Bobby laughs-- Smudge grabs his torch and pushes Bobby away. Rita and Bond crack up.

SMUDGE (cont'd)  
 (threatening)  
 You fuckin' want some?

The young lads back off.

CORPORAL 'PADDY' O'DOWD(30) with a faded Glasgow smile and soft Irish lilt, stands in the doorway.

PADDY  
 Listen up.

The team stop and look in: instant respect.

Paddy slow eyeballs them.

PADDY (cont'd)  
Five minutes. Briefing room.

The men start pulling on uniforms and straightening up. Paddy eyes them for a moment longer. Exits.

**INT. BRIEFING ROOM - DAY**

The SQUAD are seated along two rows in a worn but spotless room. Jackson and Paddy casually jot notes. Parker sits near them, to one side.

Lieutenant Greystone is out front finishing off. An A-frame display board with handwritten orders, and map, are the backdrop to the briefing.

GREYSTONE  
In summary. We're to be transported to the western highlands. Pick up the trail of the missing unit, locate, and bring them back. Lieutenant Parker has kindly been lent to us from Intelligence.

Bobby quietly GROANS and shifts: Noticed by Parker.

GREYSTONE (cont'd)  
She will act as our local knowledge expert. Lieutenant, your input?

Unfazed, Parker rises and takes position in front of the men. Jackson stares coolly at her.

RITA  
(whispers to Bond)  
I'd smash that.

Bond stifles a CHUCKLE-- Jackson looks their way: they avert their gaze. Fearful.

PARKER  
As you know the ground is mountainous and boggy. With limited access other than by foot. Local presence is limited to a few scattered farms, and language is mostly Gaelic... The units last transmission was from--  
(points to map)  
here. Which affords us a good starting off point, but comms are sketchy at best... Questions?

JACKSON  
What was their sit-rep on last  
transmission?

PARKER  
It was garbled. But they were on task  
and making progress.

JACKSON  
Progress on what exactly?

PARKER  
They were investigating a sighting of  
a wild animal.

A few men roll their eyes and shift in their seats.

JACKSON  
This animal. What can we expect?

PARKER  
The size and shape of a four-legged  
predator. Most likely a large dog.

JACKSON  
Shoot on sight?

PARKER  
Authorized.

Jackson frowns, tapping his notebook.

JACKSON  
How comes the local police didn't  
handle it?

PARKER  
(slight hesitation)  
They don't have the numbers to cover  
an area of this extent.

Jackson stares at Parker. Her blank return offers no clue.  
Greystone steps in.

GREYSTONE  
Right, that's all. We move in one  
hour. Sergeant Jackson, a word.

The men filter out into the hallway.

RITA  
(re: Parker)  
What you reckon?

BOBBY  
I ain't no gyno like, but I know a  
twat when I see one.

**INT. HANGER - DAY**

The squad work from a long wooden bench making final adjustments to their EQUIPMENT and WEAPONS.

Radioman, SHEEN, picks up a couple of heavy-duty spare batteries and passes them to surly JAMES.

SHEEN  
Make room for these bud.

JAMES  
Why me?

SHEEN  
'Cos you're nearest, don't be a dick.

Unimpressed James grabs the batteries and puts them on the bench next to his kit.

TINY, heavyset gunner, oils and rapidly COCKS a belt-felt machine-gun. Satisfied, he SLAPS the top cover down.

He grabs a box of AMMUNITION and walks the bench, handing each member a belt of rounds to carry.

BRANSON un-clips the protective lens caps on his sniper rifle SCOPE and looks through it.

Young Rita is leaving more kit behind than bringing it.

BOND  
(re: leftovers)  
Won't you need that?

RITA  
I ain't humping all my kit over a mountain, 'cos some jocks can't keep a poxy dog in line.

BOND  
Yeah, but--

RITA  
Don't be a twat. There's no medals for last place. I wanna be light and up front.

Jackson and Paddy are at the far end. Their hands glide over their assault rifles: SLICK. Expert.

PADDY  
What's the crack?

JACKSON  
Boss wants me to keep an eye out.

PADDY  
She's an outsider. That's a given.

JACKSON  
Yeah. I get that.

Paddy looks Jackson over.

PADDY  
But?

JACKSON  
Dunno. Can't place it.

PADDY  
Bad ju-ju?

JACKSON  
Nah.

PADDY  
There are thirteen of us now.

Paddy gives him a wink-- Jackson laughs quietly.

JACKSON  
We was that many in Nad-e-ali. Look how well that turned out.

PADDY  
That ain't such a good comparison.

JACKSON  
S'pose so. But we're still here, ain't we?

Jackson gives him a friendly nudge on the shoulder and turns to the men.

JACKSON (cont'd)  
Five minutes!

The team pick up the pace. Paddy clocks Parker as she walks in.