

The Brotherhood of Warriors

War is the lowest common denominator among civilized men. Again and again "Civilization's" cup runs over with irony leaving man vulnerable to seduction by the Devil's harlot. She makes her bed between man's weakness and his ambition and will breed with either. This unholy alliance ultimately leads to the conception and birth of a bastard child named "War". Man inherits total custody of this spawn from Hell but warriors become its caretaker. Until man ceases to exist there will be a need for warriors and as long as warriors walk this earth there will be brotherhood. It has been this way since the first day of the world's first battle and it will be this way until the last day of the world's last battle. As long as "civilized" man can cry tears of joy and hate from the same eye, his inherent flaws will ensure an eternal breeding ground for this warrior brotherhood until Judgment Day.

All mountains are similar but few bear a vein of gold and the same is true of man. Men look much the same but not all possess the blood of a warrior and even fewer the will to wager it. If a new warrior can prove his worth and be accepted into the brotherhood he is blessed with one of the rarest gifts on God's earth. He is given a fresh start in life. Each newborn warrior begins with a clean slate and his personal history is meaningless. Now he is nothing more or less than what he proves himself to be. Time and again he will be called upon by his fellow warriors to justify his virtue and their standards are high and unyielding.

A warrior's soul is set ablaze once he stands face-to-face with Death and does not waiver. Once he realizes he has the ability to take another's life and his own can end before his next breath, his innocence is forever lost and life takes on a new meaning. He will no longer accept his fate; he will determine it or die trying. He will not walk the path before him, he will cut his own. In essence his existence as an average man has concluded and a warrior is born. The brotherhood has been strengthened. He knows he has committed everything by giving his life to the brotherhood and now it is only a matter of how much time Death will allow him. One thing is dead certain, every breath he takes until his very last on God's earth will be as a free man without fear and his limits and boundaries will be his own. Nothing less is acceptable or proper. He may or may not live to see tomorrow but if he does he will do with it as he pleases. He will respect Death but he will not fear it. He will die for his brother if need be and he will pray for guidance from the Almighty. There is no ritual or celebration to recognize a warrior's passage. Each new warrior feels it in his bones and his brothers recognize it as surely as they recognize their own image mirrored on still water.

A warrior knows his time on this side of the grave can be as fleeting as a flash of lightning reflected in the aimless stare of a dead man's eyes or the final tremble of a dying wolf in a winter's storm. His life could be as insignificant as a single drop of rain in a monsoon downpour or a lone fly feeding on a rotting corpse. He has different goals than average men and he does not make longstanding plans. Yesterday is a memory and tomorrow a dream. Life for him is right here and right now. His short-term goal is one more breath and his long-term goal is a moment's peace. His ultimate dream is to maintain his composure no matter the circumstances and if tomorrow comes he will give thanks and do his duty once again. He knows Death bears a warrant with every warrior's name on it and there is no possibility of due process if his name is called. Death is prosperous and warriors are his spare change.

There is no glamour or grandeur in war but there is an abundance of courage and resolve in its warriors. Not all wars are justified or worthy of the inevitable carnage but a warrior will separate himself from a war's validation. He has a destiny to fulfill although he may not recognize or understand it. As time goes by a warrior realizes he does not fight for a cause, he fights for himself and his brothers. Once he walks into the arena the last thought on

his mind is the legitimacy of why he is there. Life is cheap on the battlefield and no one plans to die but everyone knows some will. The stakes are high, the rules are few and mistakes have consequences.

Good and evil resides in every man but they become synonymous to a warrior. Circumstances beyond his control deem it so. The ways of a gentleman he learned from his beloved mother are set aside as they must be. His resolve and his will to survive does not bind him to discriminate between good and evil and his conscience will no longer hold him accountable for either. There may be a future day of reckoning by the Almighty but for now he foregoes the civil to do the necessary.

A warrior must cross the bridge to "Hell on Earth" to apply his trade and he must be totally focused on the task at hand. Inevitably the time for small talk, well wishes, handshakes, goodbyes and tears comes to an end and the world erupts. Amongst the turmoil and chaos that makes the battlefield a madhouse, a warrior's chore is as clearly defined and uncomplicated as it can possibly be. Kill the enemy or be killed. In the arena it is an eye for an eye, will against will and stink on stink. He does not care if his enemy has a wife, children or parents. He does not care if his enemy is religious, compassionate or a pillar of his community. He is there to kill him and will use any means available to do so. A warrior respects the fact his enemy is a formidable opponent and patriot himself, but his sentiments toward him end there. Emotions such as remorse, forgiveness, sympathy or guilt have no place on the battlefield. These are dangerous sentiments and a warrior's task leaves no room for such nonsense. Emotions will be left to the songwriters, poets and blowhards.

A warrior knows each battle is a dress rehearsal for a final act not yet scripted. He knows each battle may be his last and he wants his last act on this earth to be his finest. If he dies his final story will be told by his brothers and he wants his last account to be one of dignity, honor and duty. A warrior accepts the fact he will either die in battle or resume the life of an average man after his war and the longer he survives the more he will wonder if there is a difference. Living and existing are sometimes confused for the same in the civilized world but warriors learn they are not associated. It is difficult to relish life unless you have called Death's bluff and the lion's share of warriors have done so. They have seen Death's handiwork and heard his seductive voice beckoning in the distance. Life is cheap but living is priceless.

On occasion colorful ribbons and shiny medals are "awarded" to warriors to recognize physical wounds or some handbook's definition of bravery. These adornments and commendations mean very little to a true warrior. They are the Mardi Gras beads of war and hold little value. What he wants more than anything cannot be held in one's hand or worn on a uniform and it will not be inscribed on his gravestone. More important than his own life is the love, loyalty and respect of his brothers and that is never bestowed or awarded, it must be earned and the price is sometimes high. If he can earn this perfect trinity he will die a rich man whether his final resting place is a golden coffin in God's acre or wrapped in rags and laid to rest in a potter's field.

Few men have the good fortune or opportunity to become warriors and some lack the ability. It is a gift from God that bears Hell's postmark. Side-by-side warriors see and do things average men could not fathom or understand. Average men are a leaf at the mercy of the wind. Warriors are the wind that bends the corn, fills the sails and allows the eagle to soar above his realm. Over time an unbreakable bond is formed between warriors. This bond transcends deeds and actions. It is unique in this earthly world and forever and always they will see themselves and their brothers as one. Distance, time or circumstances have no consequence on this abiding union.

History will bear witness to the virtue, significance and message of each war but warriors will determine the outcome if allowed to do so. God will determine the casualties and all too often Death will be his messenger. It has always been this way and it will always be this way. Invariably there is a confederacy of fools who will portray

their own version of all wars from a court jester's perspective but the only legitimate account resides in the minds and hearts of the warriors. What they encountered, witnessed, or thought during their war cannot be explained to those outside the brotherhood and there is no good reason to do so. It serves no useful purpose. What is done is done.

Victory in war cannot be purchased but it does require the ultimate investment. War's only legal tender is a warrior's blood. Warriors satisfy the cost of war by greasing Death's palm and the road to peace is paved using cobblestones glazed with their blood. History is altered each time blood is spilled in battle. Epic battles consist of a series of distinct and decisive encounters. It becomes personal and each casualty of war is a story unto itself. All are laundered through a warrior's soul, mitigated by his conscience, reconciled in his heart, and burned into his memory to be summoned time after time in his dreams. His bounty for victory consists of a lifetime of what-ifs and what-could-have-been's. Brotherhood becomes his salvation and survival his redemption. Let there be no doubt victory belongs solely to the warriors but victory is never elegant or graceful.

There are those outside the brotherhood who seek to profit from or stake claim to victory and they are no different than vultures and maggots feeding on a lion's kill. They are more likely to choke on their own vomit than earn legitimacy in the eyes of a warrior. They are imposters without character who seek the honor and distinction of being a warrior but have not paid the steep price of admission. They are clowns, buffoons and stooges looking for a circus. These men lead the pathetic lives of a coward and are not worthy of a warrior's second thought or the cost of a rusty bullet.

After his last battle has been fought, his final tear shed, and the last goodbyes have been said, a warrior retires from the battlefield. On the surface the war is over for these splendid men and their labors and sacrifices are etched on the very souls of their brothers to never be forgotten.

Together these warriors have tiptoed along the precipice of Hell and leaned over the slippery edge to spit into the Devil's eye time after time yet they survived. They faced hardship and adversity that mocked the margins of possibility. They knocked on Death's door again and again as they prayed he was not home. Any questions about their courage, character, and loyalty have been answered over and over. They have engaged in the unthinkable, seen the indescribable and endured the unendurable and all of it will remain inside the brotherhood. In a way they have cheated Death. Parts of their hearts and souls have already died so Death will find little profit in an old warrior. The love, loyalty and respect they earned from their brothers are forever secured and this assures they will die rich no matter the circumstances.

Warriors go home to resume their former lives quietly but proudly knowing they have done their duty like warriors before. The grace of God has brought peace to their valley for now and they will seize it. The irony and sometimes the tragedy is warriors over the ages have paid a tremendous price to create a protected civilization in which many of them no longer belong. Some have lost the ways of acceptable behavior in the civilized world and they will now suffer the consequences as will everyone they are involved with. Once they have crossed over to the netherworld of armed conflict it can be difficult to find their way back. Once they have swam in deep and treacherous waters a stroll through morning dew is a meager substitute. Let there be no doubt of the existence of two worlds and most warriors have been baptized in both, once in the "blood of the lamb" and again in the "bloody waters of Hell's tide". For a warrior the line between the two worlds is thin and the path they must now walk is narrow and perilous.

A warrior has two hearts, two minds and two memories. One of each belongs to the warrior inside him and the other belongs to his existence as a "civilized" man. These parts are not compatible or interchangeable and the

stress of keeping them in sync can govern the remainder of a warrior's life and disturb the peace of everyone involved. If he fails to maintain harmony and these parts become intermingled, turmoil and conflict are as certain as tomorrow's sun. A warrior can find himself fighting a secondary war within the civilized world and it is not hard for him to find an enemy. The enemy lies within and he is experienced, formidable and relentless.

These men will spend the rest of their lives trying to reconcile the warrior inside them with the world in which they now reside. They will strive to live in peace among those who do not understand them and they will do their best to meet the expectations of polite society. They will gather with other warriors as often as possible in hopes of preserving their sanity and to reinforce their brotherhood. Within their hearts God's peace stands at ease alongside the warrior that will always reside there. Each tries to not disturb the other for fear of the consequences. They now understand there can be no final act or internal peace for a true warrior until he leaves this earthly world. A warrior is forever and part of him will forever be at war. That is what makes him a warrior and that is his destiny.

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