The Dead Lands

By Glenn Standring
Dead eyes of the night...  
...stare at me not!
Long ago...  
...our lands were the scene of a great battle.  
It was a bloody and glorious time.  
But now, peace reigns in these lands  
and we all enjoy it.
Welcome, Wirepa.  
Your father is not with you?  
He apologises...  
...and sends you his regards.
Let us go then...  
...to the Place of Bones.  
It is noble of you to listen to your ancestors...  
...and seek proper burial for them.
We have not hunted or fished here  
since the great war...  
...your ancestors have been honoured  
all these years.
May you find what you seek.  
Do you still walk here, my ancestors?  
I will avenge your deaths.  
You will sing my name...  
...and of my glory.
Welcome me, my noble ancestors.  
I have a gift for you.  
Sacrilege!  
You dare lay hands on a chief's son?  
Sacrilege!  
There in the forest...  
...your son...  
...defiling the bones of my ancestors.  
I saw him!  
Did you do what he says?  
No, Father!  
He did it.  
This is his plan...  
...to blame us. I know it!
When my father finds out...  
...it will be war.  
We are at the edge of a precipice, Lord.  
If my son did this act...  
...then I myself will kill him...  
...so that the bond between
our two tribes remains strong.
Father!
Be still, fool.
If I sacrifice my son...
...to the God of War...
...would you consider the balance restored?
Will it end your grievance
against me and my kin...
...for now and always?
It is all right, Father.
I did not do this thing...
...but I embrace death, if it helps you.
You make me proud that you are mine.
Is it at an end?
Will his death serve to bring us together,
for all time...
...as witnessed here by us all?
Yes?
Or is it no?
No sacrifice can repair this insult
to my ancestors.
You are all responsible
and my father will hear of it.
And when he does...
...pray doom does not fall upon your heads.
Brave warriors!
War feeds our glory...
...there is no place for peace.
Do you want them followed?
We could kill them in their sleep...
...and feast on their flesh this very night.
There has been a desecration.
It was likely done by Wirepa himself...
...a pretext for what is to come.
If his father wants cause for war, he has it.
There is nothing that will stop it now.
Finally something honourable
for a warrior to do.
If you were not so stupid, boy...
...I would thank you.
I want to be a warrior.
Is it not good to die in a great battle?
Does it not honour our ancestors?
To the east of here...
lies the place we call the Dead Lands.
Once, a great tribe lived there...
...but they disappeared.
One day they were there, the next...
...they were gone.
A land without people, a dead place.
I do not want that...
...for our tribe.
They sigh at us.
The dead moan at us from the earth.
We can hear them.
We must heed their call...
...listen to their sighs.
We walk with our dead...
...but we don't yet know it.
Murder! Treachery!
I underestimated you.
You are truly your father's son.
Yes.
Before long...
...your tribe will be no more.
I will fill your daughter's uterus with dirt.
And that will be your lineage forever...
...dead earth.
Indeed...
...you are a warrior, Tane.
You will remember this face.
I will stare at you from death...
...and wait for you to join me.
You and all here...
...are cursed.
Well said.
A glorious way to die.
Slaughter the rest!
We will eat our fill tonight.
We take his head.
You are cursed.
I pity you.
Did you find the boy?
No.
The boy fled.
We leave.
Our men are dead...
...and they took your father's head.
Where were you, boy?
Look...
...see what you have done
to our glorious people.
Look!
What plant is this?
Wirepa has our father's head.
Do you understand the lesson?
Our ancestors scream at me for repayment.
And what can you do?
One against so many?
I will get repayment alone...
...or die seeking it.
If I could...
...I would kill Wirepa myself.
But I cannot.
And neither can you.
If I do not return...
...tell stories about me.
We will cross here.
That way is forbidden.
It goes through the Dead Lands.
So we'll move swiftly, then.
Travelling through the Dead Lands
saves us five days.
My lord...
...Tahi is right.
Those lands are forbidden...
...we risk the wrath of its spirits.
They say there is...
...a monster.
A monster who eats
the flesh of anyone who passes...
...who consumed a whole tribe.
What do I care...
...of monsters?
Or the dead ancestors of this place?
They will marvel at my glory!
And the ghosts will hide from us.
Yes, Lord.
We go.
Come here, boy.
Don't you recognise me?
The young have such short memories.
I am your grandmother.
I have never spoken with the dead before.
I am proud of you.
But...
...you are a fool.
What do you think you will do on your own?
I will kill Wirepa.
He will kill you.
Stupid!
I will not let it be so.
I am my father's son.
Then think, boy...
...as your father would have.
I know who can help us.
The flesh-eating warrior
who haunts these lands.
There is something of your father
in you after all.
Why are you here, little one?
Don't you know
men who come here never leave?
I am here to speak with
the warrior who is said to live here.
I am a chief.
Is that right?
A chief?
Show these witches no fear...
...or they will devour you.
They feast on the blood of great warriors.
This way, boy.
What you seek is inside.
Enter at your peril.
How old are you, boy?
Nearly sixteen seasons.
You are a dwarf, then.
Even small things can be useful...
...and some large things not.
You're funny.
Perhaps I should hang you above the fire,
keep you as my entertainment.
Or a tasty treat.
What do you think?
Nothing?
I caught this fellow hunting on my lands.
See what I did to him? Why aren't you laughing, boy? Why are you here? Tell me... ...and I'll decide... ...whether to kill you and eat you, or not. I follow a man... ...he is called Wirepa. Even now he walks through your lands... ...as if you do not exist. Be quiet! Mind those wives of mine, boy. You know what they are doing? They eat these mushrooms... ...and their heads fill with visions... ...and they talk to the dead. Finish your story then... ...and we'll see if I eat you. What is it? A lizard on my staff... ...it is a bad omen. Or not. I told you we would be cursed. This is proof. The creature has polluted my weapon. I cannot use it now. We must leave this place. Fool! It is a genuine omen. We are cursed... ...that is what it says. You can hear it talk, can you? Sleep. Tomorrow we move on... ...and all will be as before. The boy reminds you of your own dishonour... ...that much is plain. You won't escape this life so easily. Until you die, I cannot kill myself. I am trapped in this dishonour with you. Seeing you suffer... ...is the only pleasure left to me.
Help the boy.
Why?
Give his blood to your ancestors.
Ask their forgiveness...
...so that you might join them in the afterlife.
And then we both can die.
Stupid woman!
You think a dwarf's blood...
...will make them forgive me
for what I have done?
Yes!
Because he is a prize.
He is a prize!
Because he is everything...
...that you are not.
We are going south...
...leaving this place.
Good.
I do not want to share my glory with you.
Go.
Well...
...anyone else want to go with them?
No? Then move.
There is no glory lying here.
I feel there is something wrong,
with these lands.
So what of it?
The spirits cry at us...
...and yet, what can they do?
Curse us?
It is they who were cursed...
...not us.
We should rest.
The monster!
Run!
The fat one should be slow enough for you!
Bravado is pointless...
...look where it got you!
Ah, the novice.
Come here!
Die nobly!
Come on boy, don't tickle him!
Watch this.
Greet your ancestors from me.
You weren't very good today. 
In fact, you were hopeless. 
But next time, you'll be better. 
My father was right. 
He knew I was no warrior. 
You don't say. 
His death... 
...was not a noble one. 
How else should he have died? 
Like an animal, 
crawling away in the forest? 
Is that how a warrior should die? 
He fought, he died. 
Noble? 
That is what old men teach boys 
so they will rush into death for their tribes. 
But death is not noble. 
Nor is life. 
If you ask me... 
...the gods have made this life... 
...to take pleasure in our suffering. 
Tough meat... 
...hardly worth the effort. 
You are getting worse. 
Come, I'll show you something. 
Your opponents will thank you 
for a cleaner kill. 
First... 
...make them angry. 
They lose focus. 
Make a joke about their mother... 
...that usually works for me. 
Now, come at me. 
Right here. 
As hard as you can. 
Their legs go like runny shit! 
Then here, see? 
Always keep the cord around your wrist... 
...then it won't slip 
when you come down hard. 
You try. 
I said do it! 
Don't tickle me... 
...I don't like it!
Again.
That's better!
Fire in the eyes now, eh boy?
You just needed a little encouragement.
Again!
Not bad.
Not very good either...
...but maybe enough.
Now sleep.
Tomorrow we run all day.
Follow me, now.
Move!
They're getting away!
That's what you think.
Run.
Remember what I taught you!
Where is the boy?
So you like boys, eh?
Before you die...
...the boy's father...
...wishes you well...
...and encourages me to spare you no pain.
Find the boy.
Now.
Brave warriors...
...get ready!
Where are you?
Kill this dog!
It is him!
The monster in the flesh.
Indeed it is.
Come, little one.
I'll teach you a lesson.
Your mother mates with dogs!
Dog!
Move!
Is that all you can do?
You must earn the right to dispatch us!
He is a demon!
Lord...
...you have been compromised!
Let's go!
Cowards!
Hunt what's in front of you, eh?
You can't kill me...
...I'm dead already.
Am I not?
Leave me be!
What is it?
They are judging me-
They cannot.
They are my ancestors.
They judge me.
Am I not dead?
You will live.
What is it, boy?
Why didn't you tell me...
...these were your tribe's lands?
What is it to you?
What does it matter at all?
They're all gone.
They are your ancestors...
...you should honour them.
You know nothing.
You are the last of your people.
Then we are the same, eh?
All I want is Wirepa.
We need to do something.
Like what?
We can't catch them now.
We are surrounded by your ancestors.
They will slow Wirepa down.
I won't.
You will.
I'm not eating those.
Yes you are.
You will talk to your ancestors.
Ask them to slow Wirepa down.
Why don't you then...
...if it's such a good idea.
This is your land.
These are your ancestors.
Why are you afraid?
They will not speak to me.
If Wirepa gets away...
...he will have beaten you as well as me.
What difference...
...does it make to you...
...dead things?
They moan, our ancestors...
...they call to us.
The dead are calling...
...pleading for revenge and we heed them.
Where are you going, you two?
Will they help us?
They already have.
We have angered the ancestors
of this place...
...they are punishing us for coming here.
Your fear will not stop my glory.
Do you hear me?
He truly is a demon.
He is glorious!
You don't deserve to fight him.
Faster.
Cursed, are we?
And yet the ground opens up to hide us.
Mother earth is alive!
Where are you going, you two?
We were travelling with companions...
...but became lost.
You might have seen them?
We've seen no one.
You're hurt.
My father fell...
...but I nursed him back to health.
I welcome you, little brother...
...to share our camp for the night.
Thank you, we will.
He doesn't talk much does he, your father?
What are you doing?
We should kill them.
I've no argument with them.
Then we should leave.
I thought you wanted to find Wirepa.
What does it matter to you?
You said to carry on was hopeless.
Why are you sad, little brother?
I miss my family.
But you're with your father.
The rest of my family.
I don't think he is your father.
Yes he is.
Perhaps we should take you back with us.
My father would find out the truth.
It would do you no good.
I know one thing...
...you are indeed a proud and brave warrior.
The boy confessed...
...you are not his father.
Stupid boy!
I might have known.
People don't enter the Dead Lands
unless they have to.
Unless they are very desperate.
Why are you here then?
Our own lands are empty of birds.
You should try eating less.
And what is it you want here...
...warrior?
Who are you?
Tell me.
Tell me who it is I'm touching.
So much pain this body has seen.
Has it seen many noble deeds...
...great warrior?
Keep going...
...and I may yet tell you my name.
You bear the mark of the dead tribe.
Don't touch me!
Yes.
Your tribe will be no more.
You will disappear like mist.
Come then, monster...
...if it is death you want.
Don't! Please!
You should not have come here.
Why?
Why would you do this?
What are you, a demon?
Are you even a man at all?
She would have told them.
What?
That I exist.
They would know I am but a man...
...and come to take my lands.
I know who you are...
...why do you not kill me?
I told you boy...
...I told you.
I was not honourable, I told you!
I said we should go!
This is your fault.
- Liar!
- Careful, boy.
You're an animal!
Not noble enough for you?
Not like you are.
My father taught me honour.
You should restore your own.
And where is your father now?
Where your people are.
You want to know about honour, boy?
My father asked me...
...to slay my whole family.
My wife...
...my children.
As repayment to an enemy.
I did it, to honour him and my tribe.
But the world is not honourable, boy.
Did the betrayal of your father
teach you nothing?
Do you hear me?
There is no nobility, just politics.
So...
...I killed everybody else, too.
I killed them all...
...in the night.
While they slept.
That is why people fear me.
The monster who killed his own tribe.
Do you hear me?
Do you hear?
I admit it!
I have a blackness that comes upon me...
...where even the God of War
would not venture.
I've done many bad things.
I told you...
...do not mistake me for a good man.
I am not the hero from the stories.
I am the monster.
You've done well so far, eh boy?
You're still alive.
I have failed.
Wirepa got away.
Well, you can give up...
...anyone can give up.
I didn't say I was giving up.
That's good.
I want repayment
for what happened to my son...
...and you are the only one who can get it.
Why do you stare at me?
What right do you have...
...to stare at me?
How dare you?
Sigh at me not!
I have something to show you.
There...
...see it?
There will be more flesh tonight.
Now we can settle up.
They will see it.
Fool!
You talk of fools?
Who set the ancestors
of this land against us?
And dragged us through it...
...with empty bellies!
He's a fool...
...but no need to kill him.
Why are we here?
You could not go on...
...so we took shelter.
It's defendable.
Are you ready to travel?
Fight him when you control the ground.
Back inside the fort!
Cowards!
It was glory you wanted.
Come then...
...and I will tell stories
about how brave you were.
Instead of hiding behind a fence like cowards!
Look upon your son, Tane.
The weeping dwarf...
...who caused your tribe's suffering.
You are funny.
So brave, eh...
...behind a fence?
Behind my fence.
Glory...
...or death.
Either way...
...you'll make a handsome corpse, eh boy?
We will die here without water.
Be still.
It's only been a day.
Just one day, yes...
...but my mouth is filled with nothing but dust!
Mana is right.
We have no supplies.
You have put us in a trap.
Remember your place.
So it's our place...
...to die of thirst?
They have no food or water.
We have them.
Your quest for glory...
...where has it led us?
Into this trap...
...from which there is no escape!
We wither here until the demon sees fit to consume us.
Settle down!
Come and look...
You are not your father.
Lord...
You are a fool!
There!
Let his blood sustain us.
Lord...
...look.
What did I tell you?
The ancestors of this place choose me.
I will make the boy's head...
...a match with his father's.
The gods smile on me...
...and I am like a son to them.
There!
My warriors...
...we leave!
There!
Cowards!
Come, boy...
...time to claim what's yours.
Come on, boy!
Stupid boy!
You're afraid, aren't you.
I am so glorious...
...that is what you're in awe of.
The monster's spirit
and these dead lands have possessed you.
So be it.
No mercy!
Come on, boy!
You're embarrassing me!
Put up a decent fight!
I am better than you...
...and now you know it.
Pick it up, demon...
...I will honour you with a good death.
Go!
Go to your father.
You are a fool to honour me.
Tell the dead...
...I am coming.
The demon is but a man, after all.
No!
Glorious...
...as your father before you.
You will pay for the slaughter of my family.
As it should be!
Your father will be proud...
...just as mine is proud of me.
Tell them how I met death.
Promise me!
And if I do...
...what then?
Your kin will seek repayment for your death.
They will tell of our glory...
...and remember us in stories.
You didn't have to kill them all!
How could I live with the dishonour...
...of my kin lying unburied?
I have given them glory.
Just as you will do when you kill me.
So it goes, then...
...around in circles.
When you think of me...
...you will remember how I spared you.
And that forever...
...you owe me a debt.
The debt lies with you...
...your father...
...and your tribe.
For all time.
Do you swear?
Swear.
Say it!
I swear.
On your honour...
...and that of your father.
I swear it.
Then the ancestors of this place...
...are my witness.
Stupid boy...
...let me die in peace.
I can see them, boy...
...my ancestors.
They reject me.
They banish me from the afterlife.
I have nowhere to go now.
You will be welcomed by my ancestors.
Do you hear me?
They will lead you into the afterlife.
And we will speak of you in stories.
Speak of your honour.