

Volibear: The Rising Storm

By J.S.Phoenix

As a cub of the Ursine, only one thing frightened me.
Not the stories of phantom bears that stalked our village at night,
nor the tale of witches that snatched cubs out past curfew.
What scared me was something real.
The tempest of Gelid Mountain.

Cubs assembled every fourth moon, sat by roaring fires and listened
to Elder's stories.
Tales of breathless wind and metallic thunder. Nights spent in
blackness, unsure if they'd wake when daylight came.
All in search of a great power.
It was a journey I vowed to never take.
Yet here I am, hugging my back to snow covered rock and trying not
to look down at a view I'd spent countless nights imagining.
But I must press on. Wisdom awaits at the eye of the storm;
knowledge to help my tribe prosper.
The triumvirate that govern the Ursine have given in to a life of sloth.
If we are attacked in our current ways, we wouldn't stand a chance.
For the good of the tribe, I must succeed.

The wind is sharp, cutting into my face like slashing claws. I duck into
a cavern and shake the hardened snow from my fur, taking a
moment to get my bearings.
I spy something awful hidden in the shadows; the hunched, decayed
body of an Ursine.
What little fur she has left is charred by lightning and her eyes are

like glass.

She must've rested here to attend to her wounds, only to never get back up.

The death I'd always feared.

The cub in my mind wants to cry. The shaman in me whispers a prayer and summons the strength to continue.

I lean around the frost covered rock and spy my destination. A circle of grey clouds, penetrated by forks of lightning. Another day's travel at best.

Thunder rumbles dangerously, but I head out.

My senses are overloaded. Has it been hours? Days? Nothing is clear anymore.

My claws sink into the snow as a gale threatens to throw me into the inky blackness below.

Freezing rain seeps into my bones.

It's suddenly hard to move.

One foot....

Then the next...

Duck against another gale.

Eyes feel as if they're being pricked with a thousand tiny needles.

I yell encouragement to myself, but the gale is deafening.

My family comes to mind. My cubs. What could happen to them if I fail.

Enslaved by another race? Made to obey? To submit?

The stinging in my eyes lessens and the next few steps come easier.

Can it be?

I blink the ice from my eyelids and lift my head a little higher.

My bent, exhausted legs suddenly find motivation to stand.

A smile spreads across my face, cracking the frozen fur.

Walls of cloud swirl in a cylindrical shape a few feet ahead and inside rests that which no Ursine has ever witnessed.

I run onwards, despite the overwhelming urge to retreat.

The storm throws lightning to test me, and I leap away just in time.

The ground where I was stood erupts into white flame and every nightmare I've ever faced re-emerges.

By the Gods... What was I thinking by coming here? I'm a Shaman, not a warrior.

My place is to aid spirits of the fallen to their rest, not to save the tribe.

Lightning is raining down now, exploding everywhere like a minefield.

I dodge a little too late and searing pain consumes my back legs.

I fall.

My head rises from the snow and I glance back, thank the Gods that my limbs are still attached, heave myself up to test the weight on my injured legs.

My vision darkens from the pain and I stumble.

This is it Volibear, time to face this childish fear.

Thunder shakes the ground and my fur stands on end.

The next bolt is coming for me.

I'm mere feet from the eye, but this pain is overbearing.

If only I could tell my past self where I was now, that I'd made it this far into the thing we feared most.

Pointless thoughts, yet oddly comforting in what could be my final moments.

I roll onto my back and stare up at the sky. Yell so hard my lungs could burst.

"Ursine show no fear. Where others cower, we rise. May our enemies hear our names and bow. Long live the tribe!"

A traditional battle call, albeit with extra quivering.

The wind whistles as if its admiring me.
The sky illuminates and I close my eyes as the bolt strikes.

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Death isn't what I imagined.
I'm weightless, the world around me non-existent.
Every inch of my body tingles with static and my breaths are short
and rapid.
Wait. I'm breathing?
I flick my eyes open and everything is white.
Where...?
Something is whispering now.
At last, a true leader. The first in millennia to face death with dignity.
The voice circles me.
Static jolts my spine, makes me shiver.
*Like thunder he warns of what is to come. Like lightning he will strike
down those who refuse to listen.*
A hurricane engulfs me. A maelstrom of churning winds and raw
electricity.
Use this power wisely. The cold ones will soon rise.
Adrenaline pushes in my veins, as if the storm itself is absorbing into
my bones.
All hail Lord Volibear.
The whiteness evaporates and I'm back on the mountain once again.
But I'm different. Stronger.
The wind is still howling, but its ignoring me. Respecting me.
Sparks crackle between my claws.
I thrust my head back and roar into the blackened sky.
The storm rumbles in harmony. Cracks of thunder join in like
cheering subjects.
If what the voice said was true, I don't have long to prepare.

Elders will tell a *new* story to our cubs.

The story of the one that endured. The Ursine of legend.

I am Volibear.

Leader of the Ursine and force of the sacred storm.

And I am ready for war.