

### Extract from 'The Way of the Mother'

Johnny Hedgerow slung his billhook over one shoulder, spun a mallet in his free hand and sauntered once more into the village of Cropsoe, the hub of the Weald. He walked the road with casual ownership, marched straight down the middle knowing no one would challenge him, every step establishing his claim. Wearing Hweol's livery, a patchwork greatcoat of emerald and jade, battered trousers shaded in earth and feet clad in boots of oak, he told the land he was here; servant and son, keeper of tradition.

Every year, he would return before the Wheel started turning to check the boundaries between this valley and the world beyond. Wood that had rotted needed to be stripped away and replaced with younger limbs, easily moulded to weave the skeletal framework required to protect the land and the creatures who made their home there. Something told him this year the Weald would need more than his usual light maintenance. It had been a long time since he had carried out a Hedging. He licked his lips. Soon his blade would drink.

Only a few villagers were out and about, most busy working in the fields or hiding indoors. Mechanised and digitised modern-day life was kept at a distance and much that happened here demanded good, old-fashioned physical labour. The Wheel needed blood and sweat and occasionally tears to keep turning. Those abroad now stopped and stared, quickly averted their eyes should he catch them looking. Nobody acknowledged him directly however. Johnny grinned. He had no hard feelings at such a cold reception, he was a servant of Hweol as much as they were. Hweol, the one who turned, Hweol, the Wheel; *Hweol*, the circle of life.