

## Twilight of Eschaton

By Soren G.

“Among the hellscape we’ve visited, Kelomas, this has to number among the worst.”, said Severxes to his brother. The Servants of Eschaton had arrived in Shyish barely a fortnight ago and already chafed by a precipitous anxiety for violence. They had sated their thirst two nights ago in a village raid. The plunder was disappointing, a few seal skins and salted fish, but the true treasure were the inhabitants. Men were feasted on or butchered, while the women and children were taken as slaves. Of these prisoners, some would grow into members of their damned legion. Others would not be so lucky. Either they would die of exposure, or be fed to the knights’ horses or his Karkadrak, Rake. Had this been nine years ago, he would have moaned the injustice of it. Even during his time as warchief of his clan in the mountains of Ulgu, he had never been this merciless. His elder brother Anomandris had seen to that.

Every Servant of Eschaton was a slave to Anomandris in some form or another. Through his sheer martial and sorcerous prowess, he bent hundreds of skilled warriors to his twisted will. Even his own brothers were not spared. During a duel many years ago, Anomandris bested Severxes, took his crown, and drove Kelomas mad with mutation in one night. In the years since, Severxes persecuted innumerable atrocities in accordance with the will of his dark brother. For the Servants of Eschaton, a conscience is a liability. A mind cannot handle such suffering and guilt without either abandoning morality or going mad.

Some two hundred Servants made it to Shyish, where they camped atop a densely thicketed plateau. Under the bright starlight, cries of exultation, ecstasy, and suffering echoed throughout their frigid encampment. Beside Severxes, Kelomas opened his mouth and outstretched his tongue to capture the falling snow. “It tastes like home, brother”. Under his

bronze helm, Severxes allowed himself a small smile. He always enjoyed these spells of lucidity from Kelomas, especially considering how rare they had become.

“Indeed it does. Though thankfully not as dark”. It was true. Although the night here in the cold regions of Shyish was powerful, it was nothing compared to the black abyss that ensorcelled Ulgu.

A chuckle. “What’s wrong with the dark, brother?”.

Severxes’ smile began to fade, “It reminds me of home”. Kelomas frowned at that. His younger brother bent down and half-heartedly threw twigs in their small fire with his remaining human hand. Now Severxes’ melancholy truly waxed. His younger brother had been beautiful once. Long flowing hair, slender limbs, and a sharp acuity had been replaced by a bald pate ruptured by a single daemonic horn, a grotesque insectile arm, and a nearly all-consuming madness. All ‘gifts’ of Anomandris and his Gods of the Eight-Pointed Star.

In the night, there came a sound. To anyone else, it would have been no more than a strange and irregular wind, but the Servants of Eschaton knew better. These were the beating of dread Manticore wings. The once raucous camp quickly grew silent and Kelomas’ childish smile disappeared as his body jerked to unseen tormentors. Through gritted teeth he said, “I hear his whisper. Our elder brother has returned”.

Elmara was eating with her fellow knights when her servant arrived. “Mistress”, she said hesitantly without making eye contact, “you have been summoned to the Warlord’s Fire”, then she quickly bowed, kissed Elmara’s boot, and hurried out of her tent. She, whose name escaped

Elmara, was one of Elmara's spoils from the most recent village raid. While her companions fed their captives to their horses, she instead bound the girl into perpetual servitude. The recent days had vindicated her decision, as this servant proved quite adept at serving her needs, be they relaying messages or foraging the nearby woods for fresh game and tinder.

Leaving her head unadorned despite the frigid air and even colder requirements of decorum, Elmara finished the last of her meal and crossed the encampment towards Anomandris' tent, observing the rest of the army as she did so. The Servants of Eschaton's mood had quickly recovered after their Master's return. Warriors once more slid in and out of rapturous orgies, fought in the Bloodpits, and recited impossible litanies to the Great Changer. Theirs was a motley band of depravity, and although they all may worship different gods, they were all unmistakably bound to the will of the Dark Brother Anomandris.

It took nearly half an hour, but Elmara arrived at Warlord's great tent. Folding back the skin-leather hide, she entered to the thick odors of foreign incense. Severxes, his mutated brother Kelomas, and the small, wretched creature Jokli all sat silently in a rough semi-circle facing the figure obscured by dense layers of smoke in the back of the tent. "*Welcome, Elmara. Please take a seat*" whispered Anomandris. His voice was serpentine, which coiled back on itself and slithered out of his throat. The silver chains which obscured his face coiled and clinked as if brushed by a wind.

"Of course, Master", said Elmara as she took her place next to Severxes. She touched his arm as she sat, but he did not look at her. His eyes were downcast in either the fear, hatred, or humiliation of his elder brother's presence. Perhaps all three. She had been there during the duel and witnessed his humbling and his brother's mutation at the hands of Anomandris. Elmara had comforted him during his recovery, held his head as he wept in rage and despair. Perhaps only

Elmara knew the true extent of Severxes' hatred of his brother. It was as bottomless as the abyss and just as black.

*“Prepare your soldiers to march. Tomorrow, we leave for Lake Bykaal and rendezvous with Thousandeyes. Kill any you encounter on the way,”* his voice hissed. *“Though we serve the Undivided in name,”* he continued, *“remember your true master. Eschaton awaits, children. The Gods will be watching”*.

“Yes, Master” The remainder said in unison, then each kissed Anomandris' boot in ritual submission and left the tent. Elmara stood outside in the bitter wind and looked towards the horizon. A cold sun slowly rose from behind the jagged teeth of the mountains, tainting the night with its radiance. *There will be great slaughter soon,* thought Elmara as she offered a mental prayer to the Bloodfather. *We will burn Shyish.*