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PATH OF THE INCUBUS

Andy Chambers

The eternal city of Commorragh has been cast into turmoil by the Dysjunction, a cataclysmic disturbance in the very fabric of its existence. As the streets are inundated with horrors from beyond the veil, Supreme Overlord Asdrubael Vect battles to keep his enemies in check and maintain his stranglehold over the riven city. Kabal turns upon kabal, archon against archon as the fires of hell are unleashed. Redemption for Commorragh rests in the hands of a disgraced incubus warrior wrongly accused of triggering the Dysjunction itself. His efforts to reclaim his lost honour could save the city or damn it forever – assuming it can survive the daemonic invasion and the archons' deadly battles for supremacy.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Author of the dark eldar series, along with the novel *Survival Instinct* and a host of short stories, Andy Chambers has more than twenty years' experience creating worlds dominated by war machines, spaceships and dangerous aliens. Andy worked at Games Workshop as lead designer of the Warhammer 40,000 miniatures game for three editions before moving to the PC gaming market. He now lives and works in Nottingham..

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THE POWERED EDGE of the blade was inactive but its inherent weight and molecule-sharp edge still sheared through flesh and bone as though it was little more than wet tissue paper. The victim gave a last, despairing high-pitched shriek as it tumbled to its death. This small drama did not serve to silence the speaker for moment.

‘Really? This is the only way out of Commorragh that you could think of on short notice? Even in the midst of an imminent Dysjunction there must be better paths to follow.’

‘Your presence is not required,’ the towering incubus named Morr grunted in response. The incubus viciously swatted at another gloomwing with his great double-handed blade, his *klaive* to use its correct title. Morr was very keen on being correct, Motley knew, and that was probably the only thing that was preventing the incubus from attacking him. The tunnel was wide but the ceiling was low – Morr could have laid a gauntleted hand flat against the filth-encrusted roof without stretching. Even so the incubus wielded his two-metre long blade in the constricted space with consummate skill and precision, keeping it in constant motion as he tracked his elusive attackers.

His unwanted companion, a slight figure dressed in stylish, if archaic-appearing grey, skipped nimbly to one side as the flying gloomwing flopped into the viscous sludge flowing around Morr’s ankles in two neatly bisected pieces. It joined the pieces of at least a dozen other hook-winged predator-scavengers that had already whirled out of the darkness to attack and found Morr’s *klaive* waiting for them instead. The simple beasts seemed not to realise the dangerous nature of the prey they were trying to drag down with their numbers so they simply kept coming. What light there was showed an incessant flutter of dark wings circling determinedly just out of reach.

‘Oh come come,’ said the one in grey. ‘We’re on the verge of becoming such fast friends. It would be truly tragic to cut short our glittering association now, surely?’

Morr reversed his *klaive* and whirled it with both hands, grunting as he slashed out at another darting shape. Traditionally all *klaives* feature an impaling spike or disembowelling hook projecting forward a hand’s span or so from their flat tip. Morr used his *klaive*’s hook to snag the gloomwing and drag it within range for a lightning-quick downward stroke. The unfortunate creature tumbled to join its bisected fellows in the muck.

The incubus’s companion swayed negligently to one side to avoid another diving gloomwing but never stopped talking. ‘I confess I’m a little hurt by that, Morr, I mean after all we’ve been through together you might at least indulge me with a verbal response rather than grunting at me...’

The incubus ignored the speaker and waded forwards, slashing left and right in a continuous figure of eight. The other skipped after him keeping up a continuous chatter. 'I came all this way, after all. Found you in that dank hole you were hiding in and warned you we had to get out while we still could. The thanks I get is you stomping off into what can only be described as a sewer without a word... besides which, you still need my help. Who else can testify on your behalf when there were no other witnesses to Kraillach's death?'

Morr paused and turned to face the grey-clad figure, swinging his klaive without a glance to skewer another leather-winged assailant as it flew at his back. Morr's blank-faced helm regarded his companion with unmistakable malevolence. When viewed at close quarters it became clear that the other's clothing was not grey but a form of motley, tiny diamond panes of black and white that endlessly repeated. The too-mobile face below the domino mask was bright and smooth like that of a painted doll.

In contrast the incubus was covered in dark armour from head to foot with scant decoration saving short horns and tusks curving from its sinister, narrow-slotted helm. There was something about the incubus's resolutely taciturn nature that implied that, by extension, he found this loquacious individual irritating in the extreme. Morr's klaive twitched involuntarily as if he were only barely managing to suppress the urge to strike down his companion through a heroic exertion of willpower. For once the armoured warrior broke his customary silence in what amounted, for him, to a lengthy declamation.

'I cannot prevent you accompanying me... Motley, and I do owe you... a debt,' Morr admitted reluctantly, 'but do not imagine I need you or want you to help me again. The hierarchs shall be the final judge of my actions and they will hear no testimony but my own.'

Motley frowned sadly. 'I'm afraid that despite your cogent disputations destiny has yet to have her wicked way with us both. Even were we parted I feel positive we would be cast back together again momentarily until the Dysjunction is resolved – you know it's no coincidence that the masque sent me to you in your hour of need.

'All is not lost, Morr, but only if we play out our roles in the drama together. There are forces that you do not, indeed cannot, know of in the greater universe that are moving speedily towards a resolution that will bode very ill indeed for Commorrhagh if it transpires as they would have it. If you'll just accept my help again I can guide you to a better future.'

The incubus gazed at Motley silently for a moment more before turning and stomping away through the ooze without further comment. The sudden movement scattered a handful of gathering gloomwings like leaves. The motley-clad one pursed full red lips beneath its domino-mask and then followed with a sigh. Further back along the tunnel, unnoticed by either the incubus or his unwanted companion, stealthy figures dogged their steps.