



INQUISITION 2.0

SYLLAS' STORY

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ABOUT

This short story is inspired by a novel project named « **INQUISITION 2.0** ». It describes an event from the past of one of the main characters. Consider it the « *chapter zero* » of this novel, or an introduction to it.

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INQUISITION 2.0 « SYLLAS' STORY »

It was cold... freezing. On the mountaintops, the temperature was far below zero. A thick blizzard made conditions even more difficult. Syllas was moving painfully in the snow. His steps were so grueling, he looked like he carried the weight of the world on his shoulders. He had been walking for several days and his strength was beginning to run out. There was nothing around him, nothing but white and more white. Above him, below him, all around him, this blinding white...

Out of breath, he stopped a moment to regain some strength. He tried again to scan the horizon. That damned white was everywhere; invasive, choking, unbearable...

Deadly.

Syllas knew he had no choice; he decided to keep going and took another step forward. The chill froze his blood, his knees began to tremble and he collapsed to the ground, unconscious. Syllas' body began to disappear under the windblown snow.

Behind the mountaintops, the sun slowly made its appearance, showing the scars left by the storm that had just ravaged the landscape. The whiteness had given way to a blue sky as pure as the sparkle of a snowflake. Only the presence of the twin moons interrupted this blue immensity.

In ancient times, these moons were the subject of many cults, and were often compared to Heaven and Hell. White Heaven, White Hell, here was the link that bound these two moons with this place. The beauty of the landscape contrasted with Hell. Those who dared to venture here never doubted that they were proceeding to the brink of death, either for the thrill of the extreme or for their mystical beliefs. The weather conditions were so extreme, that Nirvana, or whatever it was for them, was not very far away.

Syllas laid on the ground, covered with a thick layer of snow. After a moment, his eyelids began to move, death would not take him yet.

Something wasn't normal.

Half paralyzed, he knew his ears hadn't deceived him: something was here, close to him. He opened his eyes in a panic.

He had to move *quickly*.

Gathering all his strength, he turned abruptly and threw a fistful of snow at his assailant, who bolted away. It was a *gnoka*, a kind of wild scavenger dog. His desire for a feast had probably just saved Syllas's life.

Further away, the animal stopped to take a look at his intended prey. It was probably thinking that Syllas was likely a soon-to-be corpse and that it might have another chance if it just waited a little longer.

Syllas observed it for a while and slowly put his hand in his jacket. He took out a revolver. It was a matter of life or death; it was him or the beast.

Without hesitation, he took aim and fired. The animal collapsed. Beaten at his own game, Syllas thought as he approached the animal.

Looking around him, he saw a pile of rocks and decided to take the body there.

The night began to fall. Syllas was sitting in the hollow of a rock, there was a bonfire before him and the carcass of the *gnoka* beside him. In the distance, the two moons radiated in the sky, and the red clouds glowed around the setting sun. It was an incredible show. Heaven and Hell: a world in which there was a wrong for every right; a shadow for every light. He had escaped death and found Heaven.

For the time being.

Tomorrow will be another day, with its own share of challenges. Every day was a fight to survive and surviving this long was already quite a victory. He had won the right to live one more day. But he needed much more than that to reach his goal. He had no right to die. Not yet. Not so close to his goal. After all he had endured, failure was not an option.

Exhaustion was beginning to catch up. Protected by the rock and the fire that he had, not without some trouble, managed to start, Syllas fell asleep under a sky dotted with stars. One of them, sparkled more than the others, then turned into a shooting star.

The hostile environment which he had survived for a week now stretched as far as he could see. Not the slightest sign of civilization, or life of any kind.

Despair was begging to overwhelm Syllas who could no longer walk. Again and again, relentlessly, to exhaustion. The sun was at its zenith. Syllas, removing his hood, decided to take a break. He was a robust man, but even the most seasoned people have their limit. His limit was not very far away.

Equipped with a nearly empty backpack, he had nothing left to lose; turning back was no longer an option. His face was plagued by the cold. Fortunately, his beard provided his skin with a little protection from frostbite.

Two hundred meters away there was a small grove of trees, the ideal place to build a small fire and take a rest. He plucked up enough courage to drag his feet out of the fifty centimeter deep snow that was around him and walk to this unexpected oasis.

He still had some small parts of the gnoka's carcass in his backpack, but very little. Just enough to hold him for the rest of the day.

He thought that the advantage in this inhospitable environment was that at such a temperatures, food could be kept a very long time. It was like traveling in a huge open icebox. At least there was that benefit from the beautiful, yet hostile surroundings.

He dropped his bag against a tree and collapsed from fatigue.

Syllas woke up suddenly, producing a growl coming from his gut.

It was a nightmare.

He laid his head against the trunk and let out a breath of relief. It took a few seconds to regain his senses. The day was beginning to subside. He stood to inspect the surrounding area, looking for twigs to light a fire. Under the trees, the snow was not as dense and he found some wood, dry wood.

Rummaging through his bag, he took out a small lighter. He tried to light it again and again, but the tool would not function. He let out a loud "SHIT!" and punched the tree. Syllas had picked up a nice big piece of wood but now his damn lighter was dead. He would not let it discourage him, he knew other techniques to start a fire.

And he had to use them now.

He was no novice. A lighter wouldn't ruin this moment of tranquility.

Taking other tools out of his backpack, he began to work. It was a good old fashion method: difficult but effective. In less than ten minutes, his fire was lit.

Once again the show was magical; the distant rocky peaks reflected the flamboyant orange of the sun. Within minutes, the landscape had transformed from pure white to orange, reminiscent of the flames of Hell. This place was fascinating and deserving of its name "*Massiv Haiven*" which, in an ancient language, meant "*Mountain of the beyond*".

The night had fallen. Syllas filled his gourd with snow and then deposited it in the fire. Hot water instead of a good soup, it was better than nothing and it would heat him up.

The leftover gnoka was in the fire and his mind started to drift away. He missed his sister. She was everything that he had left, and yet, she had been taken from him.

No, worse than that...

Suddenly, something tore him out of his thoughts. A strange sensation, a bad feeling went through his body.

A wild animal?

He took a piece of burning wood out of the fire and waved it around him to inspect his surroundings.

There was nothing.

Tiredness must have made him paranoid. With the conditions of life in this place, nobody would come to look for him here. And anyways, there was no one left back there. He and his sister had lost touch a few years ago, following a fall out.

It had been a silly disagreement. But it tore them apart.

When he had tried to see her again, she was with these people... Hatred began to take over at the thought of it. He clenched his jaw and his fists and stared at the dancing flames. Less than a second later, a shadow erupted out of the flames and jumped at him.

In the darkness of the night, Eden and Purgatos, the twin moons reflected the light of the sun on the mountains. The silence which usually accompanied this magnificent landscape had suddenly been broken. Syllas was the prey of a stranger who seemed to have come out of nowhere. One moment he was lost in his thoughts, the next, a shadow was attacking him.

The stranger attempted to overpower him, but Syllas fought back and kned him in the stomach. The assailant fell on his side with the blow, but that didn't rattle him. Syllas barely had time to retreat and recover, when the man tried again to grab hold of him.

At that moment, Syllas realized that what was in front of him was not human. Under a translucent helmet, the face of his attacker was hardly visible in this darkness, but he could see enough to know that he had never seen anything like it. The face of the creature was covered with black scales and it had... yellow eyes.

Piercing and determined eyes.

Syllas had no time to think, his life was once again in danger, he needed to defend himself.

Whoever was his opponent, he needed to put it down.

The creature grabbed Syllas by the throat and tried to suffocate him. As he punched his enemy, he realized that his fists were hitting something metallic and that it had no effect.

Armor?

The pressure was becoming increasingly strong and he had to use both his hands to push his opponent back. Suddenly, releasing his right hand, he managed to take his revolver out of the inside pocket of his jacket.

No time to think!

He locked onto the creature and several detonations broke the deafening silence.

The creature shuddered and let go, just enough time for Syllas to extricate himself from his grip and get up. He took a step back and aimed his gun.

“What are you”, he yelled. “What do you want from me?”

He took a few steps back to compose himself while rubbing his throat. The creature appeared to be unconscious. Syllas coughed but didn't let him out of his sight. He slowly risked a closer look and tried to turn the body over with his foot.

What was that thing that just appeared before him?

Syllas looked at the creature, suspicious. Playing dead was a old trick in close combat. It was used lower the opponent's guard for a surprise attack.

No, it wouldn't trick him like that, it wasn't human and it had just been shot at point-blank.

He had barely put his foot on the creature's flank when a red beam shot out from its arm. Syllas narrowly escaped it. With a fresh burn on his face he staggered back, then grabbed a tree to stop from falling over.

“Fucking bastard!”

The creature got up and ran right at him. Syllas didn't have time to react. His assailant grabbed him and he was airborne. His

attacker had activated thrusters that were attached to his belt and feet and they both were now dozens of meters above the ground.

Syllas was paralyzed, trapped. The arm of the creature was around his neck, and he felt the icy air bite his face. In the heat of battle, he had dropped his revolver. The only thing he could do now was to try to destabilize his opponent, even if it meant falling to the ground below.

He didn't know where it was going to take him, *and he didn't want know*. He continued to struggle.

After all he had endured; fate seemed to be taking it out on him. Maybe it was his punishment for abandoning his sister. He had failed, he had let his pride prevail... and now it was too late.

No, it wasn't too late!

He got a grip on himself and noticed that the armor had been damaged where he had fired his gun. Without hesitation, he elbowed his attacker. Disoriented, the creature zigzagged and tried to overpower him. But Syllas fought back and hit it in the stomach. He noticed the ankle thruster, and kicked it in the knee while punching its abdomen repeatedly.

Witnesses of this unusual fight, the twin moons saw two adversaries swirling violently in the sky. In turn, the creature punched Syllas in the ribs, who screamed with pain.

But he didn't stop fighting.

Although they were hundreds of meters above ground, they dodged and weaved around the mountainous obstacles in their way. In spite of the pain and the darkness, Syllas noticed a peak nearby and used the creature's distraction to his advantage. It was now or never!

He had to be quick. Considering their speed, the peak would soon be behind them and so would be his chance to escape.

He continued to struggle to create a diversion, then hooked his feet around the creature's legs to change their direction. Busy trying to overpower his prey, it didn't notice the deception.

They were now rushing straight towards the peak. Destabilized, the creature didn't notice its helmet's collision warning alert until it was too late. Bright hieroglyphics flashed on the translucent screen, accompanied by a high-pitched alarm. It turned its head.

Too late.

They crashed into the mountain.

The impact shattered the creature's armor and it burst into flames. They both fell down the mountain but Syllas managed to hang onto a rock while the creature disappeared into a ravine.

With his clothes in tatters and his body smeared with blood, Syllas watched it fall into the emptiness, relieved.

Bruised by the ordeal, he tried to move, but the pain was unbearable, he guessed he probably had several broken bones.

In this hostile environment, he told himself he wouldn't live much longer and that he would soon join the creature into nothingness. He thought about his sister. He wanted so much to find her and take her from the grip of those people...

A few months ago, after several years of silence, he had found her in the *Lunari* sect, a millennial cult once considered a « *religion* ». He had tried everything in his power to get her to see reason but that was when he lost her for good.

This cult, called « *Lunarianism* », was regarded as an official religion for over a thousand years; it was based on the belief that a deity was managing the world from Heaven and sent the souls of the deceased to the twin moons. There, the souls got their fair

reward or punishment. Those deemed deserving received an eternal stay in Eden, paradise, while the others were sent to hell on Purgatos before being recycled. It's from their mythology that « *Expia* », the planet's name, comes from. According to them, *Expia* was only a transitional place where human life was a test to access Eden. The recycled souls were then reincarnated on the planet to atone their sins until they were worthy enough to access Paradise.

After the apocalypse more than seventy years ago, all « *religions* », now cults, were banished from what remained of society. A global war between the nations of believers and those who wanted to evolve, ravaged the world. The result was the annihilation of three quarters of the world's population. Now, only small, rare groups of believers of these mythologies remained. But recently many rumors about them began to surface.

Considered a nuisance by some, the « *Lunaris* », or « *Lunarians* », had supposedly returned to « *save mankind from sin* ».

According to Syllas' sources, his sister was at the Sanctuary of Massiv Haiven, in order to make a pilgrimage to purify her soul and « *get closer to God* ».

How could she have let herself be recruited so by these obsessive religious fanatics and let herself be converted into this delusional nonsense?

He lowered his head but something caught his interest. In the distance, a small light was shining. Syllas got up, almost euphoric.

He had just found the Sanctuary!

It was there, in front of his eyes.

Maybe he still had a chance after all.

The courage that had deserted him suddenly returned. In a burst of hope, he began to walk again. There was no guarantee he

would succeed, but after all the effort he had made to find her, maybe his sister would reconsider.

He had to try, he had to.

For her. For him.

...in order to be forgiven.

Too much remorse, too much suffering... it was his fault she turned to these people, he thought. If he hadn't abandoned her, he could have prevented her from falling into this trap. He was certain of it. Or maybe he wanted so badly to convince himself, to give meaning to all of this. And what about this cult... was this a way to control people, or were they a group of neurotic schizophrenics with a collective mystical delirium? Did they actually believe their fantasies? What did they do to his sister to persuade her to follow them?

Rage filled his veins.

Rage and determination.

With a sure step, he headed towards the light. Half stunned and in a haze, he stumbled and fell again down the slope, crashing further downhill, unconscious.

The sun rose above the mountains. Between two clouds the rays were splitting the snow that covered the landscape. The wind had not yet erased all traces of the struggle that had disturbed the night. The vast white expanse had been defiled. There were traces of red... and the body of a man lying next to a rock. Sprawled on his back, Syllas opened his eyes.

Death definitely didn't want him. Unless he was already dead. After all, this place wasn't called White Hell for nothing.

No, he wasn't dead, the pain he felt pulled his thoughts into focus.

The creature, the fall... the Sanctuary.

He straightened, then grimaced. A violent headache drilled through his skull.

A concussion. Certainly.

He was still far from the Sanctuary, but at least he could see it... He only had to walk towards it.

He only had to...

At this point, the words, «*I only have to...*» had taken a brand new meaning. He had often repeated them, as long as he could remember... but now it meant something different. He only had to get up and to move forward. Yes, that's what he would do.

Get up and move forward.

Nothing could stop him anymore, he had struggled enough and a few more kilometers wasn't going to make him fail. No way... he would go to the end.

He would not try, he would succeed.

With superhuman effort, he stood up and walked forward. Every step he took colored the snow red.

In the distance, the clouds were becoming increasingly threatening...

The snow was beginning to fall more intensely. The clouds were winning their fight over the sun, which ultimately retreated below the horizon. Syllas walked in the snow, painfully. Step by step. His knees were unsteady and shaking, but he kept on going. Slowly, but surely. The suffering he was now enduring was indescribable and the courage with which he faced this ordeal would have impressed any experienced survivalist. It was incredible.

Keep on going forward, forward... forward.

The will of the human spirit can move mountains. Syllas was a fine example of it. In other circumstances, he would probably

have been considered a hero... or a stubborn idiot. But he was alone. No one knew where he was.

Syllas was standing in the middle of the snowstorm, like a walking corpse functioning on autopilot. The cold was numbing, he couldn't feel anything anymore, neither the cold, nor the pain, all sensation had gone. Little by little he felt his life seeping from him. He staggered and dropped to his knees, his head fell backwards. He didn't have any strength to think anymore. The white, the emptiness... the nothingness.

And a black veil.

A gentle warmth seized Syllas's body. There was a strange smell. The air had a familiar scent. A perfume that he couldn't seem to place. He recognized it, but from where? What was this feeling of well-being that he suddenly felt? Was it possible that...

He woke up.

It was warm and he was lying in a bed. His eyes half-opened, he scanned suspiciously the room he was in. The chamber was bleak, almost dull and lifeless. There was only a table in a corner and a painting on the wall in front of him.

A window gave a stunning view of the mountains. In the sky, the twin moons. Obviously, he wasn't in heaven yet, neither on Eden nor on Purgatos. He smirked. These mythologies had crossed the ages and had, despite everything, influenced the collective unconscious. It was part of humanity's history and heritage... folkloric legends. Sometimes people imagined that death wasn't just nothingness, that there was something else, another life after death, to make things easier to accept. People needed to believe, even if it was in chimeras. Weak minds

sometimes fell into this trap and buried themselves deeper in denial.

And that was how they were recruited by the Lunaris!

And this is certainly how they had gotten to his sister, with pernicious methods and beautiful words. To fill an emptiness. To rally her to their cause.

Syllas felt his blood rushing through his veins again.

He calmed down. Getting mad wouldn't accomplish anything.

He heard footsteps behind the door. He remembered the smell now, it was a Lunari preparation that was supposed to purify the atmosphere and keep the negative energy away. He recognized it from his sister's place.

A man entered the room, he was dressed in a white tunic and had a tray in hand. There was a carafe and a glass on it. Nothing else. As stripped as the room he was in. Borderline austerity.

There were no more doubts, he was in the Sanctuary of Massiv Haiven. But...

How did he arrive here?

He frowned and looked at the man in front of him.

"Ah, you finally are awake. It's a pleasure to see, isn't it?"

With the shape you were in when we rescued you, we were afraid that you would join the Lord before the purification ceremony. We don't get many visitors here, you know."

The purification ceremony? What?

Syllas stared at the man. He was at a loss for words. This man thought he had come here on a pilgrimage? Syllas hadn't expected this but he decided to play along for now.

"What happened? I remember nothing."

The monk looked at him a moment, thoughtful, and said:

"You were prostrate in the snow. Brother Baltimos saw you on his way back."

Syllas stared at him. The monk went on.

"You know, with this blizzard, you were very lucky, weren't you? A few more hours and you would be facing your final judgment in front of the Lord."

Syllas tried to get up by leaning on the headboard. He grimaced.

"Easy", said the monk, "you are not healed yet, you have broken ribs and many fractures in your arms... and on top of that a severe concussion."

"How long have I been here?"

"A little over a week."

A week?

Syllas took his head in the hands. He was covered with bandages. His face was marked by many frostbitten scars. But they were starting to disappear.

"When you will feel better, we will start the Ceremony of Purification, won't we? You will be able to start the pilgrimage."

Syllas raised his head, and looked at the monk, incredulous.

"Yes, right, the pilgrimage..."

"You showed enormous courage by coming here, didn't you? The Lord will know it and remember it, I am sure that you already have a place on Eden, by his side, haven't you?"

Haven't you?! Didn't you?! Isn't it?!

That guy had taken good care of him, and he was grateful for that, but his way of talking was seriously starting to annoy him.

I'm going to stick his « haven't you » and « don't you » in his face if he goes on like that, the stupid clown!

Syllas forced a smile and looked at the monk.

"Avoid moving your left arm too much, we have tightened it as much we could with the bandages, haven't we? Unfortunately, the Lord forgive us, we can't make any casts here, can we?"

Was he talking like that on purpose to annoy him?

Calm down, calm down...

Syllas reflected, he remembered the nightmare he had endured to come here. The snow, the cold... that... « *thing* » that had attacked him. He had to remain diplomatic with these people who had taken care of him and saved his life. Even if it was their fault in the first place that he found himself in this situation...

... if he wanted any chance to get his sister back.

In the shape in which he was in, he wasn't at his best and it was useless to provoke a confrontation. Alone and wounded in this hostile environment, he didn't stand a chance.

He spoke up:

"You will certainly think I'm crazy, but during my ascension I was attacked by something, I had never seen anything like it before... a monstrous creature with armor and very advanced technology."

The monk looked at him, intrigued.

"It was very dark and I couldn't see it very well, but this creature had piercing yellow eyes. I still see them in front of me..."

"You were a victim of the Devil, my friend."

Syllas grimaced.

"A trial to prevent you from accessing the benediction. The Evil One is very powerful, isn't he? He can take any appearance to pollute your spirit and get you to stray from your path to reach us. Here, we are very close to Eden, but to Purgatos also, aren't we? The struggle between good and evil is never-ending."

"Or, it was the fatigue and my spirit played tricks on me. With this cold, my brain might have..."

"You're doubting my friend, it's normal, but know that doubt is also the work of evil, you have to get these ideas out of your head to access Eden. Thank the Lord, the Glorified and the Exalted, isn't he? He granted you his grace. He saved your life, in his infinite mercy, to grant

you a chance to purify your soul before the great judgment."

Syllas started to lose patience. He ground his teeth and clenched his fists. That guy was screwing with him, there was no other explanation. Did he really believe what he was saying?

The creature...

Maybe he had dreamed it, after all, with his fall, he had probably hit his head, hence the concussion, and hence his delirium. Maybe he will never know what really happened that night.

Yes, the concussion... Syllas thought he must be in total confusion, mixing nightmares and reality. Without a doubt. The memories were so blurry. And yet...

Anyways...

This wasn't the reason for his presence here. He would think about it later.

"What's your name, young man?", asked the monk.

"Syllas. And you?"

"Oh me, it is not important. I am only the humble servant of the Lord, am I not?"

The man was about sixty, and had a completely shaved head, with the exception of a circle of hair at the top. Syllas had already heard of these Lunari monks, their lives were entirely devoted to meditation and prayer. As for this symbol on his head, it represented the moon of Eden.

In some areas of the globe, the religiosity such as the one these ascetics practiced was considered as a grave psychiatric illness, similar to an addictive neurosis. There were centers to help the victims of this syndrome. After the apocalypse, rehab centers were founded so that people would never kill each other again in the name of an imaginary entity. Some were brought there by force, others fled to faraway regions, but most of them faced the reality that these cults were the biggest HOAX that humanity had ever known till then. Centuries of mental

manipulation led the human race to the verge of extinction, and nearly to the destruction of the entire planet. It took a catastrophe so great that it had no precedent for the population to finally open their eyes. But it was in human nature to crave...

Destruction, manipulation, power...

People ended up believing in their lies, in their delirium... it became so commonplace that it had become self-evident.

The city of Draiden was the location of the most famous of these centers. It was there that Syllas would bring his sister once he had found her.

"Tell me, you wouldn't have recently hosted a young woman in your sanctuary?"

The monk answered almost immediately.

"Oh no, we haven't had any visitors in a very long time. People have lost all faith nowadays, it's very sad. But what can we do about it?"

Syllas observed him. Something was not right.

"I had a picture of her in one of the pockets of my jacket, could you give it to me please?"

The torn jacket was in a small closet that was beside the bed, with the rest of Syllas' clothes. The monk opened it and took the picture out of the jacket, as if he knew exactly where it was.

"Oh, this is a pretty young woman, who is it?"

Syllas stared at the monk for a moment, motionless.

"It's my sister."

"She must be very proud of you."

Something was wrong. There was a sort of awkwardness, a strange feeling. Syllas looked at the monk and went on.

"Not really, actually..."

The monk didn't seem surprised. No, he looked more uneasy than surprised. Syllas stared at him but he avoided his gaze.

He knew.

He knew and he had lied from the beginning.

The monk looked at the window. Syllas kept staring at him. He glanced quickly at Syllas and went back to the window.

"There are very few people that still come around here, you know. The world is falling into sin and blasphemy and at this pace, it's becoming alarming. Something must be done. Your presence here and your miraculous survival are a sign, even if you're not aware of it yet."

"Where is she?", asked Syllas dryly.

"Your sister is not here, I have already told you so", answered the monk as drily as Syllas.

No « *haven't I* »? Where was his irritating way of speaking?

"Your cult is bullshit and you're going to tell me right now where my sister is!"

The monk turned around and lost his temper.

"I have already told you that Soniya isn't here..."

He stopped suddenly, aware of the mistake he had just made.

There we are!

Syllas smiled, he hadn't thought that tricking him would be that easy. It was almost a shame. Good. He had just had the confirmed what he already suspected.

"Isn't she?", said Syllas, smiling

The monk looked at him harshly.

"Is this your way of thanking us for rescuing you? For saving your life? By coming and insulting us in our sanctuary?"

Syllas, sure of himself, answered.

"It's because of you that I am here and the fact that I almost died is your fault. It's you and your sect who brainwashed my sister with your stupid fairytales.

"You are blaspheming my friend", answered the monk in an accusatory tone.

Syllas pulled his face, he was close to losing his temper, but he didn't want to give in to this weakness. Weakness would put

him in a position of submission. And there was no way he would let go in front of that man.

The monk looked at Syllas contemptuously, a look that he had already seen in the eyes of the Lunaris when they were observing non-believers, or the « *blasphemers* », as they called them.

“Sister Soniya is no longer here...”

He was really going too far, how could he dare?

“I forbid you to call her your « *sister* »!”

The monk’s lips curled up with a subtle, almost imperceptible sneer. He had just struck a nerve.

“The moment we knew who you were, we sent her away. Her pilgrimage was over. She had received the blessing of our Lord, the Glorified and the Exalted, and she is now part of our community, whether you like it or not. She is our sister now, isn’t she? You have to accept it and join us.”

The two men looked at each other.

“Or you may leave.”

Syllas felt that he was losing the game. He clenched his fists.

“Accept the divine message and join us, won’t you? Join your sister in the blessing and the fullness of the Lord. You will have a place at his side, in Eden. Don’t persist in your mistakes and your erroneous view of the world! Trust us and stop this ridiculous crusade!”

“The only blessing there is, is in your head, you moron!”

Syllas got up, flinched because of his pain, and grabbed the monk.

“You lie!”, he yelled. “I know she is here”.

However, Syllas knew, deep down, that this time, he was telling the truth. He didn’t talk the same way when he was lying. Syllas understood it, but didn’t want to face it.

“Where is she?”, shouted Syllas.

His face was only a few inches from the monk’s. The monk looked at him without answering.

Syllas let him go with disdain and stepped back.

“I pity you, you and your spiritualists’ ramblings!”

The bedroom door was open and Syllas rushed out. Although he was still in pain, he had recovered with enough strength to run without collapsing.

The monk shouted.

“You will not be able to pervert her with your lies, the Lord will protect her from evil now!”

The corridors of the Sanctuary were made of stone, wood and *merxcis*, a whitish material found in some remote regions of Expia, very similar to rock. It was very expensive to extract because of its fragility and its localization. In addition to the murals, there were statues and paintings that adorned the aisles between the various doors. The Sanctuary was immense, but much less than it had been once. This enormous building hadn’t escaped the apocalypse. During the great Religion War it had come under the enemy’s fire and had partially collapsed. It was a religious symbol, but it remained nonetheless an architectural marvel of the Inquisitorial Age, when obscurantism was at its height. A historic remnant perched at the top of the world, a witness to the decline of humanity and the madness that followed.

Syllas ran through the corridors, opening door after door, desperately searching for his sister. There wasn’t much hope, he didn’t want to believe the monk, he didn’t want to face the evidence. Perhaps there was a tiny chance that he had misunderstood his words? Maybe the monk was playing him and was manipulating him? He had to check, he had to be sure.

No, he hadn’t done this all for nothing!

He had to find her, and if she was no longer here, they had to tell him where they had taken her!

Running through the corridors, Syllas arrived in a large room. Equipped with a gigantic bay window, it hung over the mountains and gave a stunning view of the surroundings. Before him, there was a man with his back to him. His hands were clasped behind his back while he was contemplating the panorama. It was the patriarch of the Sanctuary, the Great Morha Gumheinaye, one of the highest representatives of the Lunari cult, or at least, of what remained of it.

Syllas stopped. The man didn't move and continued admiring the view.

"Beautiful, isn't it?"

But it's an obsession among these people, thought Syllas.

His face tensed, he observed the man before him, this man who would not even deign to face him. Such disdain for those who wouldn't embrace their ideology was something common among the worshippers of the twin moons. It didn't surprise him. This person was dressed in a more sophisticated garment than the simple tunic the monks were wearing. It was adorned with various embellishments, marking his rank among the community. One more reason to show contempt.

"You are wasting your time, Syllas, I know perfectly who you are and why you are here", said the Great Morha calmly.

"Where did you take her?"

The Great Morha replied:

"This doesn't concern you anymore; she has made the choice to break free from the chains of ignorance that entrapped her. You blasphemers will no longer be an obstacle to her spiritual enlightenment."

Syllas couldn't help but feel an intense anger rising in him.

"Go home", said the Great Morha dryly. "And do not meddle in our business anymore, sister Soniya has found

the way to the truth and your lies can't prevent it anymore."

"You son of..."

The man turned suddenly, facing Syllas. He added:

"Go home or join us, it is not too late! The Lord, the Glorified and the Exalted, in his immense goodness, will forgive your sins."

"Are you joking, you old fart?"

The man held out his hand to him.

"You are just a lost soul, let us show you the path of absolution and you will enjoy the fullness of enlightenment."

Syllas took the Great Morha by the collar.

"Stop your sales pitch, tell me where she is!"

"Your soul belongs to the Lord, whether you like it or not, and you are soiling it with your stubborn refusal of his message."

Syllas let his interlocutor go with such contempt that even a filthy maggot would have commanded more respect.

"You're not worth the time I am wasting with you", said Syllas taking a few steps back. "You only are a bunch of degenerates!"

The Great Morha smiled.

"We wish you no harm, you are only the victim of your ignorance, but one day you will have to face the divine wrath, and there will be nothing I can do to help you if you keep on rejecting his good word."

Syllas shook his head, resigned.

In a lighter tone, the Great Morha added, raising his right hand and looking towards the sky:

"One day the world will find its faith back and will atone their sins. One day blasphemers will understand their mistakes. And on that day, we will find balance and harmony again. The world will rise from its ashes and we

will build a new civilization blessed by our Lord Almighty.”

After a short silence, he continued, with a more monotone voice.

“That is why, in the meantime, brother Tilèle will bring you back to the nearest village in his shuttle. I will pray for you, for the salvation of your soul, so that in his mercy, the Lord will grant you his forgiveness.”

Syllas remained reactionless, he was appalled.

And relent.

The cargo jet took off from the Sanctuary. It was large enough to carry many people and the food necessary for the proper functioning of the community. With a fairly simple design, this type of device had become quite rare; most of the flying machines had been destroyed during the Great War. Some models remained, however, among other patched-up wrecks, as well as a few flying machines created from the debris and rusted carcasses of fallen aircraft. It was the era of large-scale recycling, the age of humanity’s renewal, the post-apocalypse...

From the cargo jet, Syllas gazed at the majestic building that stretched before him. The symbol of a bygone and moribund culture, the building overlooked all the surrounding mountains, as an eagle watching its prey. Built during the great inquisition more than a thousand years ago, its architecture was the most unique of its kind. It had taken more than 50 years for the ancients to build it fully.

The shuttle moved away and Syllas swore to never give up as long as his sister was under the influence of these people. His quest was a resounding failure, but he would not give up.

No, he would never abandon his sister to these sick people.

The speech of this Great Morha seemed to come from the bottom of the Obscurantist Ages. This demonstration of fanaticism and blindness he had witnessed gave him shivers up and down his spine. He would leave no stone unturned until he wrested Soniya from this hell.

Wherever she was, he would find her! He had to! It’s only a matter of time!

The Sun was setting and the Sanctuary was now only a spot on the horizon. Syllas thought about his ascension from the mountain. The suffering he had endured and...

Images of the creature suddenly came to mind. Had he dreamed it, was it real at all? Did his subconscious create all these memories to transform his pain into images? This was one more mystery that he needed to uncover.

This strange creature with armor and unknown technology, where had it come from? What was it? What did it want? Syllas didn’t have the answers.

Not Yet.

He would have them soon enough...

...but unknown to Syllas, it would be much too soon...

The night had just fallen. The Great Morha was in his office, facing the window. He observed the moons in the sky. A diffuse light dimly lit the otherwise dark room. A man stepped forward and knelt before him. It was the monk who had visited Syllas earlier in the day.

“Your Eminence, you wanted to see me?”

The Great Morha turned around.

“Stand up, my son.”

The man stood up and bowed his head; his rank didn’t allow him to be in a position of equality with his superior.

“We have been patient too long. We cannot let these blasphemers defile in such way our holy land anymore; it is high time to act!”

The monk nodded.

“Yes, Your Eminence, we have to spread the message of God to these lost souls. Their unbelief is an insult to the one who gave them life.”

The Great Morha sneered and added:

“Soon the divine message will spread again among all blasphemers; soon they will embrace anew the Lunari! We are at the dawn of a new era, an era of faith and justice. We will no longer tolerate this decadence. The seed of sin will be annihilated.”

At that moment, a young woman took a step out of the shadows. In a firm tone, with voice strong and determined, she said:

“Lunari Vankwish!”

Fluttering between the mountains, the shuttle disappeared in the darkness. Syllas had failed in his mission, but unknowingly, he had won a victory, a victory of which he could not suspect the scope. He was far from doubting that he had just tasted the beginning of a nightmare that would soon plunge the world back into terror. He was far from suspecting that what he had just lived through was only the beginning of a major event which would change the whole of humanity.

History being an eternal recurrence, seventy years of respite were about to end. The people of Expia were living their last moments of peace.

The world was about to sink. Anew.

In the sky full of stars, one of them, separated from its cluster, sparkled more than the others.

A shooting star.

Then a second.

Soon:

INQUISITION 2.1

~ Rise of the Holy Soldiers ~

BONUS #1

Soon: « INQUISITION 2.1 ~ Rise of the Holy Soldiers »



BONUS #2



BONUS #3

