

Chapter viii, Dechala, servant of Slaanesh

Wednesday, 07 September 2005

Last Updated Wednesday, 07 September 2005

The place that had been chosen was open and wide and beyond the shade of the ancient trees of the forest of Avelorn. With the war standard of Arhaindir Moonhand held aloft in her left hand Ae'thenal did look over the host of Gor and Ungor drawn up before them, the massed Beastmen grunting and roaring and clashing their weapons upon their shields in the moment when they did sight them.

"A goodly number Ae'thenal," Si'anelle did say softly to her as Cedwyn did swiftly set about ordering his archers into a double rank at their right hand. Though it did seem to Ae'thenal that her friend's expression was now the more tight and cruel on seeing these Beastmen for all her softly spoken words.

"They are many Si'anelle," was her reply. "They do outnumber us by four to one at least."

"Are you afraid Ae'thenal?" Her friend's eyes were now on her weighing her in a fashion she had not seen Si'anelle do before this.

"Before Isha I am not Si'anelle," was her hot spoken reply as she did draw her sword, the pain of her punishment alive in her nerves. "To be afraid is a condition I did leave behind me in another country." And the look she did exchange with Si'anelle was just as coolly measuring as her friend's had been.

"Glory in this Ae'thenal," Si'anelle did laugh then, a bitter laugh. "For after this we shall again dwell in the wastelands of despair until the Banepearl does hunger anew." Turning in her saddle her friend now did carefully study the way her small army was deployed before she did give a sharp nod of satisfaction.

"They will not fail us Si'anelle," Ae'thenal did say, speaking aloud a certain knowledge within her that could only be a gift of the Banepearl's power.

"Indeed they shall not," was her friend's reply as she did return her gaze to her. "Now ride with me my sweet Ae'thenal; and with your sword naked and ready in your hand, for it does begin."

And as they did begin their ride to approach the Gor and Ungor at no more than a slow walk Ae'thenal did almost surrender to a fierce and sudden urge to cast down the war standard in her left hand so that she might grip her sword the better two handed, or else lay claim to her spear. Only she did not. For to do so would crush their small army's resolve to face this fell host and cause them to believe that she and Si'anelle were indeed the servants of Chaos. So for that reason alone she did suffer to continue to hold this standard with its device of the moon amidst seven stars aloft even though she could predict it would no doubt prove to be a useless burden in her hand when the killing did begin.

Si'anelle did not pause when she drew near to the Beastmen, but did continue her approach as if they did not exist. The massed band of Ungor skirmishers before the main war host falling silent, their taunts and noise dying away as slowly they did give ground. The hatred and threat inherent in her friend's cruel shaped features and cold eyes the goad that did give them cause to fear her. With her sword gripped in her right hand Ae'thenal maintained her position beside her friend and it did also seem that all she did have to do was cast her own eyes over these Ungor to make them fall back before her. Until finally they did cease to give ground before them and did begin a second time to clash their shields with their weapons to display their defiance.

"Where is she who does lead you?" Si'anelle did demand of the Ungor then, the sky blue silk masking the Baneppearl a covering over her hands, her voice cutting through the unruly noise as if it was no more than the grass rustling beneath the breeze. Before her unflinching gaze the massed Ungor became restless as fear did yet again begin to claim them and their weapons ceased to pound upon their shields. Perhaps they may have even broken and fled if it had not been for a silken voice that did make an answer to her friend's question.

"Well met sister, it is I who do lead these Beastmen to give you greeting."

And as the ranks of the Gor did part Ae'thenal did know that she was openly staring at the creature who did now approach them, her movements sinuous as her thick serpent's body did wind and writhe its way over the ground. That once this Chaos spawn had been a woman was obvious to Ae'thenal's eye, but with her six arms each bearing a sword gripped in her delicate seeming hands, her long and angular cruel features and sharp tooth filled mouth, she did know in truth the reason why her foster mother did become pale on hearing her name. With a calmness she did not question Ae'thenal did now take note of the well wrought armour the creature did wear to protect the more human seeming upper portion of her body and also did take a moment to carefully judge the reach of her six arms and her long sharp swords.

Si'anelle had made no reply, to Ae'thenal it did seem as if she did sit upon Finaith as if she was carved from stone, her eyes cold and filled with hate as she did look upon this Chaos spawn named Dechala. And if Si'anelle did not seem to care that now the Ungor skirmishers were making move to swiftly surround them she had not failed to see their present danger. Unflinching before their jeers Ae'thenal watched the foul man-like things as they leapt and capered while dark fire did run hissing down the blade of her sword. And while the Baneppearl did whisper to her of its hunger.

"I greet you sister," Dechala did say to Si'anelle as she did halt but a spear's cast from them, the armoured ranks of thick muscled Gor at either side of her. "For I was once as you are now. Why do you hesitate? - clutching tight to the ashes of your former existance when with one small step you may possess pleasure and delight, power and knowledge beyond measure." And laughing aloud Dechala did begin to sway in sensuous movement, her six arms making her swords describe glittering arcs that stole the eye. Becoming a creature of terrible

beauty or so it did seem to Ae'thenal, utterly desireable for all her unhuman form.

"Call upon the name of Slaanesh, Si'anelle my sister," Dechala did whisper to her as she swayed in her dance for the pleasure of her god.

"In Isha's name I shall not Chaos spawn," was her friend's hissed reply as she did finally break her silence, her agony making her eyes fever bright as the Banep pearl punished her. Without pausing in her dance Dechala did laugh aloud. "Ah, soon my sister you will lust for that pain. Utterly desiring its delicate searchings of your flesh, for pain and pleasure are two close lying bedfellows than can be exquisite to such as you and I." She laughed again her deep blue eyes mocking Si'anelle, "For are you not a one, my sister, who does refuse the attentions of the males of your race, preferring instead the companionship of your sweet Ae'thenal?"

And here Dechala did for the first time seek her out with her dark blue eyes, and Ae'thenal did see at once that Dechala did now dance for her. Her every movement of her body an immodest invitation as her six swords did glitter and flash in the sunlight.

"At present Ae'thenal you do both amuse and divert Slaanesh," Dechala did say to her. "Slaanesh does hold a fascination towards human companionship, and your strong and tender friendship one for the other is greatly diverting to my master." She laughed again, "For the sake of love and a pretty oath Ae'thenal you would go to the end of the World with your Si'anelle; such a rare folly as this does bring delight to Slaanesh. If you would call upon his name sweet Ae'thenal he would be indeed be generous towards you."

"By Isha you are a wicked creature," Ae'thenal did say to her, and then was forced to bare her teeth against the pain in her limbs as if razors were at work in her flesh. Before this she had not known hatred towards another, but in this hour she had learned the art of it.

"And you Ae'thenal are a fool," Dechala did reply as she did display her sharp teeth. "For you do believe that there shall be a day when the Banep pearl does not possess you." Mocking her Dechala did now slide her long serpent's tongue out from between her teeth while she did continue to dance. "Do you perhaps at times seek solace with your Si'anelle; - seeking a more intimate joy than mere sterile friendship when you both do lie close together beneath a blanket's covering at night? Speak my master's name sweet Ae'thenal and I shall teach you how to more perfectly please your Si'anelle."

Her hatred for this Chaos spawn almost consumed her, dark flame traced the edge of her sword so that it did seem to be no more than a filament of bright sliver set amidst utter darkness. With her heels she urged Nadimar forward only the Ungor did rush at her at once and drive her back; though they did suffer for the act as she split skulls and slashed away limbs in her retreat. And in all this Dechala did continue to dance for her, mocking her with her openly displayed sensuality and

terrible beauty.

By the awakening of a sudden strength within her Ae'thenal did know Si'anelle had at last uncovered the Banepearl. Turning her face towards her friend she did know at once that the hate she did hold towards Dechala was but a shadow when measured against Si'anelle's hatred for the Chaos spawn.

"Kill her for me sweet Ae'thenal," Si'anelle did ask of her as their eyes did meet.

"My Lady Si'anelle," was her reply as she did gift her friend a fierce smile. Tightening her grip upon the war standard in her left hand she did return her gaze to Dechala and did nudge Nadimar towards the Ungor. In that instant Si'anelle raised up the Banepearl and it was as if she did hold aloft a dark cored sun captive in her hands. And Ae'thenal did not fail to see the consuming desire to own the Banepearl naked on Dechala's face as her dance did falter.

Dark flame did again trace the sharp edge of her sword as she did spur Nadimar into a gallop towards the Ungor standing between herself and Dechala. Her joy at exacting a vengeance upon this wicked tongued creature who had dared to demean their friendship bright within her. The first Ungor to stand against her lost the hand that gripped his club before he did lose his head. The second she cleaved his head to the chin, before all the rest did scream aloud in a terrible howling chorus as the Banepearl under Si'anelle's hand did ignite their flesh as if it was dry kindling wood.

Now the Banepearl did drink of blood in quantity and it was generous towards her its servant. Like a daughter of the wind she did shriek aloud Isha's name as she did ride hard for Dechala, her blade of dark flame raised to strike, her agony like exquisite fire within her strong and perfect body. Thick muscled Gor did now attempt to block her charge and she hewed them down, Nadimar trampling them underfoot. A heavily armoured Gor armed with an axe disputed with her for several heartbeats until flame did burst from between the joints of his armour and she could ride on. Now the massed ranks of Gor at her right hand were beginning to roar and bellow as a hail of arrows, a gift of Cedwyn's archers, fell amongst them. And those at her left were faring worse as Si'anelle did direct the Banepearl against them, her face a mask of implacable hatred.

With the battlefield now the more clear around her Ae'thenal sought out Dechala anew for she had seen the wicked creature withdraw as the Gor had made their attack. Their eyes did meet across an expanse of trampled ground littered with dead Gor, who did lie charred and smouldering in the mud, having failed in their defense of their fell mistress. Now Dechala's six blades were a whining blur of bright steel as she did swing them in her dance, her face cruel and mocking as she did shriek abuse at her. Spurring Nadimar she charged, the Banepearl's power igniting her hatred into white hot rage and when her blade of

dark flame did meet Dechala's six blades it was as if the anvil of the gods was struck by a great hammer.

The war standard of Arhaindir Moonhand would have fallen from her grip to land in the mud had not Nimine caught it up in the moment her fingers slackened. With deft hands a one of Nimine's female guard did also relieve her of her sword as it too did begin to slide from her fingers. As she did slowly blink her eyelids Ae'thenal found she could not so much as remember the she-Elf's name, even though she had known her for as long as she had dwelt in Arhaindir Moonhand's household.

"I did fail her at the end Nimine," she did say softly, her despair the taste of ashes upon her tongue as she did sit slack limbed upon Nadimar.

Now her foster mother did lift her eyes from the many deep sword cuts scaring the war standard's shaft; dumb proof that the standard had not been such a useless burden in her hand as she had thought it would be. "And how then Ae'thenal do you measure success?" Of a sudden Nimine did fling a hand wide encompassing the battlefield and its thick covering of Beastmen corpses, her foster mother's familiar severe gaze upon her. "I would have given much for Tyrion himself to have seen you at work hewing a path through the Gor foster daughter; and with our Lord's own war standard bourne aloft in your hand. By Isha you did make our hearts sing with pride Ae'thenal."

In answer she could only give voice to a sigh. Seeking out Si'anelle Ae'thenal did turn in her saddle in time to see Cedwyn lift her friend down from Finaith, Si'anelle a limp burden in Cedwyn's arms. The entire company of Nimine's female guard surrounding the archer champion in their eagerness to attend their Lady.

"I did fail her Nimine," she did say again, "for I did not kill Denchala as I did promise her I would."

Her foster mother's response was a frank cry of amazement. Now Nimine did look upon her as if she was truly lost to madness. "Ae'thenal," she did say as she did grip her left arm and shake her. "You do still live where many before you have died beneath the fury of her six blades, or else have been enslaved to her will. With my own eyes I did see you fight her and cause that spawn of Chaos to flee before you; - and you do speak of failure."

"It was the Banepearl and not I Nimine," she did tell her foster mother before lifting her leg over Nadimar's back and near falling at Nimine's feet in her untidy dismount. As Nadimar did nuzzle her face with his velvet nose while she did struggle to rise Nimine caught up her right arm with a cry of horror.

"Dechala did cut you!"

Ae'thenal did barely trouble herself to glance at the long flesh cut on her forearm above her silver bracer that still did ooze beads of blood. "What of it Nimine."

"Dechala's blades are poisoned Ae'theanal," Nimine did tell her urgently. "The poison will cause you to be enslaved to Dechala's will."

"I am already enslaved foster mother," was her reply. "And the Banepearl is a jealous master who will not permit another to claim me. If Dechala did indeed find reason to fear me as you say, perhaps it was this cut that did cause her to invoke her own master to snatch her away from the field of battle."

She would have followed after Cedwyn then as he did bear Si'anelle away in his arms, only instead her legs did fold beneath her and Nimine did have to help her to her feet. "I shall not mutely stand by and watch you fall into despair Ae'theanal," her foster mother did say to her as she gave of her support. "Remember that the Banepearl was made to entrap those of good heart; no mere spineless puppet could have do as you have done this day. And also hear and know this truth foster daughter, Si'anelle did wield the Banepearl to protect us all; even though I do think she would have delighted to close with Dechala in your place."

"Aye Nimine," she did sigh, "This day Si'anelle did hold a hate for Dechala that did outshine my own." Turning her head she did survey the battlefield unable to discover any joy in their victory. Then her eyes did fall upon the Banepearl where it did lie cold and dark amongst the corpses. Breaking away from Nimine's supporting arm she did stagger towards the wicked thing as if her body was not hers to rule, while Nimine did quietly follow after her the war standard of Arhaindir Moonhand resting on her shoulder. Falling to her knees on the trampled ground Ae'thenal took the dark orb up in her hands, and did moan aloud in despair when the Banepearl did not aid her.

"Should you be suprised Ae'theanal?" Nimine did say to her. "The thing is gluttred and does have no need of you." Bending she did pick up the piece of sky blue silk from where it lie on the ground and did hold it out to her. "Cover it and put it away foster daughter; then I will bring you to those who do indeed love and cherish you. And will tend you until you do once more regain your strength."

"Foster mother," she did ask then while she did remain on her knees. "Is my love for Si'anelle an unnatural urge within me?" There was not another living to whom she would ask such a question and she did hold a most desperate need in her heart to dispell the wicked doubt Dechala had sown within her concerning her love for Si'anelle. Taking a step towards her Nimine did press the piece of blue silk into her hand, her habitual severe expression now softening as she did rest her eyes upon her.

"So that was the nature of the taunt Dechala did employ against you my child," Nimine did sigh as her hand came to rest upon her shoulder. "No Ae'thenal, you are Si'anelle's true and good friend; if I had thought your love unnatural I would have spoken to you of it well before this day." As her hand did tenderly stroke her hair Nimine did sigh again, "It is said that Dechala was a princess of our race before she did embrace Slaanesh; - for that reason alone Ae'thenal I would not consider any word of hers to resemble any quality of truth."

With the Banepearl now wrapped in silk in her hand and with Nimine's arm around her to support her they did quit the battlefield together, Nadimar patiently following behind them without need of any word on their part. "The mages of Ulthuan do know that the servants of Chaos did gather here in Avelorn," Ae'thenal did tell her foster mother, speaking to the knowledge that was hers by reason of her enslavement to the Banepearl. "Already an army under Prince Tyrion does assemble and perhaps in a day's time it is likely they shall find us." In truth she did feel afraid, for if she was weak, Si'anelle was the worse. And not either of them was capable of standing against such as Tyrion in the defense of this small remnant of Arhaindir Moonhand's people.

Nimine's expression did become the more severe as she did turn her face towards her, "If your thought does run towards engaging Elf-kind in battle I shall forget your heroic acts this day foster daughter and shall strike you. For the day that you and Si'anelle do ride out to fight Elf-kind you shall ride alone. And you shall find both Cedwyn and I standing among the ranks that do oppose you." Though when her tears did begin to overwhelm her eyelids Nimine did relent in her severity and sigh. Gathering her into her arms as if she was still a child of tender years who had skinned a knee while fighting imaginary foes.

"Peace Ae'thenal," Nimine did quietly say while she did give herself over to open weeping. "For when we do meet with Tyrion there will be no need for both you and Si'anelle to rise to our defense. No doubt we shall be questioned, and we shall tell our tale of today's battle before being permitted to depart to continue our journey into exile."