

## Unstoppable – Stephen Gross

Elric Anderhal steadied himself against the the wall as the last of the inner sanctum's wards faded. His breathing had not been so laboured in years. Years of telling others what to do were catching up on him. It took a mage with great training and aptitude to breach the seals of Tailan's tomb, and Elric's mage-lieutenants had not been included their liege's escort. They had been left to keep their master's stronghold running smoothly, far away from the coveted artifact Elric was about to claim.

Elric's long-idle muscles screamed as he dragged the sanctum's ancient basalt door open. He would have collapsed then and there had his prize not been so close. The mage took a deep breath of the stale crypt air, and approached the sarcophagus. He matched the heavy stone lid's groan as he slid it off, sending it crashing to the floor. Before him lay the bones of the Archmage Tailan Gethros, whose finger still bore his life's work, the Conduit Ring. Elric slipped the ring off Tailan's skeletal finger, and on to his own.

The dry air about the mage crackled with energy. His drooping eyes snapped open, and his posture straightened. The strength that had drained from him in his foray into the tomb began to flow back into him. Elric waved a hand at the door, and it was violently ripped from its frame. The sound of the door crashing against the opposite wall echoed through the crypt. Elric staggered from his display of raw power, though he quickly regained his footing.

Elric gave the word for his guards to follow, and they began to make their way out of the tomb. The mage and his escort halted their exit, however, after passing back through what had been the third warded door. Standing atop the blasted remains of one of the golems that had served as the tomb's guardians was an armored man. Elric's eyes were drawn immediately to symbol of Orain on the knight's polished platemail. The mage bore scars from previous encounters with the agents of the fiery god of justice and protection. These agents, however, had fared much worse.

No helm covered the knight's graying auburn hair. He drew his sword from the sheath across his back; the blade only a foot shorter than the knight himself. As he shouted his challenge, a fiery halo blazed into being above his head. "Elric Anderhal, Hopekiller, Kingslayer, Scourge of the West, I am Mathos Dawnrazor. I am a sworn knight of the Order of the Midnight Beacon. In the name of Orain and the countless dead at your hand, I swear that I shall be your death this day."

Elric had burnt men who opposed him alive, frozen them solid in a tomb of ice, or called down a thunderstorm upon them. But the fatigue from earlier, fading though it was, had not completely disappeared. "A fine blade, fine suit of plate, all for an old templar past his prime," he called. "Guards! Whichever of you kills him shall have them as your prize!" With that, his servants, weapons already drawn, charged the knight.

The knight's age belied his speed and strength. He cut down the most eager guard before the man could take a swing. As he fought, he spoke in a steady voice. "I am the flame in the night, the candle in the dark." He slew two more of the mage's guards before one of them finally landed a glancing blow. "I am the torch that shows the way, the light that keeps the shadows at bay."

A sword cut through his armor and grazed his side, though he did not seem to notice. "A righteous fire blazes within me." The last remaining guard slashed the knight across his face, before the knight drove his blade through him. "While it burns I shall not falter. I shall not fall." Mathos turned once more to face the mage.

Elric snarled, his hands beginning intricate arcane gestures. "Death does not release my soldiers from my service!" he cried, as the bodies of his escort began to rise. The reanimated guards let forth an unholy shriek as they rushed the man who had killed them. "I am the flame in the night," Mathos began again. The dead clawed at him as he hacked at them with his bloodied sword. "The candle in the dark."

As he fought back the corpses that were grappling with him, one of the others picked up a fallen blade. "I am the torch that shows the way." The dead guard took the sword in both hands, and plunged it into Mathos's side. "The light that keeps the shadows at bay," the knight continued, as he pulled the blade free and impaled one of the fallen guards with it. "A righteous fire blazes within me." Bleeding from numerous wounds, Mathos felled the last of the dead. "While it burns I shall not falter." Then the knight once more stared Elric down, the mage's twice-slain escort scattered around him. "I shall not fall."

"Enough, templar!" Elric roared, "If you are too stubborn to shut up and die when you've been killed, I will ensure nothing remains of you to speak!" The mage's hands once more danced complex paths before him.

"I am the flame in the night"

Conjured shards of ice flew from Elric's hands and ripped through the knight's armor, embedding themselves in his chest. Mathos continued forward.

"The candle in the dark"

Lightning arced from the mage's fingertips, striking Mathos and coursing across his ruined platemail. Mathos continued forward.

"I am the torch that shows the way"

With a scream of rage, Elric hurled the unrelenting knight across the chamber, sending him slamming into the wall with a sickening crunch. Mathos rose from the ground.

"The light that keeps the shadows at bay"

Weathering a storm of curses that would make a man fall dead on the spot, Mathos continued forward.

“A righteous fire blazes within me”

Elric had backed himself against the wall of the tomb, as Mathos raised the hilt of his sword with both hands, the blade pointed down at Elric.

“While it burns I shall not falter”

Mathos drove his blade into the mage’s chest, burying it to the silver crossguard. He released his grip on the blade as Elric crumpled to the floor.

“I shall not fall”

Mathos dropped to his knees. The burning halo around his head was extinguished. The mage’s shouts and incantations had been silenced. The knight’s mantra had ended. The only sound in the tomb was Elric gasping out his final breath. Mathos let his eyes close, and then, as it had been for decades before, Tailan’s tomb was silent.