



Darkness Rising

A complete history of the Storm of Chaos

In the north the war drums beat. The Chaos gods have found a champion to lead their combined armies:

Archaon, Lord of the End Times. They seek nothing less than total domination of the Old World. The mortal races in the south are in disarray, riddled with rivalries and internal struggle. Dwarfs distrust the elves, and the nations of men are divided. They are ripe for the taking.

At this time of peril, a man has stepped forth, heralded by some as the Champion of Light, Sigmar reborn! Will the appearance of this hero bind the races together, or drive a wedge between them? Whatever the case, war is coming, and the fight for the Old World is on!

A BLACK LIBRARY PRODUCT

ISBN 1-84416-209-5



Background Book

UK £15

US \$29.99



Darkness Rising

The Complete History of the Storm of Chaos

BEING A CONSIDERED ESSAY ON THE RISE OF THE DARKNESS,
THE STORM OF CHAOS AND THE INVASION OF THE LORD OF
THE END TIMES

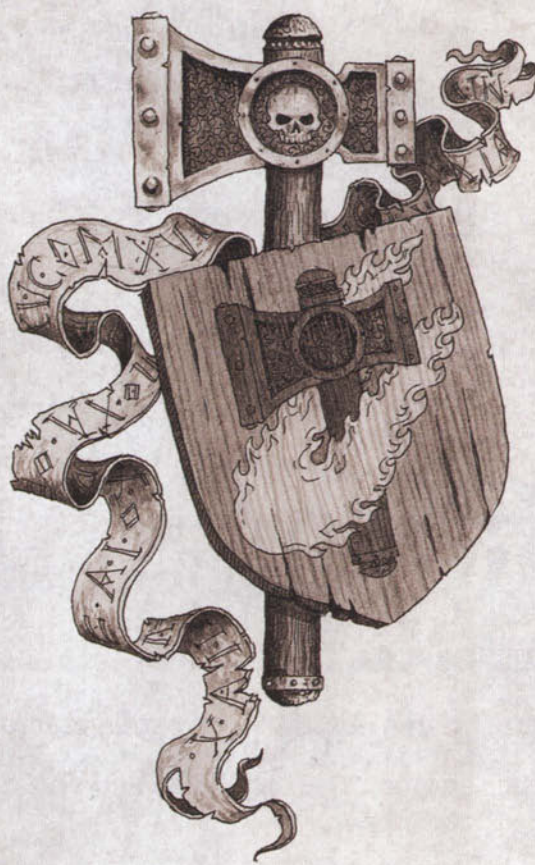
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Historian, Antiquarian, Fellow of the Altdorf Men's Historical Society and Connoisseur of
Finest Estalian Port.

With capable assistance from the boy, Stefan.

A History of the Fate of the Empire of Karl Franz during the time of the
Darkness Rising.



— Altdorf Press —



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A Black Library Publication

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Thanks: Paul Gayner, Gav Thorpe and Sabertooth Games

ISBN 13: 978-1-84416-209-3 ISBN 10: 1-84416-209-5

Limited Edition ISBN 13: 978-1-84416-210-9 Limited Edition ISBN 10: 1-84416-210-9

GW Product Code 6071 0299 079

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Printed in the EU.



It is with great honour and humility that I, Herr Frederick "Old" Weirde, scholar and researcher of Altdorf, collector of histories and chronicler of the past, am able to present to you, noble reader, my collected notes from that dread time known as the Storm of Chaos, as commissioned by the Emperor Karl Franz himself.

In the year 1522, our beloved land of the Empire was engulfed in a titanic war that surpassed even the Great War against Chaos fought nigh on two centuries past. An enemy more dangerous than any believed possible, driven on by dark and horrific gods, descended on our lands, having fought its way through our allies to the north and the east, and embarked on a mission of destruction, burning, killing and destroying everything in its path. Its target became clear - the towering city of Middenheim, and upon this great bulwark did the enemy lay siege.

This was a time of great sorrow. Thousands of brave and loyal soldiers fell on the battlefields of the Empire. Great funeral pyres piled high with the bodies of the slain smouldered for months, filling all of the Empire with a sickening stench. Thousands of brave Empire souls were not even given such an honour in death, but were staked to trees or left to hang from gibbets by the cruel and bloodthirsty enemy. Countless towns, villages and great cities were smashed asunder by the enemy—how many lifetimes will it take to rebuild them? I know not. Always will the Empire bear the scars of this war, although many will wish to forget the atrocities that occurred. Our Empire has been sorely wounded, and I fear that our land may never be the same again.

These are my collated notes and essays from that horrific time, as well as the despatches I received from my faithful observer in the field, young Stefan (to clarify any possible confusion when perusing my notes, I may make reference to Stefan simply as "the boy" on occasion—a title that he never appreciated). The input of brave and wilful young Stefan was invaluable in the compilation of this work; he it was who wrote daily despatches to me of the real goings on in the field. He it was who witnessed and wrote of many of the horrors of the war, giving this tome a weight of authenticity that is generally lacking in most histories. It is easy to remain unmoved when reading a dry overview of a battle. When the author did not see the flow of blood, breathe in the stench of the bodies of friends lying in the mud and filth, or watch as a comrade slowly dies in agony, why should we empathise with his words? Having witnessed such horrors personally and written of

them, the accounts of Stefan certainly lend this tome a more than ordinary perspective of this terrible time. A note must be added here however: Stefan was ever an impressionable lad, and one must excuse his occasional excesses of hyperbole and drama. He always did have a rather active imagination.

Through this nightmare time, I remained within the walls of my beloved Altdorf. Most of my writings were put to paper in my office (though my good wife Frau Weirde, Sigmar bless her, always did insist—much to my irritation and chagrin—in referring to it as the sewing room). Many a long and dark night did I spend with quill in hand and candle burning low, dutifully scribbling until the rays of morn did rouse me from my note taking. In times when the moment took me, most often when Frau Weirde's hacking weevil-cough threatened to bring the walls down upon me, I took residence in one of my favoured drinking establishments, the Hanging Crow or the Picture and Wabberthwait, and over the course of a satisfying firkin or two of Speckled Hen did scribe, until closing time forced me onto the street. I must also extend a hearty thanks to those brow-beaten individuals within the great library of Altdorf, who did more than once lend me a blanket when I fell into a fitful slumber while poring over one of the more dry and laborious books of Empire history.

My intent with this book is to allow one to gather an understanding of what it was like to have lived during these Dark Times, as well as giving a factual account of the actions that occurred. I believe that these writings can act as a comprehensive humanist history of this dire time, and that copies of it will reside within the Imperial Palace, as well as the Great Library in Altdorf. Already I have received requests from such notable dignitaries as Graf Boris Todbringer of Middenheim, for their own personal copy of my work.

I hope that through reading this compilation will come an understanding of these times, and I pray that another such time will not befall us. Nevertheless, I fear that this is the hope of an old and sentimental fool, and in my heart I know that although we have weathered this war, another already is brewing. The dread forces arrayed against us will never let up—for them, death, battle and war are acts of true devotion to their bloodthirsty gods, and the destruction of the world as we know it is their ultimate goal. Until that is achieved, they will never rest. To live in fear is a terrible thing—yet for us to ignore the chance that another, even greater Storm of Chaos may erupt would be folly indeed.

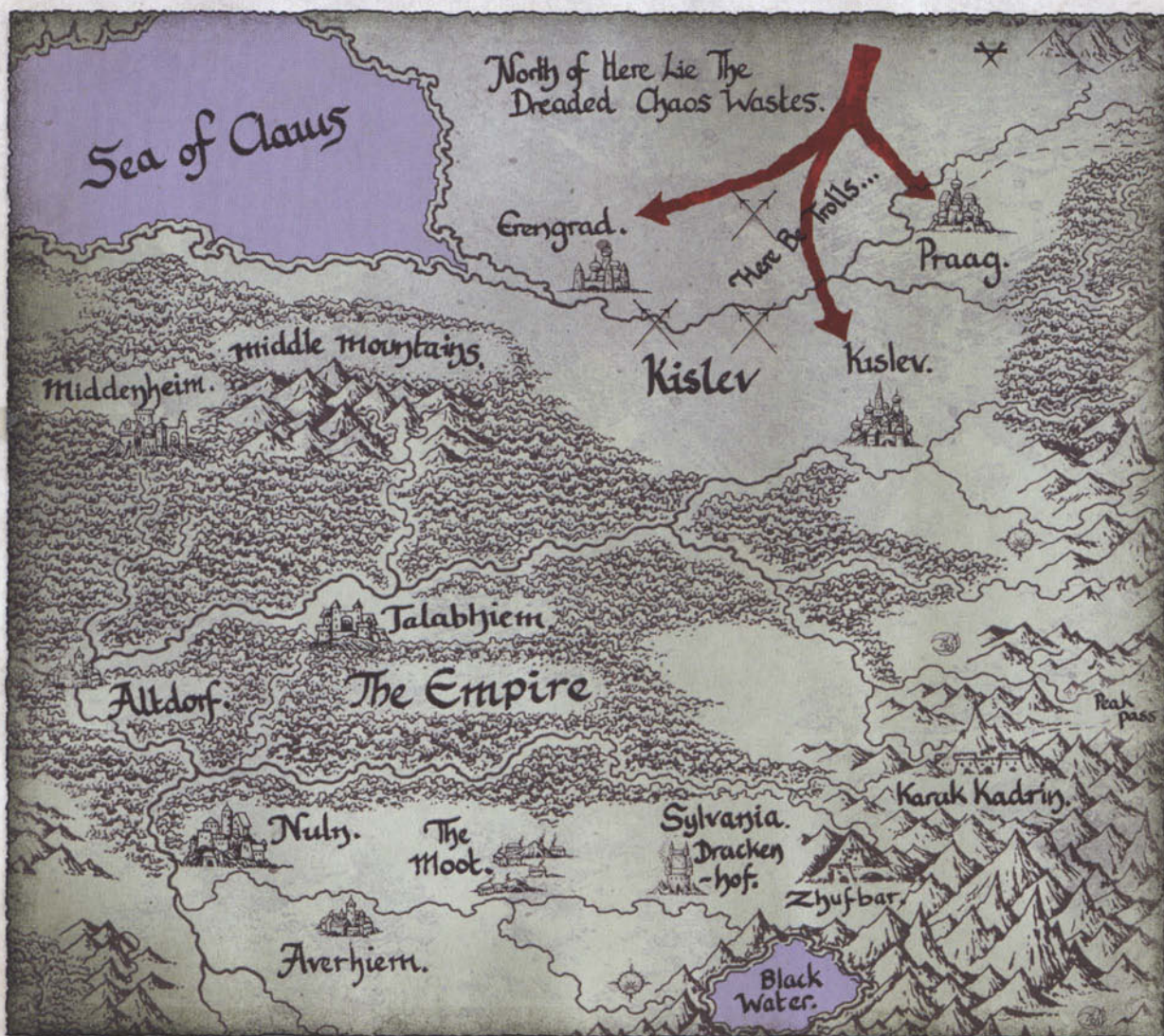






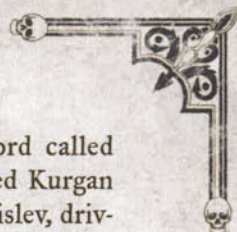
Chapter One

Rechaon, Lord of the End Times



Stormclouds Move South





Dark omens and dire predictions run rampant through the populace of Altdorf. A great number of doom-preachers and rabble-rousers stand on street corners, declaring to any who will listen that the end draws near. The more frenzied ones are dragged away by the emperor's guards, screaming of an apocalypse that draws nigh, but still more appear each week to take their place. The taverns are more subdued than usual, quiet and morose, their clientele swapping whispered stories of a faceless enemy gathering its forces to attack the Empire. Those boisterous and jolly with drink are quickly shushed by their companions, for tensions are high. From the palace, all is quiet, and many take this as confirmation of their worst fears. Dread spreads through the city like a plague. Doors are barred and locked, windows shuttered and drawn as night descends, and neighbours eye each other suspiciously. Business and trade are bad and crime has risen, particularly around the seedy docks. Rumour of the coming war has clearly spread throughout the Empire, for the population of the city has begun to swell, as citizens from outlying villages and towns begin to abandon their homes and seek solace within the great walls.

Rumours abound that the barbarous warriors of the frozen wastes of the far north are rallying, preparing

themselves for invasion. Led by a warlord called Surtha Lenk, a powerful army of the hated Kurgan has already assaulted the frozen lands of Kislev, driving south towards and into the Empire itself. Mighty battles were fought, and the army was finally defeated at Mazhorod. Nevertheless, the victory celebrations were brief, for many believe this was not the main invasion. It appears that it was merely an advance party of a much greater war host that some say may attack on the first thaws of next spring.

If such is the case, the people of Altdorf are right to fear. The men of the northern wastes are bloodthirsty warriors, who live to slaughter, rape and destroy in the blasphemous names of their hateful gods. Their numbers are beyond count, and while some mock these rumours, claiming that the barbarians are too busy warring with each other to organise a full scale invasion, others say that one man has arisen, one chosen by the dark gods, who has united the forces of Chaos under his banner. His name has been whispered by some in the dead of night over a cold fire-pit, but even speaking his name has already seen a score of men burnt at the stake by the ever-vigilant witch hunters. His name is Archaon, and some say that it is he who will bring utter ruin to the world as we know it.

A sense of impending doom pervades the Empire.



Archaon, Lord of the End Times



I remember a most disturbing experience that I endured about thirteen or fourteen years ago. I had thought the episode closed forever, and took pains to ensure that was the case. But recent events—namely all this talk of a lord of Chaos named Archaon—has stirred up that particular nest of vipers. I find revisiting these memories difficult, but for the good of this journal I must do so.

On this fateful night, in a particularly misguided mood, I took it upon myself to visit the ruined temple that lies outside this city's walls. It was haunted even then, and people are forbidden to enter it by the law of the emperor. Frau Weirde will regale anyone who is willing to listen about how I believe I am above such laws [she has the kernel of a truth there], and as if to prove her belief, I ventured inside.

It was a place of dusty, broken archways and birds' nests, shafts of moonlight illuminating the clouds of dust I conjured with my boots. Under the charcoal-covered timbers and broken stained glass on the floor were cracked and blackened flagstones—whoever burnt that place down made a damn good job of it.

The rumours that the place was haunted proved to be true. I saw a figure, blurred but distinct enough to give me the fright of my life, crouching in the central knave. It

was scrabbling at something on the floor. Uncommonly large, it seemed to be dressed in the trappings of a Templar of Sigmar. I saw it clutch something and then convulse. It turned its head in my direction and screamed. I fainted clean away, and when I came round there was blood in my hair. The apparition had vanished.

I made the sign of Sigmar, and [gods know why] walked over to the spot where I had seen the ghost. I found a scrap of a parchment that chilled me to the core. I locked them in a leaden chest and buried it in the holy grounds of the Great Cathedral, resolving to scour it from my memory, but it has come back to me. Be warned, it does not make for pleasant reading. I can only conclude it was part of that Great Truth that drove the tortured soul I saw to madness. Try as I might, I cannot shake the feeling that the mad templar was a glaubegeist, a ghost of faith—the last tattered remnants of Archaon's soul.

I have heard tell that Archaon was once a Templar of Sigmar. He learnt something, which stripped his sanity away and he abandoned the Empire and his faith, cursing the names of his gods. He became consumed with his desire to destroy his former homeland, and made pacts with dark gods in order that he may achieve these ends.

It is foretold that time itself is coming to an end.

In the north stirs a power unlike any other.

The hand of Chaos has cast a huge, impenetrable shadow upon the world,

And it cannot be banished or defeated.

It is written that soon the stars will fall from the sky, and the moons will turn red as blood.

In the wake of the storm will come the armies of the Dark Gods. The puny princes and lords of the mortal world will gather their pitiful armies, but it shall avail them not. The lords of Chaos will descend upon them and crush them utterly.

It is the pathetic vanity of we mortals to think that our weak cries and brittle weapons could hope to stem the tide of the night. It is already too late; all hope was lost aeons ago.

The moment of Dark Glory fast approaches, and there is nothing we can do save kneel before the Chaos gods while there is still time. But be quick, for the time till the coming of Chaos is measured in mere heartbeats.

With the final triumph of Chaos, all life will decay into a seething mass of lost and screaming souls, eternally enduring the forms thrust upon them by the uncaring gods of Chaos.

Despair, for the Storm of Chaos has begun.



Greetings, old man!

Firstly, let me assure you that I am both alive and well, although events round these parts have passed from the strange to the unbelievable, and my skin condition has been giving me merry hell recently — I swear all these lice-ridden hostels and remote rural inns are aggravating the matter. Fortunately, that peculiar cream that you recommended I obtain from Gretchen has been working wonders. I just wish I knew what was in it! She refuses to tell me, naturally, trade secrets and all that, but I am almost certain I can detect camphor, beeswax and possibly even naphtha in its scent. I shudder to think that one is as strange as she is comely.

But back to the matter at hand: despite the fact my health is fundamentally sound, the same cannot be said of the once-fair province of Gatersberg, in the southern reaches of the Reichland. What started out as a simple errand to establish contacts from whom you can procure mandrake root (and frankly it still galls me that you won't tell me what for) has turned into a full-scale fact-finding mission. I am nearly at the end of my purse and am having to subsist on my own moneys instead of my expenses advance — a fact I feel sure you will redress on my return to Allidorf — for on my word as an "inky" (I know you love that term so), my discoveries will be of great interest to you.

"Well, what are they, young fool?" I hear you scold. The first instances of peculiar happenstance I assumed to be some sort of meteorological hiccup: uncomfortably hot winds for this time of year, and flurries of snow that pile up against doors and windows whilst leaving the hard-packed earth of the track untouched. This did not cause too much consternation in itself, as the folk around here lead such simple lives a new conversation topic is a blessing to them. I myself made nothing of it, but as you may have heard these same snows have intensified in these parts, shutting down many of the minor roads and forcing me (oh calamity!) to spend many evenings in the local taverns in front of a roaring fire.

It is round just such a hearth that I made the acquaintance of one Grandfather Jaeger, a farmer of at least sixty winters. He regaled me with a strange tale of hoof prints in the snow. "How bizarre," I can hear you sarcastically reflect. "News of hoof prints, in a farm of all places! Money well spent!" But these hoof prints were upon the roofs of Herr Jaeger's barn. Not only that, but they passed in a direct line onto the roof of his house, and from there onto his outhouse, and thence onto his neighbour's barn roof, without touching the virgin snow in between the buildings even once! Not the poor of some lowly goat, I feel.

Nevertheless, I dismissed it as a product of Jaeger's predilection for cider and the boredom of winter evenings; much as I did the tales of a withered old man carrying the sign of a spiral who haunts the crossroads to the east of



here, walking backwards and talking in tongues as he does so. Odd, but plausible enough, that is until the innkeeper and his cronies told me that his very touch is death. Six bodies have been found, stone cold, yet unmarked, within a mile of that crossroads in the last fortnight. My comfortable air of amused disbelief evaporated instantly when the villagers showed me two of the corpses. I slept ill that night.

Since then I have been inclined to treat the fanciful tales of the villagers with a little more credence than normal. And I hear more strange rumours with every passing week. A strange malaise is affecting many of the young men in Gutensberg, a sickening of the heart that brings lethargy and indifference at first, then painful cramps as time progresses. Is it some kind of ague? I doubt it — every single one of those struck by the illness is a first-born son.

Add to this unsavoury picture the behaviour of the livestock. Morrslieb was full in the sky four nights ago, and the racket the animals made was beyond endurance. I had to resort to your old trick of candle wax in the ears. Anyway, the following morning, the farmers of Gutensberg found that the cattle had been gnawing each other, chewing the flesh from each other's flanks in the night. Their milk was laced with blood for days. And the eggs! Last week I was preparing myself breakfast and, as I cracked a nice big specimen into the skillet, something slithered out from the yolk that most certainly was not asian in origin. It had fried before I had a chance to examine it properly, but it was horribly malformed.

Perhaps the crowning glory of this catalogue of woe is the report from the neighbouring village that a goat had been born with a human head, and hands instead of hooves. And before you ask, no I do not intend to investigate. I can tell you, this village is fast losing all trace of tolerance or good nature. I myself am attracting suspicious glances, as if the local folk think I am at fault for these ghastly events. I intend to set off for Lachenabad in the morning, weather be damned, where I can at least get Jess re-shod and perhaps enjoy a little normality.

I shall write soon, hopefully with less unsettling news. All these strange portents sit ill with me, though I know they are your bread and butter. Think of me whilst you sip herbal tea in your nice warm study!

Until then,

Stefan



This is a grim time for us to live in. A sense of pervading doom has descended on Altdorf, as if some weight is hanging above our heads and we are just waiting for it to drop. The boy seems to have got it into his head that doom stalks the forests of the Empire at the moment. What I think he does not truly realise [but he's young—he will learn] is that doom always stalks the forests! But he believes that this time something is different. It is my nature to be more sceptical. However, even my healthy scepticism is being eroded by the feelings of unease and impending darkness that pervade the city.

Walking through the markets today, I took a detour along Down Street in order to avoid the attentions of a particular fishwife, who for some reason that is beyond me does always seem to delight in haranguing me most foully. It was on this detour that I heard the words of a flagellant. He had carved an image of the twin-tailed comet of Sigmar upon his brow, and had nailed a plank of wood into his own chest. On this he had scrawled the words “darkness comes”, in blood. His flesh was scored with scars and more recent cuts. He had a mad light of fervour in his eyes. Now, I always try to keep clear of these maniacs, for to be quite honest they frighten me, yet the press of the crowd forced me into close proximity.

He was shouting and ranting and spittle flew from his cracked lips. To my dismay, he singled me out of the crowd and fell at my knees, grappling with my

legs so that I could not easily escape from him. He shouted these words in a voice hoarse with ranting (though I have taken the liberty of adding a bit more decorum and sense to them).

“The End comes, and he rides upon a steed of fire with two tails! A wave of darkness rides in his wake! The Dark Templar comes to slaughter our gods!”

Normally I would discount these words as those of a madman and push them from my mind, yet they resonate in my head. They were much too similar to what I had discovered about this so-called Archaon to be a mere coincidence. But his ranting of a steed of fire with two tails sounded suspiciously like a twin-tailed comet. I discounted this, for the flagellants of Sigmar are constantly raving of such things.

Nevertheless, I heard no more from the flagellant, for he began to beat his head with his fists, screaming and contorting his body as if in agony. Having been released of his fevered grasp, I quickly made my exit. As I came out of Down Street (sweating profusely from my ordeal), I did see the crowd part to let some struggling figures pass. It seemed that the flagellant had attracted more attention than perhaps he had wished, for he was being dragged away by the militia.

Somewhat flustered, I arrived at the great Library. I calmed myself by smoking my pipe and reading some extracts of a subversive comedy that had recently arrived there, translated from its native Tilean.

It was by strange coincidence that I discovered this letter that afternoon. It was clearly misfiled and forgotten, for I discovered it folded and [for reasons unknown] inserted in a volume called “The Collected Recipes of Ma Grimwald” [I was considering copying out a few choice recipes and “accidentally” leaving them lying about in Frau Weirde’s kitchen in the forlorn hope of one day receiving a well cooked meal]. On closer inspection, I was interested to see it was a letter from a Celestial wizard addressed to one of his peers, written many years past. It seemed appropriate to include it here, especially after hearing the crazed words of the flagellant.

I find the following letter intriguing, though I do not truly understand all this talk of celestial bodies and such. Nevertheless, this wizard seems to be predicting the reappearance of the holy twin-tailed comet—and possibly very soon! Could this signal mean salvation if the rumours of the coming war are proven to be true? And could it be that the words of the crazed flagellant were not merely the words of a madman, but actually held truth?



Chaos Knights Charge to War





My dear friend and colleague, Shalstar Kallat,

I have continued with the research that we discussed last winter - namely the tracking and studying of that great twin-tailed comet that has passed above our heads in the heavens several times through the history of the glorious Empire, and your homeland of Araly.

Tracking this celestial phenomenon is almost impossible. It seems to appear in the skies almost at random, but I think I have begun to achieve some insight into its chaotic path through the cold heavens.

My research (I have included the pertinent notes from my studies in this letter) seems to indicate that the appearance of the twin-tailed comet is not a random occurrence. While the revered priests of Sigmar would agree with this, stating that its appearance signals the presence of Sigmar returned (either in the form of Sigmar himself reborn, or his divine presence becoming manifest in the body of a champion) to battle great evil, it is my belief that the comet does not merely appear in our time of need. That strikes me as a purely reactive explanation, and through all my studies, nothing in the heavenly bodies appears purely out of reaction to something that may happen here in our world.

No, it is my belief that the comet is not truly the signal of a great hero like Sigmar returning to aid us, but rather is the reason that such a hero would appear. Let me explain, and I must state here that much of this cannot at the moment be proved. I believe that the comet passing close to our land is what generates the energy that allows the avatar of Sigmar to return - likewise, the passing of the comet is what allows our enemies to gain additional power from the winds of magic.

It also seems to me that the comet of Sigmar is appearing with greater frequency now than ever before. Whereas many years ago, the orbit of the comet was such that it would appear every few thousand years, the time between visits of the comet are becoming less frequent. The comet's orbit seems to be drawing in, so that it will appear with greater frequency in the coming years. I predict that it will appear within the next few decades (by my calculation, somewhere between the years 2520 and 2522), and then after that will appear again within fifty years. After that, it will appear within the following twenty-five years, and so on. I may even venture an opinion that the comet will eventually crash into our land, but what that would bring with it, I know not.

Details of my research are included. I look forward to your correspondence.

Yours,

Halfrecht Mensch





Chapter Two

The Holy Sigmarites of the Empire

The worst fears of the people of the Empire seem confirmed—the dread armies of Chaos, having been unified by their unholy leader and forged into a vast army intent on destruction, is on the move. Already the steppes of Kislev have been ravaged by fire and death, and it is said that ungodly ceremonies and sacrifices are taking place. The people of the Empire are in a panic, and await a declaration from the great Emperor Karl Franz on how to fight this enemy. The city is ablaze with fearful stories of creatures in the darkness. Many now fear to walk beneath the great forest canopy that separates the cities and towns of the Empire, for it is said that the evil creatures lurking within their shadowy depths have grown more aggressive and confident of late. Many of the smaller villages scattered through the Drakwald have been burnt to the ground, their populations slaughtered or dragged away, never to be seen again.

Stories sift into Altdorf of livestock being born twisted and mutated, and of blighted crops, rotting unnaturally in the sun. Many more incidents are being reported; strange creatures creeping up from the sewers in the night, an entire household burnt at the stake for communing with dark powers, and of the man who awoke one morn to discover, to his horror, a withered, twitching hand growing from his chest. How many others within the Empire hide taints of Chaos, fearing persecution?

And yet in this dark time, a ray of hope shines brightly. Countless citizens are turning to the

worship of Sigmar, abandoning their occupations to spread the word of the patron god of the Empire. The most holy Grand Theogonist Volkmar appears daily on the steps of the temple of Sigmar in Altdorf, preaching that with faith this darkness will be overcome. In rural areas, people flock to hear the words of the outlawed Prophet of Sigmar, Luthor Huss, who travels the lands spreading his fiery fervour. There are even rumours that a young man has been discovered, a blacksmith, who, it is claimed, is Sigmar reborn. Thus with faith, the people of the Empire clasp onto hope, and pray that it will carry them through the nearing times of darkness and terror.



Marauders from the North



I have seen the twin-tailed comet in the sky! I cannot fully express my amazement in words, yet it truly was a marvel to witness. I swear I could feel the heat of its passing on my skin. Oh, what a blessing to have seen this momentous event with mine own eyes! My hand is still shaking as I pen this, and my heart beats with excitement.

I have just attempted to make my way to the Hanging Crow, but there simply is no way I can penetrate the pandemonium that has erupted in the streets of Altdorf. Thousands of people throng the streets, driven to hysteria by the visitation upon our less than fair city. I narrowly avoided being crushed by a horse and cart, being mugged by doomsayers, and being knocked over by a screaming woman at least twice my own size before I had reached ten feet from my own front door. As such I have returned to my garret and climbed out upon the roof—despite the creative protestations and lamentations from Frau—the better to watch as Altdorf erupts into madness like an ant's nest into which boiling water has been poured.

I am not the only one to have had this idea. The dark, haunted rooftops are dotted with people waving their arms around, dancing jigs, holding placards bearing tidings of doom—everything up to and including howling at the moon, by the looks of it. The

streets are thronged with people arguing, shouting and pushing, and I'll wager a pretty pfennig what about, too. The city is divided in opinion. Is the comet a harbinger of destruction that will smash into the heart of Altdorf and destroy it just as its predecessor destroyed Mordheim? Or is it a sign of our salvation, that Sigmar has been reborn somewhere in the Empire, to lead us against the forces of Chaos in our darkest hour? In the streets, clerics counter the claims of curates, students squabble with spectacled scholars, fishwives frantically fret at the faithful, and pickpockets plunder the pouches of preachers who shout their doctrine to any who will listen. New Empire Street is in a state of riot, and mounted watchmen have started laying about themselves with their cudgels—gods help the unruly if Filthy Harald is on duty. I would not be surprised if the wild-haired doomsayers that sometimes march alongside the Empire armies grow substantially in number after this little furore.

I am less than inclined to venture out to learn more, lest I be the one putting myself in danger instead of Stefan. This is of great consternation to me, as I would like nothing more than to be discussing the reaction of the city in my comfortable armchair by the Hanging Crow's hearth.

I shall be patient.



Wolf Kin Skirmishers



I write this from that very armchair, though this is a good seven or eight hours after I penned my last missive. I managed to convince Herr Puerte, my next-door neighbour, to accompany me to the Street of a thousand Taverns by the simple expedient of shouting through our thin walls. (He sits opposite me now, happily introducing himself to the wonders of Old Speckled Hen.)

The inn is busy. Where only yesterday it was a quiet and reserved place, now it buzzes with the old and the young, all with fresh stories about the carnage caused by the passing of the comet.

Over the last hour or so I have heard tell of a man who set himself on fire rather than be subjected to Sigmar's judgement. I heard tell of a young couple, madly in love, who threw themselves from the rooftops because they believed the comet was a sign that they had sinned by lying together before wedlock. I have heard about the organ grinder who lost his nose when his monkey went berserk at the sight of the celestial phenomenon, and the crushing discipline brought down upon the riots by the Reiksguard. I have heard about the religious mobs that prowl the streets, hunting heretics, or indeed anyone they deem undesirable, and giving them a good thrashing. I, for my part, subscribe to the belief that the comet is as much a tidings of good as it is of evil. Yes, these are dark times. I believe the comet heralds the arrival of a champion of light, and when things have calmed down a little, I shall make my way to the library to find out.



To see the miraculous appearance of the twin-tailed comet in the sky was an absolute marvel. Frau Weirde thought that I had become bereft of my senses, and did accuse my noble self of having partaken of too many drinks! She missed seeing the tremendous event, being at the time perched over her chamber pot. Methinks this was a result of the previous night's "lamb" stew, cooked by Frau Weirde herself. I dare not to venture this opinion to her, but methinks it was not lamb.

With all the furore that the twin-tailed comet created in Altdorf, I thought it best to delve into the histories of the previous times that such an omen had been seen. Most famously, the twin-tailed comet heralded the coming of our lord Sigmar. This is an excerpt from the *Saga of Sigmar*, which I acquired many years past:

*Hark now, hear these words,
And live in hope.*

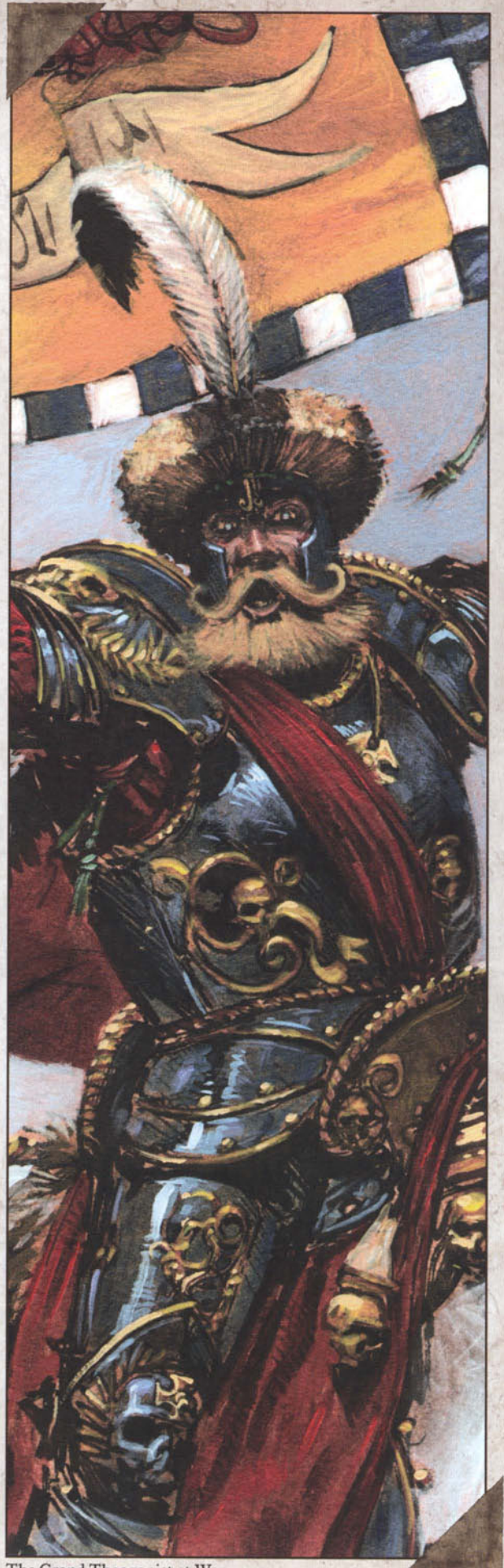
*In the time before time,
Orcs roamed the land,
And all was darkness.
It was a time of woes,
It was a time of doom,
It was a time of wolves,
Mankind was prey.
They looked to the sky,
Cried to the gods: 'Deliver us!
And the gods answered them.*

*Into the darkness, came a light,
A torch of the gods,
A dragon with two tails...*

The most immediate and obvious thought is that the appearance of the twin-tailed comet announces the return of our lord Sigmar. Could this truly be the case? I must admit that my heart does yearn for such a thing to happen. I am certain that is what impressionable young Stefan will deduct if he did also witness this momentous event. But there has been more than one reference to the appearance of the twin-tailed fiery comet in the skies.

A twin-tailed comet heralded the coming of Sigmar Heldenhammer. In that time, the lands were overrun with darkness. The comet was a light in that darkness, and presaged the coming of Sigmar, he who did fight his enemies, and then founded our Empire.

A twin-tailed comet descended on that once great city of Mordheim, smiting it into ruin. This has been accepted as being Sigmar's holy wrath, for it is said that the people of that place had strayed far from the ideals



The Grand Theogonist at War

set down by Sigmar himself. I take it that since the comet did not descend on Altdorf with fiery destruction, we will not suffer a similar fate.

The other time that a comet has been sighted was during the Great War Against Chaos, two hundred years past. As the honoured Heironymous of Nuln states: "Every time that the wings of fire have appeared in the sky, they have heralded the coming of great things". It seems to me that the appearance of the twin-tailed comet tends to coincide with the appearance of some great and heroic warrior in a great time of need. This individual, whom I shall dub the Champion of Light, rises to face some terrible evil, the Everchosen of Chaos. These two individuals, both infused with the powers of their gods—the Champion of Light with the power of Sigmar, and the Everchosen with the powers of his fell deities—are fated to face each other in battle.

From this I can conclude that a mighty Champion of Light must surely have arisen. Who this individual is remains to be seen. His or her enemy must surely be the dread Lord of the End Times, Archaon himself. The fate of our Empire may rely on the Champion defeating this grand evil in personal combat.

I have heard many wild and speculative reasons for the appearance of the twin-tailed comet. Being renowned within the Hanging Crow for my learning, I was asked my opinion by Fritz, the rotund and dour cellar man. I explained the Champion of Light theory to my rapt audience, and it immediately prompted people to speculate on who this could be. The consensus seemed to be that it must be the Grand Theogonist, Volkmar the Grim. It is said that he is mustering an army of the devoted to face Archaon, and we did raise our flacons in salute to his success.



A Foreboding Woodcut

The streets are filled with rejoicing. Volkmar the Grim, Grand Theognist of the Church of Sigmar marches to war. Leading an army of the faithful, today he rode out of the city. At his side rides the elector count of Valabecland - a most devout and stern warrior. The whole of Altdorf was in attendance to see the Theognist in all his glory as he paraded atop his glowing war altar. The citizens threw flowers before him, cheering and waving. The feeling of doom that has hung like a miasma over the city has lifted. Surely he is our salvation, surely the power of Sigmar will flow through his personal representative in the world, and this Storm of Chaos will be ended.

Two weeks have passed since the army of the faithful marched to the north to face Archagon. I hear from dispatches received that they have passed through Valabheim, where they were welcomed as if the war had already been won. From there, they have marched to the northwest, skirting the Middle Mountains. Everywhere they went they were welcomed as saviours. So it is that the Grand Theognist brings hope to all of the Empire. Even as I write, I believe the army moves into the cold lands of Kislev. It seems that Volkmar intends to pass the battle site of Mazhorad, to pay respect to those who laid their lives down there before pressing north into the icy Troll Country. Praise be to Sigmar.

Still no word from the north. People are beginning to get nervous. What would happen should Sigmar's chosen fall? I dare not think of such things.





From exhilaration to despair... News has come from the north. Volkmar the Grim challenged the warlord Archagon, hoping to end this Storm of Chaos before it began. Alas, this was not to be. My worst fears have been made real - Volkmar has fallen. Nobly did he challenge the warlord Archagon, but even his unwavering faith in Sigmar was not enough to overcome his foe. Cut down he was, his body left in the snow. His army, dismayed at the loss of their leader, fled the battle and were mercilessly cut down by the worshippers of Chaos. My mood is bleak, and I fear the worst is yet to come. What if Volkmar was the Champion of Light, and still he was defeated? What will this mean for my beloved Empire?

Here I sit, with quill in hand, my fine Bretonnian decanter of Estalian port near empty. I grow maudlin. Even now, I can imagine, the hordes of Chaos pouring southwards. How many more eyes will I be able to sit here at my desk before Altdorf itself is overrun?

I go to my bed now. I look forward to the oblivion of sleep, and pray that this is a dire nightmare.

With the fall of Volkmar the Grim, the position of Grand Theognist of the Church of Sigmar has lain vacant for the past week. In this time, when leadership, prayer and resolution are so needed, the Church has seen fit to hastily advance a replacement. The new Theognist is Johann Esmer. I know him not, but I hear the hushed talk in the Hanging Crow that he is not half the man Volkmar was. Where Volkmar was tall and stern, he is small, and nervous. It seems that many regard him as a man with more political aspirations than a man of Sigmar ought to have. It would be churlish of me to write badly of the man myself, but I pray these rumours are not true. In this time, the people of Altdorf - nay, the people of all the Empire - need a strong figure to rally behind. I fear Esmer is not that man.



I have become a different man since my last missive.

The last few days have been quite the most important in my life. Before you scoff, let me say that I find this incredible too, old man, and were it not for the presence of the lord amongst men slumbering at the door of this barn I tarry in, I would believe it to be some disease fuelled delirium. But the fact remains that I have been brought from the brink of a horrible death, not by a physician or apothecary, but by the spirit of Sigmar reborn.

I shall start at the beginning. Travelling from accursed Gutesberg to Lachenbad through the stinging winds, with Jess whickering every step of the way, I came across bloodstains in the snow. Curiosity got the better of me, and I traced them to their origin. I was aghast to find the corpse of a beastman, a diseased half-man with back-pointed legs and the horned head of a goat. Thankfully, the thing's skull had been caved in. Shivering despite my many layers of clothing, I made haste toward Lachenbad.

That gruesome sight did nothing to prepare me for what I found there. It was a scene of carnage, a violent tableau perfectly preserved by the unforgiving winter. Most of the village's buildings were burnt to the ground, black timbers punctuating the desolate landscape like the charred skeletons of giants. Ravens picked at the corpses lying in the streets, half-concealed by the freshly falling snow. I rode Jess onward, a morbid desire to investigate made me take a closer look at the bodies.

Amongst the bodies of the villagers lay the cadavers of yet more mutant creatures. Almost all had the heads of beasts: cattle, goat, sheep and hound. The further I rode into the village, the more mutant corpses I found. The people of Lachenbad had fought hard. One beast had an iron poker shoved through its eye socket. One had a blacksmith's anvil buried deep in its chest. As I rode Jess around the blacksmith's hut, the only building still vaguely intact, I came upon a great mound of beastmen corpses. Almost all had their heads or chests caved in. This was a mystery to me.

After calling out and receiving no reply, I left that hideous vista to the carrion birds and flies that buzzed around the dead. If I had not been so shocked by my discovery, I may have taken pause at the presence of so many flies in the depths of winter. Perhaps it would have readied me for what happened next.

As I rode east out of Lachenbad, I came upon another horrible sight, a crow, half-decayed and writhing with maggots, sitting atop a milestone. It cawed horribly, and then I was attacked by something so vile, I doubt I will ever erase its mark from my mind. It burst from a mound of snow and charged at me, a ululating howl on its slobbering lips, a pestilent beast-headed creature with gnarled horns and three suppurating sores in place of its eyes. I cried out as Jess backed wildly,

pitching me from the saddle and bolting down the path as the thing loped nearer. I fell heavily, breaking my wrist, and I crassas I screamed with fear as the foul-smelling thing bore down on me. I held up my hands to ward it off, a pathetic gesture that elicited a hideous, gurgling chuckle from the beast-thing; it sounded like a man drowning in clotted blood.

The creature stepped over me and, batting my arm aside, thrust its rusted, scabrous sword deep into my gut. I fell back into the snow as it leant over me, foetid breath hot in my face. It ripped open my shirt, eager to feed, as more of its fellows stalked from the woods. Sigmar gave me the memory of their grotesque visages! My blood thundered in my ears and I began to panic as the realisation that I was about to die under the claws of this fiend sunk in.

The thunder coalesced into the sound of hooves a scant second before the thing's head was taken from its shoulders by the downward sweep of a warhammer. Riding atop a magnificent charger was a thick-set, bald man in the battered armour of a High Priest of Sigmar. He wheeled back, and through fevered eyes, I saw who it was that had saved my life: Luthor Hass himself! The thing's companions were being slaughtered around me but, unable to resist the toxins the beastman's sword had infected me with for a second longer, my body grew cold and I slid into unconsciousness.

Then, miracle of miracles, I felt warmth flow through me, and the lumpy form of the beastman's corpse lifted from atop me as if it weighed no more than a lamb. I opened my eyes, and standing before me was a shining, blonde haired man, silhouetted by the rays of the sun. He put down his weapons, a pair of gore-spattered blacksmith's hammers, and laid his hands upon my wound. I swear to you I felt it heal then and there, and the filth the sword had put into my veins disappeared like a bad dream.

He looked like a young farmhand, muscular and powerful but barely a day older than myself. But he has shown me his true power, and I can see beyond the veil of the flesh. Hass, the mounted warrior, is right in his holy passions; this young man, Vallen of Lachenbad, is no mere blacksmith's son. He is Sigmar reborn.

Gods be praised, old man, I was saved from death by Sigmar himself.

Well, young Stefan must have been addled by his horrible experience, and is probably just being his impressionable young self. (He does so idolise those strong hero types. Surely our great hope is no mere smith-sweeping youngster?)





From the quill of Stefan of Altdorf, in the year of our Lord Sigmar 2523

Mock me if you must old man, but it is strange company indeed I keep from this day forth. I shall list their number not for the sake of your records, but for those of history itself:

The Prophet of Sigmar: Luthor Huss, to whom I owe my life, is a towering ox of a man, whose fiery conviction sets aflame all who listen to him, and sends the unfaithful quailing into the dirt at his feet. He rides a great charger and is clad in the finest plate armour, though it is in a state of disrepair. Huss has no time for scented baths and spit-and-polish, and his head is shaven like that of a monk. He tells me that he has fallen out of favour with the petty bureaucrats who infest the church of Sigmar, and that he is returning to shake them by their scrawny necks and show them the true glory of Valten. I find him more than a little intimidating, and my heart quickens at his approach.

The Bearers of the Word: The majority of those who march toward Altdorf are bedraggled and wild-haired, conviction replacing the false virtue of vanity. Simple men all, the Bearers of the Word are clad in coarse sackcloth and lice-ridden hessian. They beat themselves with jagged chains and flails, mortifying their flesh. And it seems to work, not one of these holy men has an ounce of sin in his body. They bear placards and parchments proclaiming the glory of Sigmar. Some have sewn their eyes shut, wanting the last sight they see to be the incarnation of Sigmar. Many proclaim his glory in a never-ceasing tide of devout prayer to which I find myself adding when the fervour takes me.

The Free Men of Lachenbad: Carrying everything from pitchforks to ploughshares, the Free Men of Lachenbad march from their devastated village with the intention of taking the fight to those who destroyed their homes. They join us without hesitation when they set eyes upon the glory of Valten. I even recognise several of the villagers from Gutenberg! And they are not all men, either: the women and children of Lachenbad march with us too. Why, just behind me is a little girl of no more than eight years who clutches an amulet of Sigmar to her chest.

Warriors of the Faith: Every other day another warrior priest joins us. They have the steel of faith in their souls, but just to look upon their god tempers it and increases its strength a thousand fold. Some are great bull-necked warriors of the church, some are stick-thin but with fierce eyes.

The God-Child: And so we come to the valiant man who leads at the head of our motley column. He rides upon a horse so white it seems to shine. Valten, a lad no more than a score of years old, is of larger build and of stronger arm than Huss. He towers above his faithful host, his physical presence commanding and his eyes shining with the glory of Sigmar. But his words, though strong, are softly spoken, no booming demagogue this. I wish that the beastmen of the forest would rise up once more, just so I could see the living incarnation of my god smite them down again!

Such petty concerns as comfort are beyond me now. By all the stars in the sky, I feel that I have finally found my place in the world: by the side of the Exalted of Sigmar, marching to destroy those who would bring darkness upon the Empire and its allies.

Oh dear, the boy has fallen in with the wrong crowd, just like when he was dallying with those nasty Hood's boys last summer. I do hope it is just a phase - a sorcerer who blunts himself towards his career prospects so much.





Chapter Three

The Conclave of Light

With the destruction of the army of the faithful at the hands of the dread Chaos warlord Archaon, the Empire has recoiled in horror. True fear has entered the hearts of its citizens, for it is now apparent that the coming war is very real, and that the Empire may not be able to hold the hated enemy. Most truly believed that their salvation had come with the appearance of the twin-tailed comet and Volkmar's march to the north. The fall of the most holy individual within the Empire, the Grand Theogonist, has sent many into ever descending spirals of despair, and many see this as the last ray of hope being extinguished. Some [including the ever-impressionable boy, my young researcher and self proclaimed "inker", Stefan] take strength in their faith in this young Valten, believing he is Sigmar reborn, as Luthor Huss claims. This claim still has not been recognised, and so this seems like a forlorn hope.

While the northern cities ready for the coming war, still no word has come from Emperor Karl Franz. Dissidents wonder if he is paralysed

with fear and doesn't know how to react. However, these voices have been silenced as word has now come from the outlying Empire provinces, saying that emissaries from all





over the Old World and beyond have arrived within the borders of the Empire, and are making their way towards Altdorf. It would seem that Karl Franz has organised a grand council of war, a Conclave of Light, in order to organise a defence against the coming Storm of Chaos.

En route to the Council are our own electors from all across the Empire, including the high Ar-Ulric, leader of the church of Ulric, and the newly appointed Grand Theogonist of the Church of Sigmar. There are said to be emissaries from Kislev and the dwarf nation approaching Altdorf as well, and some even say that one of the highest

powers from among the high elves of Ulthuan draws near, though there is little evidence of this. It is hoped that a confirmation of unity and a commitment to the defence of the Empire will be achieved.



The following articles are some of the many that I have collected in this dark time. These come from a range of sources, including the Altdorf Press and flyers tacked to the palace walls and public tiding boards. They are an interesting insight into some of the current thinking and occurrences happening in our great capital.

IS TIME RUNNING OUT?

Two weeks have passed and still there has been no word of Karl Franz's plans to defend the Empire against the Menace from the North. Will we shore up our defences and prepare for a defensive campaign fought outside the city walls? Or will the forces of the Empire march to war, meeting the invading hordes head-on? Not since the Great War two centuries past has a decision been so important, a decision that our beloved emperor seems loathe to take. And this is understandable, for the fate of the Empire rests in Karl's hands. But with every passing day, more soldiers and those of our Kislevite comrades are prey to the marauders invading from the Wastes. Can we afford the pontifical endless debates of our politicians when that what is called for is quick, decisive action?

Turn to page four for more detail on the forthcoming Conclave of Light and the fight fought in the north, complete with the impressions of the carnage being wreaked by the invading soldiery.

- 2 -

I cannot help but agree with this sentiment, and I pray that feuds and disputes can be forgotten in the coming months. I fear, however, that they will not.

Pig-Boy of the Docks Burnt!

At noon of last Wellentag, the skies of the docks were blackened with smoke. Another has been burnt at the stake within our fair city! Wilhelm Steinberg, noble witch-hunter and friend of the most holy Grand Theognist Johann Esmer, strung up the so-called Pig-Boy. This individual has been a fixture of the docks for nigh on six years now, and was commonly seen sitting atop a pile of stock, mending sails with his hands. Steinberg, and only trotter-spoke Steinberg, accumbed to death.

Blood Flows as Noble Rivalries Spill onto Streets

Noble blood has been spilt in the streets of Altdorf. An altercation between emissaries from Hochland and Ostland erupted in the Home Hearth drinking establishment on Parliament Street last eve, resulting in the nephew of the elector count of Ludenhof being stabbed. A heated argument broke out when the Ostlanders entered the premises where, according to witnesses, the Hochlanders had spent much of the afternoon. The ruckus was broken up by the city watch, together with a detachment of Knights Panther, but not before several serious injuries were incurred. How can we stand against the coming enemy if we cannot stand united?





Farm Boy Possessed by Spirit of Sigmar

Word has come from outside Altdorf that an army marches upon us as I write. Not the dread hordes of Archaon, but an army of the faithful led by Luthor Huss, self-appointed Prophet of Sigmar. This army consists of men dressed in sackcloth and ash, with a great many flagellants and warrior priests of Sigmar also in its ranks. But most astonishing of all is the blonde-haired youngster who rides at their head.

Luthor Huss is claiming that a young farmhand, found in the remote village of Lachenbad, has been possessed by Sigmar himself. Heavily muscled and a full two heads taller than even the powerfully built Huss, this giant of a lad bears a birthmark in the shape of a twin-tailed comet upon his chest. He reportedly slew an entire beastman war band single-handedly when it fell upon his village, smashing their twisted skulls with a pair of blacksmith's hammers. It is he who Huss claims will be our saviour, our champion of light with supernatural strength and iron resolve, to lead our armies in their coming against the Chaos threat.

DWARF ENVOYS APPEAR AT CITY GATES

As the sun came up on the morning of last Konistag, it reflected from a half dozen rune-encrusted axes outside the great East Gate of our fair city. Seventeen days since the Conclave of Light convened have passed, and finally the dwarfs of the east have decided to make their presence felt. Or have they? At the time of writing, it is uncertain whether the dwarf delegation is here to offer the aid of the Empire's ancient allies, or to tell us that none of their short but stalwart soldiers can be spared from the defence of their mountain fastnesses.

The Fire-Breather Malcholdiar in the Dungeons?

Though Altdorf is overrun with individuals proclaiming that the end is nigh, one individual, the fire-breather Malcholdiar, was even more fervent than others. To all and sundry passing by his shackled booth on Market Street, he would declare that the End of Times was upon them. He was dragged from the streets to the palace by the Reiksguard, declared a heretic.



And so the Conclave of Light was convened. Here were gathered dignitaries from all over the Old World and the Empire, all gathered to discuss how to react to the threat from the north. Proud I am to have been allowed attendance, although my bony backside was most displeased with the hard seating on that first day. Since then, knowing that such a lengthy debate within the palace would prove most uncomfortable for my rear, I took with me a padded cushion. Frau Weirde was displeased by this, for she claimed it was her favourite cushion and believed that I might misplace it. Alas, she was proved correct, for it was gone from my seat when I returned to it after a swift dinner-time pint of Speckled Hen—I suspect the Chief Advisor Mikelbach of taking it, but the opportunity to accost him never arrived. Nevertheless, I must admit to being humbled to be in attendance with such a notable crowd. Indeed, I fear that I did stutter out some remarkably incompetent phrases when the noble elector of Ostland personally addressed me.

Many great and noble people did attend the Conclave. All the electors that could be in attendance travelled to be there, as well as gruff, obnoxious fellows from the dwarfs, and stern faced and humourless Kislevites. There was a buzz of expectation as the Conclave began, but this soon gave way to buttock-numbing boredom on my part. Indeed, Herr Gruber, who sat by my side, claimed that I drifted off to sleep on more than one occasion, and that my snoring disturbed proceedings somewhat. I do not believe him.

I was dismayed by how slowly the items of discussion proceeded. To my admittedly ignorant ears it seemed that the electors, for all their airs and graceful ways of speaking, were bickering amongst themselves, using this time and place to air petty squabbles and minor disputes. Days and days passed without resolution. While some among the electors grew quickly agitated and urged strong action, others argued against such a thing.

The newly appointed Theogonist Esmer and the Ar-Ulric Emil Valgeir, the High Priest of the Church of Ulric [a most fierce and frightening individual] were at each other's throats for much of the time. Ar-Ulric refused to even glance in the direction of the Sigmarite, while Esmer launched a barrage of sneering insults towards the High Priest of the God of Winter; whatever you can say about Esmer, he certainly has plenty of nerve. The Kislevites spoke sharply in their harsh tongue, and I can only assume that their words were not pleasant. I can understand their displeasure too, for the armies of Chaos have already ravaged their lands, and were doing so even as this debacle ground on.

Maybe I am being ignorant. I have never before been in attendance at such a gathering of nobles. Perhaps all

the laws, by-laws, decrees and decisions of the Empire are made in such roundabout ways, if such is the case, then I wonder how anything is ever achieved! Clearly my understanding of politics is sorely lacking.

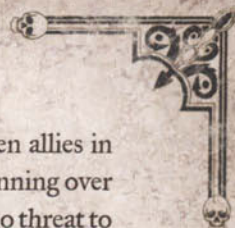
Through all this discussion, as days of endless talks continued on and on [and my poor beleaguered buttocks went from sore to numb to achingly painful and finally to a point where I could not feel anything at all], the Emperor Karl Franz sat silent. Occasionally he would speak if directly addressed, but even then his remarks were curt. I had never been so close to our noble emperor before, and I spent some time studying him. To me, he seems a man with many troubles piled upon his back—yet he looks equipped to shoulder such a burden. He is stern, strong and respected by all for his political and strategic skills, not just his title. I was surprised at his seeming reluctance to make a solid decision. I got the impression that he was waiting for something.

My belief has proven true! As another Conclave session began on a cold spring morning, thirty days after the council had first begun, and my mind began to drift back to Frau Weirde and another spring morning [many years ago, mind], the council doors were thrown open: lo and behold, there stood a figure unlike any I had previously seen.

Tall and regal, with an unnaturally elegant face and frame, there stood an elf prince. Leaning on a glowing staff, it was none other than Teclis, prince of the fair high elves of the far distant [and many believed fabled] isle of Ulthuan. A wizard able to command such powers that I cannot even begin to comprehend it; this was the elf who founded the Colleges of Magic here in Altdorf. Two hundred years have passed since last he laid foot within the Empire, and yet I would hazard a guess that not a thing about him has changed in all that time. Timeless, almost immortal, he seemed. The court wizards who were in attendance all dropped to their knees in respect, and I believe that everyone in the room that morning was awed. On second thought, the dwarfs were not awed, for I heard much huffing and grumbling from them [they had in the last days remarked somewhat smugly that it appeared the elves would not attend this conference—they stated bluntly that the elves had not the belly for a good fight—and were now being proven wrong, much to their displeasure].

With the appearance of Teclis, events began, thankfully, to pick up pace once more. With an authoritative voice, the emperor silenced the bickering of his electors. Even the dour dwarfs ceased their mutterings under his stern glance. The speech of Teclis is a thing that I hope that I will remember until my dying day. His voice was clear and filled with assurance, gleaned from





countless centuries of leadership and study. His is a beautiful voice, as clear as the most perfect crystal, and he spoke Reikspiel with the slightest of lilting accents. It filled the auditorium, so that all seated, even at the back, did not need to strain themselves to hear him. Like a resonant song, wise council did he impart.

With astounding eloquence, Teclis urged those in attendance to fight this threat, just as the Empire had fought a similar threat two hundred years earlier, during the Great War. He recalled the time of alliance then as if it had occurred just yesterday. Just as he fought at the side of Magnus the Pious in that grim time, he pledged that he would remain here and fight alongside Karl Franz, to tackle the threat of Chaos head-on. So moving were his words—for he recalled the proud days of the past—that those at the council harkened well to his words, and did pledge themselves and their soldiery to fight. Even the dwarfs [for if the elves were to fight, then they would be damned if they would be outdone] agreed with this direction.

Teclis would remain with the emperor and fight at his side, along with a coterie of skilled elf magicians and a force of three hundred of the finest elf warriors. He pledged that the fleets of Lord Aislinn—a much renowned warrior-prince of the city Lothorn—would patrol the seas and guard the northern coasts of the Empire from attack from the Chaos worshipping Norse.

The Empire and the dwarfs have long been allies in times of woe—with a history of alliance spanning over two thousand years. The dwarfs swore that no threat to the Empire would cross the mountain passes from the east, and that they would lend their aid where they could. The Kislevite emissaries returned to their Ice Queen in the north with promises of military aid. The electors all swore to raise their armies to fight the forthcoming armies of darkness. Ambassadors bearing urgent despatches were sent across the mountains of the west, addressed to the king of the Bretonnians, Louen Leoncoeur. A response was quick from that land, with promises of aid.

So it was that the Conclave of Light was concluded. Emperor Karl Franz—the greatest statesman ever to have ruled the Empire, so history will recall—forged the greatest alliance of nations seen in over two hundred years. Plans were made [which I was not privy to] and details written up to assemble a grand force of armies that would ride to halt the forthcoming Storm of Chaos that was set to break upon our Empire within months.

I left the Conclave tired but elated. With such a gathering, I began to believe that we could face this enemy. More than this, I believe that we could face this enemy and win.



Staunch Allies



I have taken the liberty of transcribing those parts of the Conclave of Light that have stuck in my mind as particularly noteworthy for the edification of any students of Imperial history who may wish an insight into these troubled times. Much could be seen of the personalities and agendas of some of the most celebrated individuals of our time over the course of the Conclave. Though I am not a gifted stenographer, I have done my best to recall verbatim the more pertinent discussions that punctuated the vast rolling seas of ennui inevitable when a large number of men of state are gathered in one room.

Amongst their number were the following celebrated individuals:

Karl Franz of Reikland, emperor of the Old World, the most able statesman and tactician we have ever had the honour to call our leader.

Teclis, supreme elf mage and founder of the Eight Colleges of Magic. He arrived thirty days after the Conclave had begun.

The elector counts of Nordland and Averland, who are sometimes regarded as opponents of the emperor's rule, and those of Stirland, Ostland and the Ostermark—men of action who wore their Runefangs openly and would rather fight the Chaos menace than flee before it. Ostland and Ostermark were those who opposed suggestions of burning down the crops and fields of the northern Empire in order to deny Archaon provisions. The electors of Wissenland and Stirland [along with Talabecland] spoke against the aggressive policies of Boris Todbringer, wanting to fight a more defensive battle.

Gisime Stoutheart, Eldar of the Moot and elector, a rotund fellow with unquenchable passions for food and amorous pursuits.

Helmuth Feuerbach, elector count of Talabecland, whose armies were defeated when fighting alongside the late Theogonist Volkmar.

Graf Boris Todbringer, elector count of Middenland and Commander in Chief of Middenheim. He was the one who most vocally supported an aggressive strategy in the coming war, and had many bitter arguments with Johann Esmer and the more defensive electors.

Kurt Helborg, Reiksmarshal, general of the emperor's armies and military advisor to Karl Franz,

recently returned from his wars against the orcs and goblins of the Grey Mountains.

A delegation of emissaries from Marienburg—including the pompous and fat Thurk van Hasteroy. A deeply suspicious individual, this man was more a merchant than a leader of men, always seeking to make a profit.

Chief Advisor Mickelbach, a youthful but wise man with close cropped black hair and beard tinged with grey. A skilled tactician and stealer of cushions.

The emissaries of Tsarina Kattarin of Kislev, Piotr Kropotkin and Vassily Ilyenskja—fierce-eyed sons of the north, clad [somewhat surprisingly] in garish robes of office, their long black moustaches were entwined with golden thread.

Louis Rochelle, court diplomat and ambassador of the King Louen Leoncoeur of Bretonnia, a perfumed, officious old statesman dressed in finest brocade and silk with one eye permanently closed by a nasty scar. He did not journey from Bretonnia especially for the Conclave, for he has lived in Altdorf for many years. He is rumoured to be a bit of a ladies' man.

Johann Esmer, the newly appointed Grand Theogonist of Sigmar, who I hold in less regard than the wasps that buzz through the rafters of my study during summertime. He advocated defence over aggressive strategies, and proposed strengthening the powers of the Templars of Sigmar—the witch hunters. He also declared his wishes for the emperor to imprison Luthor Huss as a heretic and subversive, though Karl Franz skilfully deflected this. The bitterness between Esmer and the representatives of Ulric was most intense.

The patriarchs of the Eight Colleges of Magic, including Luther Flamestrike, a fiery and hot-headed wizard specialising in fire magic, the reed-thin Methuselis of the Celestial School, and the almost inhuman Balthazar Gelt, gold-masked Patriarch of the Alchemists.

Snarri Thungrímsson, envoy of the dwarf High King Ungrim Ironfist, a dwarf almost as wide as he is tall, but none the less intimidating for it. He arrived some fifteen days after the Conclave had begun.





Ulric Emil Volgeir, the High Priest of the Ulrican Cult of Middenheim, a venerable priest, doughty warrior and holy terror when his anger is roused. He was summoned late, and he stated aggressively that he believed this was due to the emperor being a puppet of the Arch-Lectors of Sigmar, trying to keep the church of Ulric out of the conclave. The emperor, who was not amused, flatly refuted this.

Ulric Grebersson, an advisor to Graf Boris Todbringer, a man as fierce as his bristling white beard and barking voice indicated.

Old Weirde, dashing historian and author of this transcript.

The Conclave itself took place in the House of Luitpold, a gothic building with a central auditorium of sufficient size to house not only the dignitaries listed, but also numerous aides, attendants, entourages, companions, seneschals, bureaucrats, aficionados, administrators, representatives and spokespeople who, for the most part, only spoke when spoken to. And rightly so.

Here follow transcripts of some of the discussions.



Mighty Boris Todbringer

KURT HELBORG: But with all due respect, Averland, not all of us have so splendid a natural barrier as the Worlds Edge Mountains between us and the invading menace.

AVERLAND: Todbringer's told us how impenetrable a fortress his city of Middenheim can be, so why not mount your defence there? I for one believe him.

GRAF BORIS: That is true. But who is to say that my city lies in the path of Archaon's invasion? With the beastmen as his allies, Archaon could just as feasibly bypass the armies of Middenland altogether, pushing through into the soft underbelly of the Empire. This is why we must take the fight to him before we lose sight of his movements.

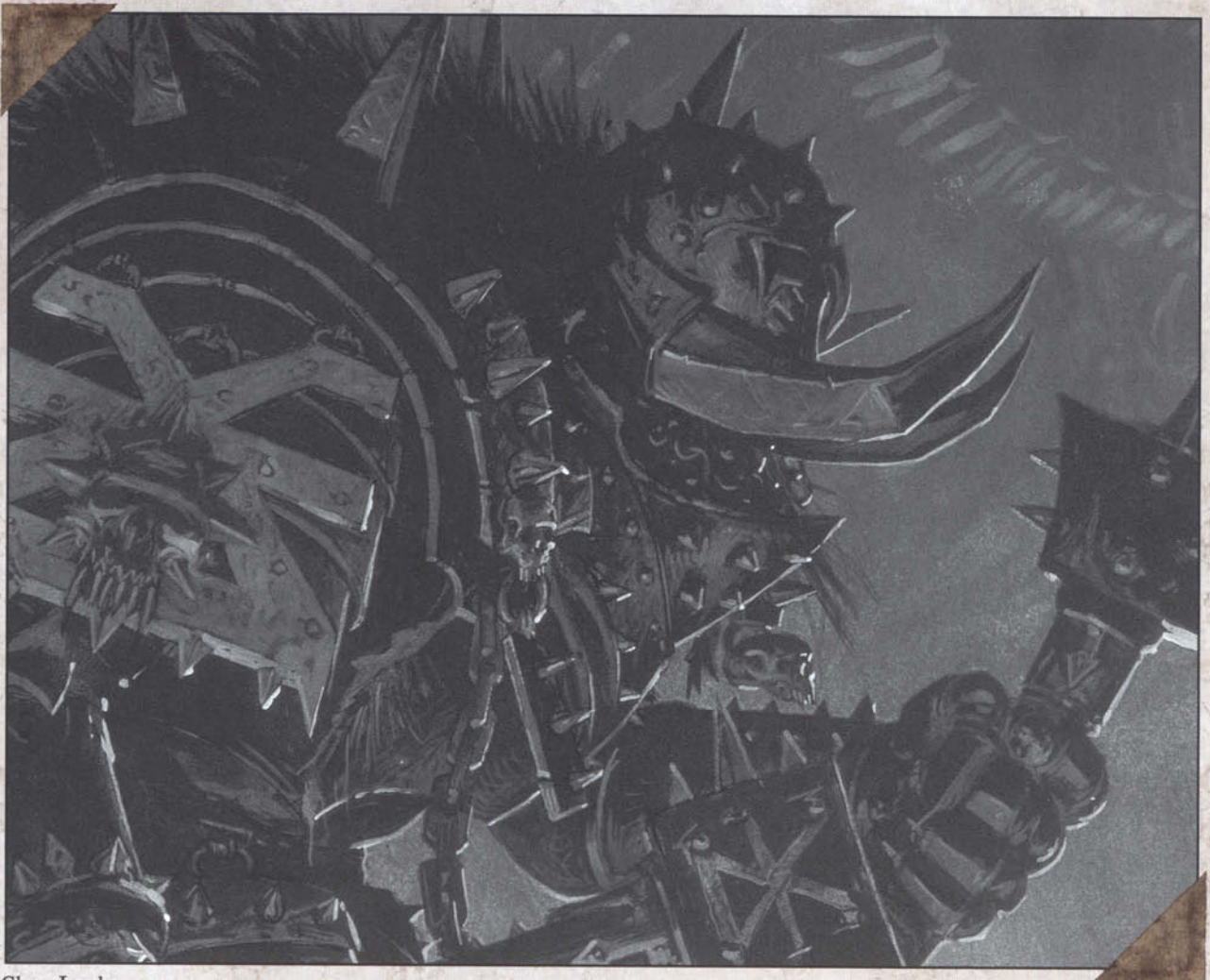
NORDLAND: I do hope you are not referring to my principality as a "soft underbelly", Graf Boris.

TALABECLAND: Lose sight of his... Are you quite mad? He marches with a hundred armies at his side, his horde blackens the horizon when it approaches.

How do you expect him to creep into the Empire unnoticed? We must evacuate and fortify, or our provinces are doomed.

GRAF BORIS: Talabecland, we all respect the fact that you alone amongst all of us here have fought against the invasion to date. But try and see past your own experiences. Archaon's force is comprised of many armies. They can split up, each under the control of one of his lieutenants, and attack across such a broad frontage we cannot hope to stem the tide completely. His horde grows stronger with every passing month; such is the way of Chaos. Our only chance is to funnel his attack into a defensible position and take the battle to him at that point. We must gather the armies of the Empire and march north.

GELT: We of the colleges would propose the use of a great ritual to drain the hordes of their magical power, to ensure they do not bolster their numbers further with daemonic creatures. We can weave divination magic to ascertain where they intend to



Chaos Lord



strike. If that is a defensible position such as Middenheim, all the better.

AR-ULRIC: We will stand ready to repel him. I would far rather be there than stuck in this damn palace, with its lace and fanfares. This is a waste of time.

METHUSELIS: How uncluttered a viewpoint you priests have. Well done indeed.

ADVISOR MICKELBACH: Please have some respect for Karl Franz's hospitality. We appreciate this process is taking rather longer than imagined, but the defence of the Old World is not a matter to be concluded hastily.

AR-ULRIC: *mutters a curse*

NORDLAND: Well, Karl Franz? Why are you so silent on the matter?

KARL FRANZ: I am still listening to what you have to say.

DAY 17: THE DWARFS PLEDGE THEIR AID

KROPOTKIN: You talk as if this is some exercise. It is not. My countrymen die, every minute, without thanks or reward. Try to imagine a person dying every time you speak. That is the truth. Words do not help them.

STIRLAND: Damn you, Kropotkin. We know that. You have made that painfully clear to us. We are trying to save lives by this process, not waste them. The decisions we make in this room could save whole empires, not just scattered villages in the steppes.

ILYENSKJA: In Kislev we have a legend of a man who leaves his brother to die, trapped in a snowdrift, so that he can stay by the hearth and explain his reasoning.

AR-ULRIC: The Kislevite is right. This is no time for wordcraft.

THUNGRIMSSON: Fear not, manling, for the dwarfs realise your plight. We will send aid. When I return, I shall tell the mighty Garagrim Ironfist where the fight is to be found. He shall march to Kislev with a throng of Slayers, twelve-hundred strong, and then on to Erengard, to fight at your side. They will die to a dwarf before they see your cities fall to the monsters of

the north. By my oath I promise you this.

KROPOTKIN: A thousand blessings to you and your kin. The Tsarina will be joyful at this news.

Kropotkin calls a messenger.

ILYENSKJA: Our gates are open to you, as are our stores, for much of Kislev is barren.

DAY 30: THE ARCHMAGE TECLIS PLEDGES THE AID OF THE ELVES OF ULTHUAN

All patriarchs of the Eight Colleges of Magic knelt at Teclis's arrival.

TECLIS: I have come, as I came to you over two centuries ago. Four lifetimes in your reckoning, less than a generation in ours. Though the people of the Phoenix King have their own woes, the time has come again when our paths must cross, for the fate of the world hangs in the balance. No race can stand aside against the threat that gathers in the cold wastes of the north. Not alone will the mighty numbers of men, nor the stone walls of the dwarfs, nor the fleets of Ulthuan hold back the tide of darkness if we are divided.

Some time passes. The dwarfs, grumbling amongst themselves, finally give voice.

THUNGRIMSSON: Though the memories of others may grow dim with time, the dwarfs remember the wrongs done to them, and few are greater than the treachery of the Phoenix King and his beardless kin. But, before the deceit of the beard-maimers, the elves and dwarfs stood side-by-side on many occasions to face the hordes of Chaos, and put aside the differences during the time of Magnus. Though we shall never forget the wrongs they did us, we shall not let it be said of us that we would rather damn the world than listen to an elf. When the horns sound from the walls of Karaz-a-Karak, the dwarfs will heed them, and if need be, we will march at the side of the elves.

KARL FRANZ: Noble Teclis, what is the answer that you bring from the Phoenix King? Will he fight with us?

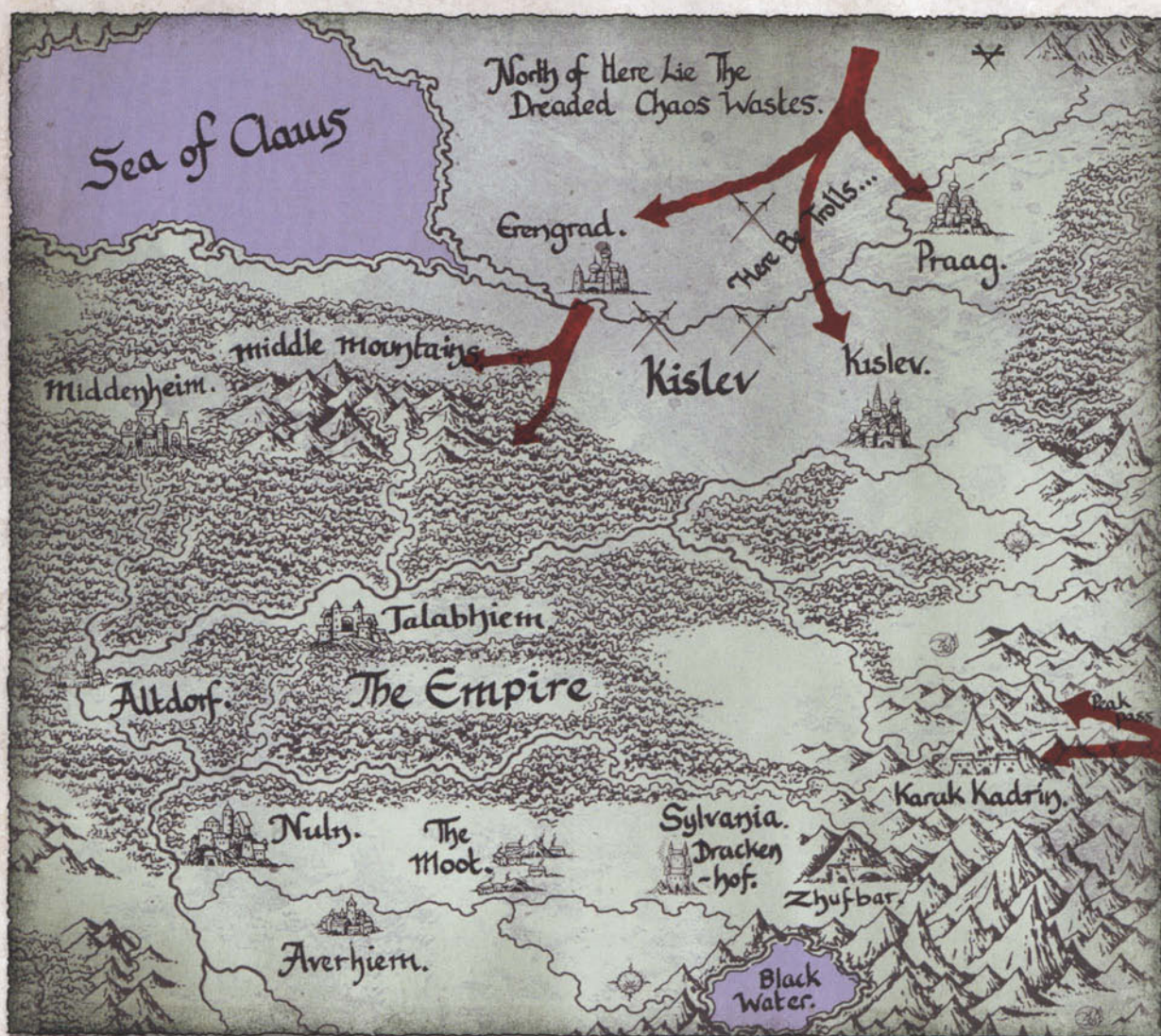
TECLIS: Yes.

And so it was that the Great Alliance was forged anew.



Chapter Four

The Eastern Front



The Noose Tightens



And so it was that the Conclave of Light concluded, with the Empire and its allies pledging aid in the coming conflict. The elves of Ulthuan would patrol the Seas of Chaos and embark on a campaign of naval warfare against the Norse. The dwarfs stood braced against those that sought to cross the mighty Worlds Edge Mountains, and to march to the aid of the Empire if besieged. The haughty Bretonnians swore oaths on their honour to ride to the Empire in its time of need. The elector counts agreed to lend their aid, and the churches of Sigmar and Ulric agreed [in as much as they could ever agree] to face the coming darkness head-on. Shrewd diplomats, politicians and businessmen were even sent to the southern lands of Tilea, Estalia and the Border Princes to employ the services of mercenary armies. Our Emperor Karl Franz was central to this unification of belief and action, and with his

leadership, we will meet the hated forces of Chaos together.

The enemy forces have begun to move. Reports are coming in of great forces massing over the World's Edge Mountains. In the north, more armies are closing on our Empire.

The east has traditionally been a bulwark, a solid wall through which no major threat has ever penetrated. Yet in this time that draws near, will this remain the case? An attack from the east would be a devastating blow, particularly if it coincides with an attack from the north. A war on two fronts will be hard to maintain, and if — as some predict — an attack comes to us from the north and the east, then we will be sorely pressed.

I pray to Shallya that she have mercy on our Empire, and that the threat from the east is not a serious one.



Chaos Heavy Infantry



Concerning Vardek Crom and the East

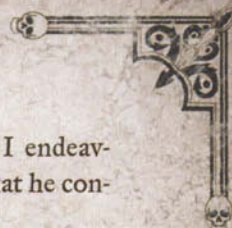
For some time there has been rumour of a mighty gathering of Chaos worshipping Kurgan tribesmen advancing down the eastern side of the World's Edge Mountains. With more obvious concerns, the people of Altdorf have thought little of such rumours. But I, having engaged in some research on the various Kurgan tribes that have through the centuries descended from the Dark

Lands [see my discussion in my *Histories and Most Deplorable Actions of the Kul*], am most disturbed by these snippets of information.

In brief, Kurgan is an inadequate term that refers to the many bloodthirsty tribes that dwell in the fell north. They appear to have had a common ancestry, hence the name, and tend to share a universal swarthinness, but beliefs and practices vary greatly between the



Crom the Conqueror



separate tribes. Indeed, and thankfully so, the Kurgan tribes are constantly as much at war with each other as they are with anyone else. They are massive men, tending to stand almost a head taller than men of the Empire, and are warriors of great skill and power. After all, they fight from birth to survive.

What I find worrying is that it appears that the Kurgan have united. This has never happened before. If true, the numbers that the Kurgan command are nigh on impossible to comprehend—certainly they outnumber the people of the Empire. They are the most numerous of all the cursed people of Chaos, with numbers greater than the Norse, the Hung and the Dorstans.

What this all means frightens me much. It would seem that the dread warlord of Chaos, Archaon [curse his soul], is a skilled general as well as a warrior. In the Great War Against Chaos, the forces of darkness were routed by a grand alliance of men, elves and dwarfs. In that time, the assault on the Empire came from but one direction—Kislev. If Archaon does not wish to have the same result, then he would attack the Empire from more than one direction and attempt to hold up the allies of the Empire in doing so. This massing of forces over the Grey Mountains may well be such an action, for if they push over those mountains, they would assault the Empire from an unexpected angle. In addition, the dwarfs would be focused against such a force, and might be unable to aid the Empire in its time of need.

The man said to have unified the Kurgan is named Vardek Crom, the so-called “Conqueror” [certainly, I would be more comfortable if the leader of the hordes had a less impressive title—the “Loser”, or the “Incompetent” would suffice]. For an individual to have united the Kurgan is an amazing feat.

I must mention that much of this information has come straight from the horse’s mouth [though I would never call a dwarf a horse to his face—they are not a people renowned for their sense of humour]. I had the pleasure of accompanying a stout dwarf fellow named Burrock Thurgensen to the Picture and Wabberthwait, a favourite local establishment. I met him at the Conclave of Light—he was one of the dwarf ambassador’s guards, and a youngster at seventy years of age.

I must admit that much of the evening is a blur. While in my youth at the university, my drinking prowess was quite breathtaking, alas in my twilight years I can no longer claim such skill. Thurgensen bought us both many pints of Speckled Hen, though he was most unimpressed with its quality—not

strong enough, apparently. Nevertheless, I endeavoured to keep up with him, for the more that he consumed, the looser did his tongue become.

When I questioned him about Crom the Conqueror and his massed army of Kurgan, he was most amused by my concern.

“Fear not for the east, manling,” he said. He seemed to find it rather insulting to have even hinted at the Empire being assailed over those mountains. He was adamant that none would cross; either through the Peak Pass or any other way through the mountains, for they were guarded by none other than the dwarfs of Karak Kadrin.

I had a passing knowledge of Karak Kadrin, the famed centre of the Slayer cult. Slayers are dwarfs who have suffered some grievous blow to their pride, some dishonour that they feel can only be compensated by their own glorious death in battle with a powerful foe. Thurgensen explained some of this to me, and I must admit to having been quite won over by his rock-solid belief that nothing would get through the Slayer army.

On my other concern—that the dwarfs would be too busy guarding their own holds to help the Empire—Thurgensen assured me that the dwarfs would be where they were needed. Indeed, it would seem that a second army of Slayers, and one led by the Slayer King’s own son, was already making its way northwards to fight the approaching storm.

There were many details that I fear I have forgotten in my drink-addled state. I kept pages and pages of scrawled notes from the evening, but it would seem that these contain all manner of barely readable phrases that I’m sure at the time were imminently important, but to look upon them with a sober eye, they seem like the scribbles of a madman. They included a random assortment of lyrics that I fear I may have written down believing at the time that they were the most plaintive and beautiful words I had ever heard [they were truly awful], and an address written in a feminine script. The evening descended into a hazy blank, although I do remember being helped home by Thurgensen, who was singing a raucous song and assuring me that the dwarfs would step in and win the war to save the Empire. Again.

I felt reassured that the dwarfs would hold the eastern front. However, I get ahead of myself. For before the night was over, we did discuss much about Vardek Crom, particularly his battles with the orcs, the Slayer army of Karak Kadrin, and much more besides. We even spoke of ratmen! My notes on the following pages speak of what I can remember of the evening.



Having recently read the book *The Loathsome Ratmen And All Their Vile Kin*, I am inclined to take my stout dwarfish companion's tales of their infestation of the northern lands with a bit less salt than usual. It really was most convincing, and Thurgensen swore by his grandfather's beard that not only did they exist, but that they existed in uncountable numbers.

As his story wound on, it entwined with that of the fearsome orc Warlord Grimgor Ironhide, whose exploits I shall come to shortly. Before my companion got into his stride, I nipped back over to the bar and carried a tray of six pints of Owd Ballbreaker back to our table—a good deal more potent than Speckled Hen, and once Thurgensen starts he does not like to be interrupted in his flow. I can sympathise, as it riles me greatly when Frau Weirde starts fussing about in the kitchen when I am imparting my findings to her. Obviously the state of the oven is far more important than that of human civilisation itself! Any road, the dwarf did tell me much about these skaven and their ways before my bladder finally caught up with me.

The skaven, as they are known to Thurgensen and his kin, are half-man and half-rat, not much taller than a dwarf and far, far weaker of arm. They smell like wet dogs, have pitted, hissing snouts that twitch and sniff, and lashing tails like milk-white

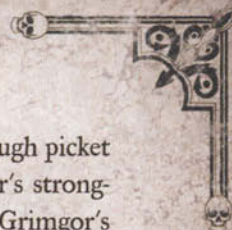
blindworms that poke out from beneath their filthy rags. The only real factor the skaven have in their favour is an almost inexhaustible supply of warriors, for although their miserable lives are short, they breed like rats in a grain silo. They are organised into clans that war incessantly with one another for supremacy [I cannot help feeling they would fit right in down at the dockyards]. One of the strongest of these clans pours down from the north even as we sup our beer, the Clan of Moulder, led by the grotesque warlord Throt the Unclean.

Throt, Thurgensen whispered above the crackle of the hearth, is a great, bloated monster who conducts all manner of diabolical experiments both on himself and others. Possessed of an infernal intellect, this twisted creature delights in creating monstrous warriors to fight his wars for him, and though his gut is as large as an ogre's, he can never sate his hunger for flesh nor slake his thirst for blood. He commands the clan of Moulder, who pervert the beasts of the world into creatures from the darkest nightmare. To do this, they use a forbidden mineral thought to have originated from Morrslieb itself: warpstone, the solidified essence of Chaos. Thurgensen tells me that Throt has joined forces with Archaon, and now his vile crossbreeds shamble and lope amongst the disciplined ranks of the warriors of Chaos. It seems that the armies of the Empire are not the only ones finding unusual allies with whom to fight this war.

The armies of Moulder, spilling out from the Hell Pit to embattled Kislev and beyond, contain far more than the numberless hordes of mutated ratmen. At their sides scurry living tides of gigantic rats, with the size and temperament of wolves, goaded by cruel keepers with barbed whips. Obscene, rat-headed parodies of trolls and ogres stomp through the mange-ridden hordes, rusted blades crudely grafted to arms like tree trunks. Rat-things with wings of bats and great drooling jaws flap and wheel above the horde, whilst gigantic furred golems constructed from screaming heads and vicious claws crush their clan-mates underfoot in their thirst for the warm flesh of man. Perhaps the most chilling legend Thurgensen had in his arsenal was that of a monstrous leviathan of putrid flesh, akin to a rat in the loosest way, a blind, albino thing that burrows through the earth to burst out into the ranks of the foe with the force of an earthquake. He fears, quite rightly, that should such a hellish creation find its way into the Ulricsberg it could undermine the walls as effortlessly as a full guild of dwarf engineers, and I know enough dwarfs to know how serious a claim this is.



Tunnelling Mole Rat



Well, friend Thurgensen was far from done with his tales of the ghoulish things on the borders of the Old World. Not since Grandfather Weirde choked to death on a fishbone have I heard so many tales of myth and monster, though Thurgensen lacked the twinkle in his eye of the old buzzard. His has the countenance of one who had lost kin to the beasts of which he spoke, and so I kept my peace, merely scribbling the occasional note, which seemed to please him somewhat.

I added another log to the fire and the hours rolled by. I had promised that I'd be home by midnight, but with such a rich vein of information right next to me, no force in the world could have budged me from my favourite cushion at that time. Thurgensen had turned from talk of vermin to that of the greenskins. His demeanour changed considerably; when he spoke of the rat-kin it was with hushed whispers, like one recounting the story of a ghost that haunts his cellars. But when Thurgensen spoke of the greenskins invading his homelands, his face coloured red and his voice raised so loud that at times patrons in the snug on the other side of the bar craned their heads to see what all the commotion was about.

To the east of the Old World lies the greatest greenskin warlord ever to have blighted the Old World, a monster in the flesh: an orc known as Grimgor Ironhide. His axe, Gitsnik, has claimed so many dwarf lives that it has its own entry in the Book of Grudges and will be melted down and scattered from the seven peaks should it ever be captured.

Ironhide lives for nothing other than testing himself in the fires of battle, and will take on any foe he feels to be a worthy challenge, regardless of alignment. Given the disregard in which the orcs hold the noble soldiers of the Empire, one might even be forgiven for thinking that Grimgor Ironhide may even prove to be a useful distraction to the forces of Archon as the year unfolds. But Thurgensen assures me this is not the case.

According to dwarf miners who keep a rough picket line around the far limits of Clan Moulder's stronghold, Hell Pit, the early part of this year saw Grimgor's armies marching deep into skaven territory, pitching camp outside the mountains that housed Throt's inner sanctum. The skaven master mutator, understandably irritated by this challenge to his authority, sent out waves of abominations and hideous experiments to drive off the greenskin menace. But it was not to be. Grimgor and his armies seemed to thrive on the challenge, with the orc warlord continually pushing into the furry ranks of the foe to take on the ever larger and more frightening creations vomited forth from Throt's laboratories. The slaughter lasted for weeks before Grimgor, who by this time had pushed deep into the warrens of the Moulder stronghold, found himself running out of abominations to kill. So it was that the orc eventually left the winding warrens in search of a fresh challenge. And he found it, in the form of Vardek Crom, who fought him to a standstill and, by defeating his armies around him, forced Grimgor to retreat.

Since his de facto defeat at the hands of Crom, Grimgor has surged westward and now seeks to cross the Worlds Edge Mountains through the heartlands of the dwarf realms. Grimgor's force no longer consists of a hotchpotch of orcs, goblins and snotlings. His constant, self-imposed trial by warfare has whittled down his ramshackle force into an elite group of orc warriors, with nary a goblin in sight—these he calls his 'Ard Boys and, according to Thurgensen, never before has an orc horde approached something as close to discipline as these seasoned veterans.

Needless to say, Grimgor will not achieve his goal of crossing the passes through the Worlds Edge Mountains without triggering a war that, even if the dwarfs should lose, will last so long Grimgor's contribution to the Chaos invasion will be minimal.



The Advancing Horde



When I came back from the latrine [which I must say warrants an investigation by the staff of the Wabberthwait; evidently all this talk of doom and darkness is taking its toll and I swear I saw one of Clan Moulder's creations lurking underneath the drain in the far corner], old Thurgensen was already in full stride. His talk of rat-daemons and marauding orc warlords had drawn quite a crowd, and he was warming to his subject. But one storyteller can tell the tricks of another in the same trade, and I instinctively felt that Thurgensen's final denouement was to be one of optimism by the way he crafted each legend in a manner lyrical rather than doom-laden. That was ever the dwarf way—fine storytellers, but too close to the subject matter for the teeth of the twist to bite deep.

I was not to be disappointed.

Over the course of his story, Thurgensen reminded us many times that if it were not for the dwarfs, then our beloved Sigmar would not have ascended to the heights of godhood at all. He spoke of the dwarf's part in the battle of Blackfire Pass, and how they later

statement, I cautioned him with a stern look]. In that time, the two races swore binding oaths to come to one another's aid in times of strife, and there is nothing a dwarf takes more seriously than an oath. Thus it was that the might of the dwarf empire stood ready to repel the many and various dangers he had spoken of over the course of the evening.

And mighty indeed was the picture Thurgensen painted of his people. Not only did Karl Franz wield the mighty warhammer Ghal-Maraz, forged for Sigmar himself by the best dwarf runesmiths, but the dwarf High King himself had vowed that no threat would pass into the Empire from the east, be it green-skin, vermin or scion of Chaos. It had fallen to the dwarfs of Karak Kadrin to fulfil this vow, said Thurgensen, as the army of Vardek Crom was heading for Peak Pass. Not content with merely defending the pass against the enemy, the dwarfs of Karak Kadrin had resolved to march to war and meet the enemy. None amongst their number was so keen to bury his blade in the foe than Garagrim Ironfist, true son of the Slayer King and War-Mourner of Karak Kadrin [what grand titles these dwarfs have!].

The tale of the Ironfist family is long and woeful, but by this point the barkeep had taken the commendable step of locking the doors of the Wabberthwait and ensuring that Thurgensen's throat did not run dry—his craftsmanship of the stories so far was spell-binding. We sat like rapt children in front of our grandsires as Thurgensen unfolded the saga of Karak Kadrin. Garagrim's own great-grandfather, King Baragor, suffered a great personal loss which many believe to be the death of his daughter at the claws of a mighty dragon as she travelled to marry the son of the High King himself. Upon hearing this news, Baragor swore that most sacred oath of the dwarfs, the vow of the Slayer.

Poor Baragor was unable to fulfil one oath without breaking the other, namely that his kingly duty is to lead his people in the best way possible. In the end, his wisdom found a way through this dilemma. Baragor founded the shrine of Grimnir, the shrine of Slayers in Karak Kadrin, and with generous donations of runic weapons and talismans he established a haven for Slayers from all over the dwarf realms. Soon Karak Kadrin was acknowledged as the home of the Slayer cult, who until that point had been a scattered collection of individuals roaming the dangerous passes and labyrinths of the mountains in search of death.

Although Baragor could not fulfil his own vows while his people still needed him, he could help others to do so, and as such he upheld his honour and was considered a wise and reasonable dwarf by all concerned. But tragedy was Baragor's constant companion, and he died in a tunnel collapse deep below Karak Kadrin, with his Slayer's vow still unfulfilled. So it fell to his son, Dargo, to carry the unusual burden that his



Warrior of the Wolf

taught mankind the secrets of how to tame metal and to use black powder to slay one's enemies from afar [though Herr Bugels, a long-time member of the Royal School of Engineers, appeared to spray a good deal of his beer across his lap upon hearing this



father's inheritance carried with it. Dargo's living descendant is King Ungrim Ironfist, the current Slayer King of Karak Kadrin.

Ungrim, like all dwarfs of high rank, is a holy terror in battle. He wields his father's axe—Thurgensen tells me this has in the past cut through both of a giant's legs in one swing—and is clad in the Dragon Cloak, an ancient Dwarf relic ensorcelled with protective runes. His head bears the Slayer Crown, a great horned helmet with a bright orange crest like that of a Slayer [I'm sure it looks very regal in real life]. But it is Ungrim's son, Garagrim Ironfist, in whose veins the passion for war runs deep.

As the hearth glowed red, the last of the logs popping and crackling as a circle of rapt faces surrounded our stout storyteller, Thurgensen recounted how Garagrim is the great hope of the Ironfist line, for he

has adopted the rare title of War-Mourner. This enables him to take on the sins of his forefathers and atone for them as if they were his own. He too has sworn the Slayer oath, and should he fall in battle the obligation for Ungrim to do the same will be lifted. The tale of a horde of of gigantic mutant beasts coming from the north have attracted hundreds of Slayers to Garagrim's side every week. So, by marching into the teeth of the Chaos invasion and sacrificing his life, the son will save the father—it is all very poignant.

Well, by this time even our noble dwarf envoy was beginning to tire, and I was sorely longing for my bed. I am not a young man anymore, and my knees do creak so if I walk far at night. He finished his tale by describing the last sight he saw before he left his home for the Conclave three weeks ago: the magnificence of the dwarf armies marching to war—Ungrim and his

stout clansmen moving to intercept the evil Crom and drive him from the mountains with axe and bullet, and Garagrim at the head of a great host of Slayers from the hold of Karak Kadrin, the like of which has never been seen. The thought of thousands upon thousands of individuals, every one as stubborn and fearless as this Gotrek Gurnisson we hear so much about can surely only spell doom for the forces they encounter. [If only I could witness such a spectacle first hand! Oh well, that is not my lot, and truth be told never was.] I shall leave the excitement to the boy and I must content myself with my little study room, the companionship of ale and tome, and the thought that our beautiful land is defended by an ancient race so true that the ill-gotten might of Chaos will crash against it like a wave against a cliff.

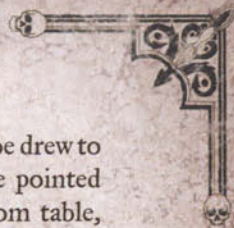
I must confess that the evening in the company of the Burrock Thurgensen—as well as giving me a pounding headache—did open my eyes to the confrontations that had already taken place across the Grey Mountains to the east of the Empire. Like most of the people living in our land, we take it for granted

that the mountains to the east are a natural barrier—that there are sturdy dwarf warriors guarding the passes precludes us from considering that an attack could come from that angle. Although I was comforted somewhat by Burrock's words, especially that the dwarfs are already marching to aid in our defence, I was [after several days of reflection] rather perturbed by the sheer number of warriors that seem to be gathering beyond the eastern mountains. A massive army of greenskins loitering about with malicious intent, and led by a warlord who is just spoiling for a fight worries me—especially at this time. Sigmar knows where that army is now. And the Kurgans of Vardek Crom, where now is that army?

And the ratmen. I have studied the evidence of the existence of these creatures in the past, and have formulated my own opinion on whether they exist or not—a debate that has lasted for hundreds of years. My conclusion is thus: that there is not enough evidence to make a conclusion one way or another. Nevertheless, if such a force does exist, it is concerning that it would now choose its time to become known.



The Depravations of Chaos



When I reached my door that night, I virtually fell into the hallway, for I was a little on the inebriated side after spending all night drinking Owd Ballbreaker and fine Estalian port. I was greeted by an extremely irate Frau Weirde—who had been fretting quite uselessly through the latter part of the night—who did harangue me most fiercely in the fashion of a mother disciplining a wayward son, calling me a useless sot and a dirty stop-out, amongst other less pleasant terms. It really was most embarrassing.

I did not retaliate and so the shrew's diatribe drew to a relatively quick close. Before retiring, she pointed out a letter propped up on the drawing room table, emblazoned with a makeshift seal I recognised as the boy's. I headed down the stairs and opened his latest correspondence.

What I read plunged a cold claw of fear into my gut. I lost the contents of my stomach over the carpet [more fuel for the Frau's fire of discontent], something I have not done for many years.

From the quill of Stefan of Altdorf

Old man, it is with tear-streaked cheeks and shaking hands that I write to you this day. I have spent the last few hours talking to a group of wounded and desperate dwarfs heading west, even as we march east. They were almost beside themselves with grief and fury, for the worst that we feared has come to pass. The dwarf armies have failed us, old man. Though they reaped a great toll on the armies of Chaos and their mountain passes are clogged with the dead, it was not enough. They have failed to stem the tide of monstrosities coming from the east. The remainder of the dwarf armies have withdrawn, and the hordes of Chaos now pour through the narrow passes and defiles of the mountains. How can we possibly hope to win a war on two fronts against an enemy whose warriors seem without number, if our most ancient and stalwart allies let us down in less than a month?

I am close to despair, even with my faith to shield me, for Valtan cannot be everywhere at once. I pray for the Empire's safety, and I pray for yours, for if the dwarfs have failed us, strength of arms is surely not enough.

Sigmar save us,

Stefan



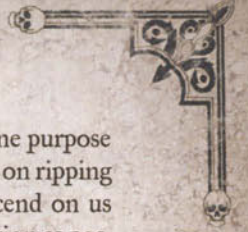


Chapter Five

The War in the North



Horsemen Marauders



Alas, my fears of serious invasion and war from the east have been realised. Even as I write, the forces of Crom the Conqueror push through the passes and valleys of the Grey Mountains to bring war and destruction to our lands. I thank the heavens that Axe Bite Pass opens into the cursed lands of Sylvania and not one of our more precious and vulnerable provinces. Surely the inhabitants of that land will not look kindly upon an army arriving in its midst. Still, this is but a small blessing—for I suspect that those blackened, mournful lands will soon be overrun, and that will allow our foes in the east to go where they will in our Empire. This invasion alone could occupy all our armed forces, and yet the forces of Archaon and his lieutenants are even now beginning to press in from the north.

It is as I feared, the armies of the north and the east are acting in concert. While one presses from the east, diverting our attentions and splitting our defences, an overwhelming force storms the north. It chills me to the core, but even I with my lack of military, tactical and strategic understanding can see that we cannot hope to face all these enemies on the open field and win. This attack is coming so quickly that the mustering of our armies to fight them is going to be terribly strained. In a long, ongoing campaign we may well win out, for the armies ranged against us will have severe logistical problems sustaining themselves. However, I believe that a long war is not what they seek.

No, it seems that the enemy are here for one purpose only: a swift and precise assault that is focused on ripping the heart out of the Empire. They will descend on us quickly, and cause as much terror and destruction as possible, hoping to strike a sudden, mortal blow.



Mutated Beastman



Study of a Beastman's Head



The north is overrun. Many had assumed that the invasion was all but over, that the attacks against Kislev and Ostland were the invasion. Alas, that is not so. That was merely the vanguard of a grand army of destruction. That army now advances into our beloved Empire. It has

split into several smaller forces, and is advancing with tremendous speed into the Empire.

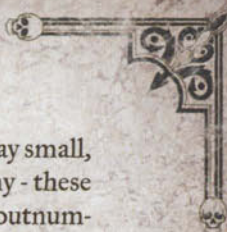
I have here a letter from some time ago. It states that Erengard, that grand northern port-city and centre of trade, was under siege. We know now that it has fallen.

have closed off all escape routes. I have glimpsed fair sailed ships at sea - Dimitri says it is elves patrolling the Sea of Chaos, protecting us from the Norse. I hope he is right. Fog and mist now block my sight to sea - it is said that this is the doing of the sea-witches of the elves. Some stationed here on Chekova Tower say it is Manann himself protecting us. Koffa says that he has seen a giant ocean-serpent in the bay, but he speaks so many lies it is hard to tell what is true.

We fought three battles today. All the reserves have been pulled onto the walls. We are hard pressed to hold the bastards. They are huge, well armoured and fight like devils! The acrid stench of evil fills my nostrils. Every man and woman able to fight is on the walls - if Norse longships arrive, carrying their berserkers and were-kin I fear we will be lost.

We are dead on our feet. Such are the numbers facing us that they launch a fresh attack almost every few hours. We cannot rest, for the hours between attacks are filled with chanting and drumming beyond the walls. Already two men on Chekova tower have thrown themselves off the battlements just so they do not have to hear the cursed sound any longer.

I must go. Horns are blowing. Longships in the harbour. Our end has come.



I reached for my illuminated copy of *The Great War Against Chaos* by the Venerable Heironymous of Nuln, but this gave me little comfort. While it was the alliance of the Empire, the dwarfs and the elves that saw that conflict ended, this one seems somewhat different. This Archaon is a tactician and strategist, not some mindless barbarian leader without understanding of war on such scale.

His massed armies have spilt out of the lands of Kislev. They have advanced through those war-torn lands, already ravaged by last year's invasions by Surtha Lenk and Aelric Cyenwulf. During the Great War as described by Heironymous, the armies of Chaos spent much time besieging the city of Kislev. Thanks to the valiant defence mounted there, Magnus the Pious had the time he desperately needed to gather his forces and link with the elves and the dwarfs to march against the foe.

Archaon however, is obviously schooled and has knowledge of the mistakes of the past. And most say these northerners are little more than savages! They may well be savage, but they certainly learn from previous errors. He has left only a small part of his army

to advance on Kislev, Erengard and Praag [I say small, and in that I mean a small fraction of his army - these "small" factions are still forces that greatly outnumber the soldiers guarding the aforementioned cities]. While these forces are not expected to level those places, they will certainly do enough to occupy the Kislevites and ensure that the rear of the main army is protected.

Archaon and his unholy horde are within the Empire already. From the north they come, and from the east. And I have just heard that the coastline is under renewed attack from the Norse attacking across the Seas of Chaos, probably using Erengard as a port. I can barely fathom this terrifying fact, and it makes me feel Morr's icy touch to think of it. Stalwart forces of the northern electors have already faced his wrath on the field of battle. All have been slaughtered or scattered, but their valiant defence is buying our Empire valuable time. But will it be enough? I fear that the time of our Empire may have come. I hear that one of the massive splinter armies is moving towards Talabheim even as I write. Worse still, another army seems to be angling towards Altdorf.



Daemon Unleashed



I am in shock. For many months we have heard nothing of note here in Altdorf about the war. And now, as if in one horrible blow, the news has begun to flow like a flood. And it is certainly not good news. I have to wonder at this lack of information, even young Stefan's letters have become infrequent of late. I feel that the dark beasts in the forests are making it their aim to halt the flow of information within our Empire, making us confused and disorganised.

These are some of the things that I have heard this day. Some of this information has come from gossiping fishwives on street corners, some has been posted in flyers and distributed to the educated. Other snippets I have garnered from the professors at the university, and still other pieces of information I have received directly through letters and discourses either from Stefan or directed to me by my friends in the palace and the library.

Nordland and Ostland are burning from north to south, and tens of thousands of brutal warriors, twisted beasts and horrific monsters rampage deeper into the Empire. The enemy stalk through the ruins of Wolfenburg. I read this on a news sheet last night:

"Wolfenburg abandoned! The capital of Ostland, Wolfenburg, has been abandoned and given up to the enemy. The city is a ruin, though it has been the site for countless running battles in the last week. Finally, and with reluctance, Count von Raukov has pulled his forces back."

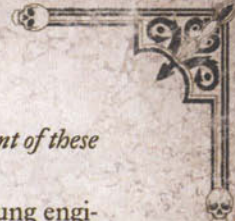
Is Lenkster castle the bastion of our defence? I have heard that Lenkster castle is a stout bastion. If it falls [as I fear it may], then it will open passage to other more vulnerable targets, including Breder.

I received this missive from Stefan:

"Old Man, I have spoken to men who have faced the rumoured Cannons of Hell of the enemy. They speak of monstrously huge guns that house the spirits of daemons."



Fall of a Warrior



They rumble and growl with rage, and from their toothed maws disgorge fire and torment. They say that these things hold the power of ten Great Cannons, and that no wall can stand under their bombardment. I hear that they are en-route to Middenheim. I fear that even those

mighty walls will not stand up to the punishment of these fell machines."

This note I managed to obtain from a young engineer in training, Edgar Wurst:

"Alas, I have just read a despatch most upsetting. The revered steam tank, 'Von Zeppelin', assigned to fighting the enemy at Kurst has been badly damaged. Apparently a detonation in its boiler has rendered it immobile. I also hear that with its fall, Kurst has been overrun by the foe and reduced to a smoking ruin."

In despair, I took myself to the Hanging Crow for a firkin of Owd Badgers. There I sat with Guzlok Redmane, a dwarf I have known for many a year. He tells me that far to the northeast, Garagrim and his host of Slayers have crossed the river Lynsk and are engaged with the enemy pouring into the Empire in the wake of the frontal assault. How he knows such information I know not, but I believe his words.

The reports go on and on. It seems that the enemy is striking with lethal speed, and the north is well and truly overrun. The stalwart northern defences have no hope of holding, and the best that they can hope to achieve is a fighting defence, buying with their lives the time we desperately need to muster our forces. I fear I did drink too many Owd Badgers in despair.

On my brisk walk home [well, in truth it was more of a stumble], I happened upon the beggar, Blind Jasper. Now, I have known this poor wretch for many a year, and took pity upon him this night. Although I often drop an offering into his begging bowl, this night that did not seem to be enough. No, it was a grim night, and so in my drink-addled state I took it on myself to give the poor old man at least one night of sleeping off the cold streets—and Shallya knows how many more nights our Empire will survive. Arm in arm with him [I'm not sure who was supporting who], we wove our way back to my home.

I will take a short diversion at this point, so that you, noble reader, can have a bit of back-story of Blind Jasper. He is an elderly man of perhaps sixty, though he may well be much younger and merely been aged by his years on the streets. It is my belief [though I may be incorrect] that he was once a man of some importance within the church of Sigmar. He may have been a witch hunter templar, or a priest of some sort, but whatever he witnessed on one fateful day has scarred him forever since. Rumour has it that he witnessed some horror so foul and disturbing that he did claw out his own eyes. Now the poor fellow begs in the streets of Altdorf. I lend him kindness when I may, giving him food [though leftovers of Frau Weirde's cooking may not be a blessing] and the odd coin.



Blind Jasper



Though I must write this down, I would far rather scour it from my mind. A terrible thing happened that night when I put Blind Jasper up in my house. I no longer feel safe there, for a daemon has been visited upon me.

After a short and unfulfilling slumber, I awoke a few hours before dawn. Sleep is no friend of mine, nor has it ever been, but after a drinking session of such awesome magnitude I was expecting to sleep until noon the following day. It was no noise that had awoken me, for my candle wax plugs were in place, but on taking them out I could make out a series of thin, despairing cries coming from the guest room [Frau remained in repose, it would take all but an earthquake to wake her in the hours before dawn].

Taking the guttering candle from the bedside table, I pulled on my threadbare robe and went to investigate. Perhaps Jasper, questing for the latrine in the dark, had hurt himself. I grew more certain that this is what had happened, for it was Jasper's voice and he was in some distress. But these were not cries of pain, it transpired. They were cries of dread and were most unsettling. It took me a good minute or two to steel myself to go in, so unnerved by the timbre of Jasper's voice was I. There was something unnatural to it.

I crept into Jasper's room, the candle casting little light into its dark corners.

He was asleep, or something like it, for he did not respond when I softly called his name—perhaps he was in the grip of a fit or a fugue. I cannot say. He was clutching at his unseeing, milk-white eyes, and as I watched, his fevered cries and ravings begun to coalesce into words. I sat down, fascinated as one becomes at the sight of a corpse, and watched him describe the visions plaguing him; that which he spoke of I shall carry to the grave.

He was speaking of the cursed ones, those we call daemons, and his voice was thin and afraid and tinged with madness. He described a great plain of frozen tundra thick with nightmares, nightmares that had been dragged up from the minds of the murderous and twisted and given terrible form. They were beyond counting, marching with intent towards the realms of man.

He spoke of a thick column of daemons the colour of dried blood, born from the slaughter of innocents. At their head strode a dozen giants of gore-slicked muscle and pitted brass, their hateful wings blotting out the sun. Their mouths lolled hungrily, strings of blood-laced drool trickling down to be gratefully received by the daemon hounds snapping at their feet. He described a sea of writhing limbs and coruscating flame, a tide of energy made flesh that coalesced into hideous, gibbering forms. They clawed their way out of each other's maws, melding together briefly only to pull forth yet more progeny from within themselves as spurts of balefire set light to any living thing they passed. He spoke of a legion of cyclopean daemons hunched like ghouls,





Duel to the Death



their suppurating flesh writhing and wriggling as they reverently whispered the names of each and every disease ever to have plagued mankind. Some were mounted on fleshy, slug-like beasts, some rode in chariots made from the rotting corpses of their victims, but all were surrounded by a thick cloud of flies that choked the air. As he said this, I swear I saw something fly out of his mouth, but it may have been a trick of the light. Perhaps I was still drunk. I fervently hope so, for what was to come defies rational explanation.

Jasper's spasmodic movements were becoming more and more violent, but I felt that there was a truth to his words, and that if he was truly seeing a vision of the forces of the north, I could at least learn the nature of the evils poor Stefan was marching towards. I listened on as he talked of the daughters of evil that slunk alongside their many-limbed lords, lascivious temptresses whose perverted beauty could cause a man to abandon love and faith and plunge himself into depravity forever. He spoke of skies turned black with great clouds of wheeling, bestial predators, of cackling ghouls riding upon the backs of unnatural steeds, and of terrible daemon princes alight with the power of raw evil. Grass withered and rivers ran red and black as they passed.

The wax from my candle was trickling over the back of my hand, but I dared not move, so transfixed was I by the grotesque sights the blind beggar was describing. The candlelight was reflecting from the shiny bodies of the insects creeping along the walls toward it, but still I stayed. For Jasper's body had begun to rise, slowly, from the hard bed.

He was convulsing, now, as if trying to shake off a plague of spiders, hitting himself as he rose inch by inch into the air. I was so scared I could barely breathe. He began to blurt out more of his visions in hot, ragged gasps - a creature of shadow, the master of darkness itself, driven insane by jealousy and spite over the millennia. It was the creature that had crowned Archagon himself, but its rage was if anything more terrible than that of the Everchosen. Jasper began to sob and wail, crying that it was coming for him, that it flew towards him on black, ragged pinions, and that upon its banner writhed the resurrected form of Volkmar, bound in chains of agony for eternity. He threw his arms about his head as if warding something off, and then his body went ramrod straight, hovering several feet above the bed.

Jasper began to turn, slowly, spinning in the air, until Jasper's blind eyes looked straight at me. They were black, utterly black, and the candle did not reflect in their depths.

"We come for you," he said, in a voice that most definitely was not his own.

At that point, the candle sputtered and went out. And so did I.

I can say now, noble reader, that the whole incident with Blind Jasper did give me quite a spook. Yes, I Frederick "Old" Weirde was given the fear by this most unusual of occurrences. In actuality, I must confess that it did far more than this—it terrified me to the depths of my soul, and I was glad to be wearing my brown undergarments that day, if you understand my meaning [note to those readers of delicate sensibilities, you may read my turn of phrase as merely a crudity of words, not intended to be taken literally]. I could feel my sanity being strained, and I am certain that had the encounter lasted any longer then I would have gone mad. How many of the wretched and frenzied flagellants that pervade the Empire in these times have had similar horrific experiences?

My hand shakes with trepidation as I write these next words. I pray that I do not draw the attentions of more diabolic powers by doing so.

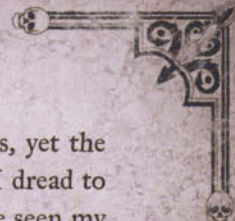
It would seem that Blind Jasper was possessed by a daemon of immense power. I do not claim to be knowledgeable of daemonic practices, and neither am I familiar with possession, but I am certain that this is what took place. The daemon-being that seems to be called the Dark Master [or Be'lakor sounded like the name that possessed Jasper spoke—I dare not say it aloud, but hope that the written word shall not invoke his power].

Blind Jasper claimed to have seen a grand, diabolic army on the march. A cynic might relate this as being an elaborate metaphor for the enemies drawing near [indeed I might well have drawn a similar conclusion, had I not witnessed Jasper's horrific transformation myself]. I fear that his vision is an accurate one.

Reports such as the following, a fractured and discarded fragment that was the recorded last words of a soldier from Hochland [generally considered the babbling of yet another soldier who has become bereft of his senses after witnessing one too many atrocities in the northern provinces] seem to back up these claims:

I write this with shaking hands. It seems I have come to the attention of the witch hunters of Sigmar. Last eve, as I was writing at my desk, the front door was rudely kicked in, and a troop of hard-bitten men did proceed to ravage my house, under the direction of a steely-eyed individual named Wilhelm Steinberg. He silenced my protestations with a glare, as his men upended bookshelves and





emptied the contents of my drawers. Steinberg said that I was under suspicion of "heretical consortation with diabolic powers". An absurd notion.

His thugs confiscated many of my histories for "further investigation", and burnt many parchments on the spot. I could barely contain my rage as they committed these acts, yet knew better than to harangue them with my wit. I could sense they were provoking me, hoping to get a reaction. Sigmar knows what would have happened had I done so. I fear I would have been quickly strung up and promptly burnt in the street for my troubles.

Steinberg and his cronies finally left. Thank Shallya that Frau Weirde was not at home—she was out shopping, no doubt scouring the stalls for ingredients with which to poison me with her "cooking". If she had been here, I am sure that her viper tongue would have been the downfall of us both.

I must be thankful that they did not discover what I have written on the previous page. Foolishly, I left it

open upon my desk throughout the ruckus, yet the witch hunter did not lay his gaze upon it. I dread to think what my fate would have been had he seen my account of the incident with Blind Jasper. An ash from the enthusiastic burning of a parchment by one of Steinberg's thugs [Upon which was written a number of rare—now much rarer—Bretonnian soliloquies. Heretical writings indeed!] did land upon this page, as you can see.

For all my outrage, I acknowledge that I was very lucky—from what I have heard, this Steinberg has burnt people within Altdorf without trial or evidence on many occasions. He is one of Johann Esmer's lackeys, I believe. Esmer seems to have created for himself a band of extremist Templars, and is using them to further his own aims, almost like a secret police force at his beck and call. No doubt he has eliminated many potential rivals with these tactics.

The witch hunter left with a dire warning that he would be watching me. I will write no more of such things as I have recorded in the last few pages. Suffice to say that my speculations have proven to be true, and an army of darkness does march alongside the forces of Archaon.

Alas, the same luck cannot be said for poor Blind Jasper. I have not seen him for many days now, and he is not at his normal begging spot in the courtyard of Sigmar. With his lack of mobility, this is most unusual, and none of the other street urchins have seen him. I fear that he has been taken by the witch hunters.

*...ripped apart by devils of slaughter.
Skin of blood, fire in the eyes. Red faces,
lips curled back... so many teeth, and fire
in its throat. They towered over us and
howled. One rose and fell, and limbs and
blood sprayed in every direction... howled
in joy as... they lapped at the blood... sym-
bols that hurt the eye to look upon... devils
with black shadow-wings... fire crackling,
wars, bloodlust... death itself... all
dead... all dead...*

I, Old Weirde, firmly believe that an army of fell daemons marches against us. Indeed, I have since had letters from young Stefan that indicate the same. Tales and accounts have reached his ears that this army attacks towards Middenheim from the north. And horror of all horrors, it seems that Volkmar the Grim, who was certainly slain under the blade of Archaon, has somehow been brought back to life, and is being paraded at the head of the army of darkness, chained to a monstrous battle standard.

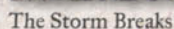
These daemons seem to vary greatly in appearance. Some are said to fly through the air - either borne aloft on leathery wings, by the force of their own magical will, or screaming through the clouds looking for all the world like giant, unnatural versions of the rays that dwell within the seas. Some daemons have the heads of withered birds but the bodies of powerful warriors, while others are bloated and pox-ridden creatures with one great, pus-filled eye sitting below a single twisted horn that sprouts from their forehead. Some tales speak of little, alluring, yet terrifying, daemon-women that bewitch their foes before ripping them apart and tearing at their flesh with fang-filled, sensuous mouths. Beings standing over fifteen feet tall are said to stalk the battlefields, smashing apart our men with every sweep of their blades.

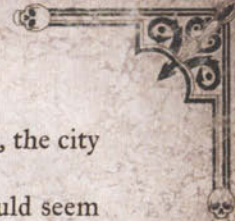
One part of me rails against believing these tales, but I now believe in my heart that these accounts are true. Oh, but I wish I did not. A year ago I would have scoffed at hearing such things and berated Stefan for believing them.





The Husteríng





Ur territories are overrun. Through the lands devastated by Surtha Lenk and Aelric Cynwulf, Archaon has led his giant army. Leaving a small part of his force behind to besiege Kislev, Archaon has rampaged onwards, destroying Erengard, crossing the Lynsk and advancing through Ostland. There, his forces have split into five major armies, each part taking a different route. One has advanced passed Wolfenburg, another moving to besiege Brass Keep in the Middle Mountains. Another has advanced into Hochland, while another moves into position to confront reinforcements from Hergig and Talabheim. Archaon himself leads another force that drives straight towards the ultimate target of this war. As I hypothesised, it seems that the armies of Archaon are not here for a long, drawn out war. They are here for one purpose: to strike a lethal blow to the Empire. The target of this

blow now becomes apparent: Middenheim, the city of the White Wolf.

If my research has been accurate, it would seem that the reason for this has become clear. I believe that Archaon wishes far more than to slay the people of the Empire. No, he has a more ambitious aim: to tear down and destroy the worship of Ulric, who was the revered god of Sigmar himself. It is said that if the eternal flame of Ulric within the Grand Temple of the god of winter in Middenheim is ever extinguished, then the end of the world will come. If Archaon—whom his followers believe is the one who will usher in the destruction of the world—succeeds in this aim then it will absolutely shatter the faith and heart of the Empire, and our lands will be ripped asunder. Our only hope is that Middenheim is able to hold, to withstand its attackers for long enough that our forces, and those of our allies, can converge on the enemy and break the siege.



The Winged Lancers' Charge



Greetings once more, Old Man,

Though I pen this with my battered quill, I feel I could just as easily communicate with you by raising my voice. Ah, perhaps not, but I am within a few miles of you now. We have reached Altdorf and are camped outside its great gate.

The past few weeks have been the most incredible of my life. I have recovered my steed, Jess, she came to me one evening as we made camp, acting as if nothing untoward had happened. I have learnt to fight, and fight well. I now carry a hammer gifted to me by a lame smith from the village of Freubad, a kind old man who would have dearly loved to ride with us, but who could not leave his forge. Best of all, in our scouring of beleaguered hamlets and dark forests on the banks of the Reik, I have killed no less than three of the enemy with this weapon, lesser beastmen, truth be told, but worshippers of Chaos nonetheless. In point of fact, Jess did most of the work; a sledgehammer swung from the back of a galloping horse packs quite a punch!

It has been three days since we reached the gates of Altdorf, and many of us are becoming impatient. Why should the rightful emperor of the Old World sit by whilst the sons of Kislev die by the hundred to buy us time for our petty politicking? Valten is content to wait in the shadows, as modest and circumspect as a true leader should be. But Huss! The Prophet is like a man possessed, storming up and down outside the gates, swearing great oaths and looking every inch as though he intends to take down the great gate himself with a swing from his hammer. Every day he cajoles and threatens the Reiksguard captains manning the walls, asking them to look deep into their souls, not into the backsides of their superiors! I imagine the great and the good are locked in endless debate about whether this truly is Sigmar reborn outside the gates.

I urge you to be at the palace when the gates finally do open, for Huss is making progress, and the confrontation between him and Karl Franz will be history in the making. I only pray this letter reaches you in time.

Yours,

Stefan

From the quill of Stefan of Altdorf, Sommerzeit 2523



Immediately upon receiving this letter, I took the boy's advice, and made my way toward the palace. I arrived there not a moment too soon, for as I arrived I could see the people were already gathering by the thousand. Word travels fast in this city. Karl Franz must have been in a quandary indeed, the thought of handing over the rule of the greatest nation in the world to an untested yokel on the word of a religious fanatic must have filled him with trepidation. However, to side with the Grand Theogenist Esmer and refute Huss's claims would anger a good deal of the devout populace of Altdorf and a fair number of the electors, resulting in a riot at best and a civil war at worst.

The people had gathered in Coronation Square, appropriately enough. I elbowed my way to the front. After what seemed like an age, Karl Franz stepped up

onto the great plinth that houses our mighty statue of Sigmar, so that all could see him. Huss and Valten stood on either side, looking stern and resolute. You could have heard a rat sneeze it was so quiet.

Karl Franz, after a long and impassioned speech informing the crowd who this young man was, presented Valten with the rune-encrusted hammer Ghal-Maraz and declared him the spiritual leader of the Empire. But the clever bugger saved the best to last. Standing next to Valten as he raised the mighty heirloom, Karl Franz drew his Runefang and held it aloft, vowing to lead the armies of the Empire by Valten's side no matter the cost. Even Huss smiled at this—Karl Franz had not handed over the reins of power, but had acknowledged Valten as the chosen warrior of Sigmar.



Valten on Horseback

21 day of great hope this is! For at last, the emperor himself marches to war with Valtan at his side. With much fanfare and hubbub, they paraded through the streets of Altdorf and exited the city. The pair stood side by side, Karl Franz looking stern and like a true warrior, and Valtan hefting the ancient and revered hammer of Sigmar himself, magnificent Ghal Maraz. Truly I must say that Valtan looked every inch like Sigmar reborn. Tall, powerful and young, he was resplendent in the finest gromril armour of the dwarfs, and riding on a mighty charger of the elves, his face noble and strong, framed by golden hair flowing around him like a halo.

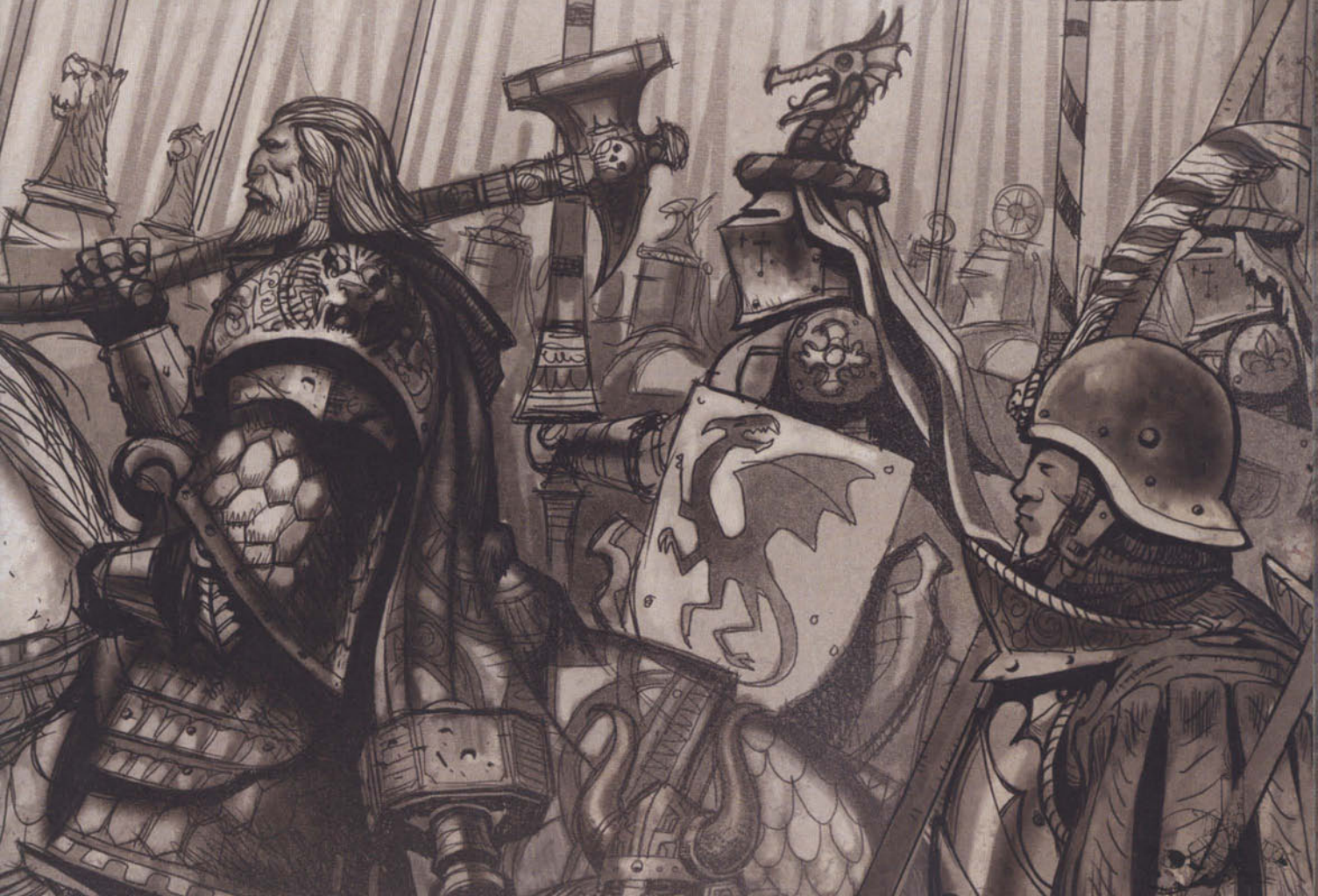
I can well understand why so many people believe he truly is Sigmar. The boy certainly believes, and I cannot find any reason to dissuade him of his faith. In truth, I do not think it would take much for me to believe in him myself—Shallya knows that everyone, myself included, could well do with having something to believe in, particularly in this dark time. The boy rides with the army of the faithful, full of fiery passion to do his bit in the war. I worry for him. I have stressed time and time again that he is an observer, not a soldier. He assures me that he will not ignore his duties, and that he will write often with updates and observations. This is not what concerns me, and I have no doubt that he will continue with his missives, filled, I am certain, with more of his overblown and long winded dramatisations. Still, the kernels of truth

within his pieces are fascinating inside accounts of the unfolding events. I fear for his safety, for I know that he feels his faith will hold him strong throughout the darkest hours. I wish I had such faith. Frau Weirde has slipped into a mood most foul, and she hands out scowls and black looks as if they were last week's milk-curd puddings. She has made it plain that I should not have allowed the boy to go, but it was not within my power or my heart to force him to stay, for he would have ended up resenting me for all time, or perhaps it is more likely that he would have gone without my blessing.

Bringing the festivities down a peg for me was the news of the north. While this grand processional took place, the armies of the darkling ones continue their rampage. Zundap has fallen, the Middle Mountains are all but overrun, and it looks as though Bohsenfels will capitulate at any moment. The warrior elector Boris Todbringer has continued his long lasting feud with the beasts of the forest, and has embarked on a crusade to butcher the foul creatures. That elector is not content to hide within his high walls. True fire burns in his belly, no wonder; villages and towns under his protection are being burnt and sacked with regularity. It is not just the dwellings that lay in the paths of the armies circling and closing on Middenheim like wolves, many of these are

not—many are places that had not yet seen war. It seems the shroud of war has been cast wider than we thought.





By this time it was clear to me, and no doubt to anyone paying attention, that Middenheim was the eventual target of Archaon's forces. Middenheim is the second largest city in the Empire, boasting a population of over thirteen thousand, and it sits at the heart of the Cult of Ulric. The savage god of wolves and of winter is a far older deity than Sigmar. It is my belief that Archaon wishes to conquer Middenheim and take it for his personal stronghold, a staging post from which he can drive the cruel spear of his invasion deeper into the heart of the Empire.

My knowledge of Middenheim is far from encyclopaedic, so given its importance in the coming days and the fact that Stefan seems bent on marching to defend it, I made haste to the Imperial Library and researched it as thoroughly as I could. Of great assistance to me was the tome *City of the White Wolf* by Herr Gulagher of the Boarskull publishing company. I have summarised my findings here, the better to set the stage for the siege that I predict will end this Storm of Chaos, one way or another.

On the Curious Origins of the Ulricsberg

Middenheim squats like a great citadel atop a mountainous spire of rock, truncated by some unknown force millennia ago. Legend has it that back in the mists of time, Ulric was jealous of his brother Taal, for although Ulric reigned supreme in the winter,

Taal controlled the wild places of the world all year round, and when winter passed, Ulric had no domain to watch over—presumably he spent the summer months plaiting his beard. He approached his brother with this quandary, and after much deliberation, Taal wisely decided to accede to his brother's request. He gifted him a great peak near the Middle Mountains and, after examining it with an appraising eye, Ulric smote it a mighty blow, shearing off the top of the peak to form a plateau on which his followers could build the greatest of all his temples.

From this it gained its original name of Fauschlag, or "fist-strike", though it is now more commonly known as the Ulricsberg. Ulric proclaimed himself satisfied, the matter was put to rest, and over the years his temple grew into a fortress and finally into a city: Middenheim, city of the White Wolf.

The following is allegedly a direct transcription from the Lore Haus of the Temple of Ulric, translated by one Brother Bengt:

"It was some fifty years before Sigmar's crowning, that Artur brought his tribe through the Drakwald forest to the Fauschlag. For the great rock was but a few miles from the Middle Mountains, and such places are rich in iron; and where there are mines, there is trade and wealth; and all these things need the protection of fortresses.

"Artrur's people were not renowned as builders, but the dwarfs of the Middle Mountains had been forced from their ancient home, and were only too willing to aid the humans in return for a share of the protection offered by the towering pinnacle.

"A hundred years passed before the work was complete, and a craggy fortress topped Fauschlag's plateau. And in that time Artur fought and lost to Sigmar in single combat, Sigmar became emperor, and ended his reign with a final journey as a mortal man. But by the sixtieth year of The Empire, the fortress was complete. So it was that the Teutogens—the last nomads of a warrior nation, and the tribe that had once rivalled that of Sigmar himself—finally came home."

The simple fact of the matter is that because of its positioning upon this great mountainous peak, Middenheim is the most inaccessible and well-defended city in the Old World. No doubt this is another reason why Archaon has chosen it for his destination, for if he can conquer Middenheim, then no other citadel can stand against him.

On the Eternal Flame

From the quill of our friend Brother Bengt, who has studied the friezes, tomes and writings of his order at great length:



Holding the Walls





"It was about this time that Wulcan, Artur's son and High Priest of the Cult of Ulric, was granted a vision. Ulric himself appeared before his servant, cloaked in a grey wolfskin and towering above the Fauschlag rock. The god smote the rock with the butt of Blitzbeil, his massive war-axe, and a fountain of fire burst forth. 'Here shall stand my temple,' he boomed, 'as long a fire burns in its hearth, your people shall endure'."

So it is that the Great Temple of Ulric atop the Fauchlag holds the Eternal Flame, a flaming shrine to the wolf-god, a flame that, according to legend, will never die. It burns with the faith of all who worship this ancient god, and if Archaon can extinguish it, he will likewise extinguish the hope of all of the great and the good, for if the Lord of the End Times can kill the manifestation of one of our most ancient deities, what can the followers of our most recent do to stop him?

Well, there is hope yet. Let us examine the defences boasted by this stalwart city, for they are quite unique.

On the Unique and Most Efficacious Defences of the City of the Wolf, Middenheim

There are but four entrances to the great walled city of Middenheim. Four enormous viaducts lead from the troubled forests, twisting and snaking along the lower slopes to eventually reach the cardinal points of the city, where they meet vast wooden gates set into dwarf-fashioned bastions of rock. These walls were fashioned not only with the aid of the greatest artisans of the time but also with magical artifice, so that if repairs are needed, mages are always present to reinforce their protective sigils. The wooden drawbridges and sections of the great viaducts themselves, are so cunningly crafted that it is popularly believed a single word of power can collapse all four and render Middenheim unreachable in an instant.

The upper walls of Middenheim, every angle of which has been carefully calculated to thwart the war



Hero of the Empire

machines of would-be besiegers, have been heavily reinforced of late. Amongst my researches I found mention of dwarf-forged chain-throwers, machines that launch great double-ended axes linked together with chains to defend the walls against winged assailants [my mind could not help but flick back to the nightmare Jasper imparted to me on that horrible night]. A sensible precaution; let us hope it is sufficient.

Aside from the viaducts, great ensorcelled walls and cunningly wrought war-engines surround the city, Middenheim has one more wonder of the world to defend it—the colossal cannon known as Ulric's Thunder. This is a miracle of engineering, so large one could fit this whole house down its barrel, mounted on a monstrous turntable to which sweating teams of dray horses are attached to pull it into the correct firing position. It has a slow rate of fire, and the cannonballs it uses are so large they have to be loaded into the breech by a domesticated giant that the citizens of Middenheim have fondly nicknamed Thunderball. When Ulric's Thunder gives voice, the walls around it shake, and hundreds of lives are claimed from the enemy's ranks as it ploughs through siege tower and battering ram alike, travelling several leagues before coming to a halt. I only pray poor Stefan stays well out of its way, or he may find himself able to fold himself into an envelope alongside his letters!

The Guardians of Middenheim

Though the dusty tomes of the Great Library disclosed a little about the stalwart warriors that defend the city of the White Wolf, I was thrilled to discover that Kommandant Gusenvald [a grizzled old veteran of the Knights Panther who frequents the snugs of the Wabberthwait] was an authority on the subject, having served there many years ago. It is ever a source of astonishment to me how much knowledge can be gleaned with the careful application of a few steins of beer.

As we know, Graf Boris Todbringer is the supreme ruler of the City State, and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. It is his duty to see to the emperor's peace, and three Midden Marshalls aid him in this. These chaps are responsible for the upkeep of the city's walls in conjunction with the leaders of the Wizard's Guild, as well as the training and recruitment of the City State's standing army and Kislevite mercenary companies.

The standing army of Middenheim bears many similarities to Altdorf's state troops, though clad in

blue rather than red and white. The standing army answers to one Marshall Maximillian von Genscher, a man with excellent connections. The size of this standing army can swell to magnificent proportions in times of war, for the following edict was issued in 1555 by Graf Siegfried the Significant:

"Be it known to all citizens of Middenheim that all humans betwixt the ages of sixteen and fifty shall be required to own either a longbow, a crossbow, or a sword. Once each week they shall report to their sergeant-at-arms for two hours military training."

I can only conclude that each and every Middenheimer is capable of defending his city if it comes to it.

Bolstering their ranks is the permanent garrison, a small corps of two hundred or so mercenaries quartered in various barracks around the city walls. These include a contingent of Kislevite cavalry, loaned from the Tsarina in exchange for a small number of Knights Panther.

The Knights Panther, the only armed forces that fall outside the jurisdiction of the Marshalls [other than the Knights of the White Wolf], are the Graf's personal guard. One of the original knightly orders, they comprise of around thirty highly trained, elite cavalry, supported by sundry squires and men-at-arms. The Templars of the White Wolf are far more numerous, responsible only to Ar-Ulric himself. They are sworn servants of Ulric and have a reputation for ruthlessness and barbarism—Kommandant Gusenvald is no admirer of theirs, I can tell you. But, as the night wore on, he grudgingly admitted that they were amongst the most capable knights he had ever fought beside, and that their hammers were at least as powerful as the lances of the Knights Panther. These Templars of Ulric also boast the Teutogen Guard, fierce and elite infantrymen who form Ar-Ulric's personal guard, clad in finest plate mail and wielding deadly White Wolf Hammers.

The armies of Middenheim also include numerous other warriors of Ulric, ranging from adventurers who have returned home, to the frightening Wolf-kin, men who have been driven to the brink of madness and despair by the predations of Chaos, and now fight with the savagery of the wolf packs that run at their sides.

I must say I am profoundly glad I live in the Reikland instead of the Middle Mountains, and that these stalwart warriors lie in the path of Archaon's invasion—it sounds like they may well be able to hold out against the hordes of Chaos until Karl Franz and Valten enter the fray and break the siege.





Chapter Seven

The Siege of Middenheim

The siege of Middenheim has begun, and the fate of the world hangs in the balance. Against its giant walls and proud defenders is arrayed a force unlike any that has ever been seen before. Never have the defences of the City of the White Wolf failed, but this brings me no comfort, for never has a city faced such a foe.

Thousands have been slain. Villages, towns and cities have been ravaged and despoiled by our enemy. Even should we prevail in this, the greatest battle of our lifetime, then we will be faced with a grim future.

Indeed, were the conflict to be ended this day and the armies of Chaos dispersed, then it would take several generations for us to recover from the damage already done. And that is not going to happen. Any day now, the walls of Middenheim could fall, and what that would bring I fear to contemplate.

Doom is knocking on our door. Nay, he has brought his friends and bed mates and is breaking it down! Our time has come—if we fall now, then all is lost and we will have no future at all—and there will be no one to read these collated notes.



The Face of Chaos







I believe the best way to describe the siege is to transcribe Stefan's correspondence on that terrible ordeal. I feel for the poor boy, he went through quite an ordeal. For the sake of completion I have included the notes I scribbled on his letters, which are printed in italics. His communications began thus:

From the quill of Stefan of Altdorf, perhaps for the last time.

I write from the Temple of Shallya, in Middenheim.

The greatest battle of our time is over. I have taken a wound of inconvenient magnitude, but you will be glad to learn it was not in the arm. As such I am able to while away my convalescence by recording all that I can remember of the last few days. Though the majority of this report is from first hand experience, a good deal of it was learned from the refugees and the wounded who were retreating from the front line, and those outriders and scouts who joined our campfires as we approached the besieged city. From these exhausted and urgent individuals I managed to glean a great deal of knowledge about the battles and dramas unfolding around us.

I have learned a good deal more from my fellow wounded under the tender ministrations of the priestesses of Shallya, for they have come from all corners of the war and have aided me greatly in piecing together the events of the last week or so. I shall endeavour to knit the facts into place as best I can for my sake as well as yours, for it would do my poor soul good to see some cohesion and continuity in the roiling destruction that nearly engulfed Middenheim.

It is quite a story.

Knowing you as well as I do, you will no doubt be hungry for that story to begin—after all, that is the main reason for our continued acquaintance, is it not? Well, I shall tell you now: it was hell on earth. I shall never be the same again, should I recover from my injury. A war with Chaos leaves not only physical scars but also mental and emotional ones, crusting the soul with despair and cynicism. But I cannot expect you to sympathise, closeted as you are in your dusty attic.

Get on with it, boy.

As we marched toward Middenheim, with the armies of Chaos racing us from the east, the men of Middenland and Ostland bravely held the line against the dark host. They were buying us time with their lives, for the longer they could hold out, the higher the chance that we would reach Middenheim before it was too late. They were disciplined and falling back in good order. Their strategy was to stand at the castles and townships they could defend and to abandon the villages and farms they could not. At Bohsenfels, Count von Raukov's army of desperados and mercenaries held out against the sorcerers assailing them for a week longer than

expected. Rumour has it that their leader, Melekh the Changer, was beheaded by Archaon himself as punishment. You always said it was ever the way for evil to turn upon itself at the first sign of failure.

Castle Lenkster held out in much the same way before its defenders were laid low by an agonising palsy. They were besieged by a pustule-ridden menace called Feytor in the service of the same dark god as the beastman that ambushed me outside Lachenbad. How long ago that seems now! Anyway, even with his vile diseases, Feytor could not take his next target, Fort Shippel. His siege was not only broken, but his forces harried by the garrison within as he attempted to rejoin Archaon's forces. Such is the steel of the men of Middenland.

The Norse prince Stykkaar proved a mightier foe, overrunning the towns of Kurst and Zundap in quick succession. He was held at the Hochland capital of Hergig, south of the Middle Mountains, by a legion of sharp shooting handgunners who were only defeated by some unnatural uprising of vermin that boiled out of the sewers of the city behind them. Nevertheless, Count Ludenhof's men had taken a great toll on Stykkaar's army, and I heard no further reports of its advance.

Archaon himself was reportedly forging westward along the Old Forest Road, with the last and most successful of his lieutenants, Haargoth the Bloodied, at his side. The bulk of the forces of darkness infested this region; we had reports of a great orc warlord called Ironhide and his army of thugs pushing ahead towards Middenheim, and one frantic refugee insisted he had seen an army of evil ghosts stalking through the forest, he had only survived by climbing the highest tree and praying to Sigmar they did not catch him. I have since seen the army of which he spoke. It would wipe the look of disbelief from even your face, old man.

I never told Stefan of that horrible night when we played host to Jasper. If only he knew, he might not be so condemning.

It turns out the infighting between these mighty armies bought Graf Boris the time he needed to withdraw his outmatched troops to the city. All the way, they harried and ambushed the Chaos forces, but when the evil tide finally reached the approaches of Middenheim they were still numerous enough to turn the ground black with their camps. Their fires were as numerous as the stars in the sky, and the night resounded to the sounds of vile industry, as horrible looking siege towers were constructed with daemonic artifice.

When the Chaos assault was launched, it hit with the power of a thunderstorm. The great hordes surged towards the walls. There was just no way the handgunners and artillery on the walls could do enough damage, even to give the horde pause for thought. Somehow the invaders had bound Middenheim's viaducts with Chaos



magic, not only preventing them from being raised in defence, but reinforcing them with magical iron thorns so that their snarl-masked battering rams and gibbet-encrusted siege towers could cross. Their attacks were so fierce that even the most desperate counter-attacks barely held the battlements. Soon the ramparts were slick with blood, and where it trickled down the walls of the city, the warriors of Chaos below would reach out and daub themselves with it, redoubling their fury. There are those in this very infirmary who believed even then that all was lost. But, as it turned out, that Conclave of Light shilly-shallying you spoke of was not so ill advised after all.

In the heat of the midday sun, there was a clarion blast of a score of horns, the forest around Middenheim came alive with brightly-coloured caparisons and glorious pennants, and the sun glinted from thousands of lance tips as the Knights of Bretonnia formed up and charged. How I wish I could have seen that sight! They fell upon the rear of the Chaos troops with abandon, led by a shining figure atop a majestic Gryphon-horse, King

Louen Leoncoeur himself. He charged straight into the heart of the Chaos line, around him was a tight wedge of knights mounted on pegasi. Surely the minstrels of that land will be busy in the coming weeks.

From the east came another great horde of cavalry—the defenders had feared that the column of dust sent up by their approach heralded the arrival of yet more Kurgan or Chaos Knights; the riders, at first glance, looked barbarous indeed next to the flower of Bretonnia. But they were the warriors of Kislev, riding to harass the rear of the Chaos forces attacking the east gate. A great cheer came from the Kislevite mercenaries on the walls as the Gryphon legion charged, their feathered banners howling in the winds. Some of the handgunners stationed in the city spires claimed that at the rear of the Chaos lines the greenskin warriors were attacking the Chaos troops in their haste to get a taste of battle. Our allies had arrived, and the tide swung back, albeit at the eleventh hour. And all the while the armies led by Karl Franz and Valten marched ever closer.



Chaos Giant

At Karl Franz's side rode two of the greatest warriors alive in the Empire today: the Grand Marshall Kurt Helborg, and the emperor's personal champion, Ludwig Swartzhelm. [On our march through to Middenheim, I watched Ludwig defeat a circle of eight of his finest greatswords, disarming all of them without sustaining a scratch.] One of those noble Reiksguard now lies in the bed next to me, bemoaning the loss of his leg in between telling his war stories. Helborg had convinced Karl Franz to attack Archaon's horde whilst it reeled from the twin assaults of the Bretonnians and Kislevites. The Chaos Lord had withdrawn his personal army toward the village of Sokh, where he lay in wait. He must have surmised that Valtan and his army was not far off, and sought to destroy our two armies, one after another, lest they link up and outflank him.

The knight told me of the glorious charge of the Reiksguard, supported by cannon fire. But the Chaos forces had cannons of their own. Great daemon-engines, manned by what for all the world looked like traitorous dwarfs, sent forth screaming balls of hell-fire into the Reiksguard's ranks, flinging cavalry in all directions and driving the horses mad with fear. But the Reiksguard held true, and smashed into the remains of Styrkaar's armies, each lance claiming the life of an elite Chaos warrior. Archaon saw the threat and counter-attacked; not at the knights themselves, but the infantrymen in support. He cut them down

like a farmer does wheat. Meanwhile, his lieutenant, Haargoth, tore into the rear of the Reiksguard like a man possessed [which, let's face it, he probably is]. If the Reiksmarshall Helborg had not seen the jaws of this trap and ordered that his men press right through Styrkaar's warband, this knight and his fellows would lie in the mausoleum, not the infirmary. Archaon let them go before moving on, knowing the demoralisation they would carry back to their lines would be worth sparing them.

The Ride of the Chosen One

Well, we had no idea that Archaon had left his camp at Sokh. Not long after first light, whilst we were still rubbing the sleep from our eyes and saying our morning prayers, a tidal wave of iridescent magical energy flooded down the Old Forest Road, burning and changing everything in its path. The stench, that terrible sharp stench of change, I shall never forget it. I was still praying, thank Sigmar, for all those that were not quickly mutated into horrible, insane shapes. Horses and men fused together, the ground roared and chewed, the air boiled in our lungs. Jess seemed to come open like a grotesque flower, her bones briefly forming a whirling spiral above her. Behind this murderous wave of Chaos rode Archaon himself, a ten-foot armoured demigod on the back of a snorting daemon steed. For a moment, I thought we were doomed, and I cried out in fear.

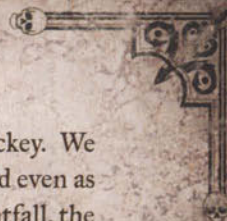
But our glorious leader did not forsake us. Amongst the pandemonium, Valtan jumped into the saddle of his magnificent horse, and galloped straight toward the enemy. The magic wielded by Archaon's sorcerers broke upon him harmlessly, for he wore the finest runic protections the dwarfs could forge upon his gromril armour. Rash but brilliant, without a single moment of doubt, he hit the Chaos lines like a comet. Ghal Maraz, the Skull-splitter, was almost blinding to look upon as Valtan swung it in great arcs, smashing Archaon's personal bodyguard from their saddles with each blow. There was no mistaking his intent.

Inspired, we rushed forward to join our leader before he was cut off completely, despite the mighty blasts of change arcing into our ranks. Warrior Priests fought side by side with farmhands against terrible blood-warriors and dripping lords of disease. I myself ran forward and took the legs out from a bird-faced sorcerer whose magic was ripping through the men of Lachenbad, reversing the swing of my sledgehammer and crushing his repulsive beak into his skull.

Around us, the ground was breaking open, and horrible flesh eating worms were lashing out, trying to



Charge of Light



bite. One nearly got my leg, but young Pfdrin, a close friend, jabbed it with his dagger until it withdrew, Sigmar bless his little soul. The heavens opened and hot blood rained down upon us. Still we fought on, our faith a shield against the blasphemous magic erupting around us. I saw Valten shout a challenge to Archaon, only to be answered by the great Chaos warrior carrying the horde's battle standard, who I later learned was called Kordel Shorgaar. They exchanged blows, but the crush of bodies drove them apart before

Valten was able to crush the coward's lackey. We pressed on, smashing the enemy into the road even as we were laid low by their fell sorceries. By nightfall, the Old Forest road was choked with corpses—seemingly those of our own and those of the enemy in equal measure. We could see their campfires through the woods. Although our ranks had been decimated, we resolved to crush them under the next day's sun. I truly meant it, too.

But it was not to be.



Faith and Hope Will Prevail



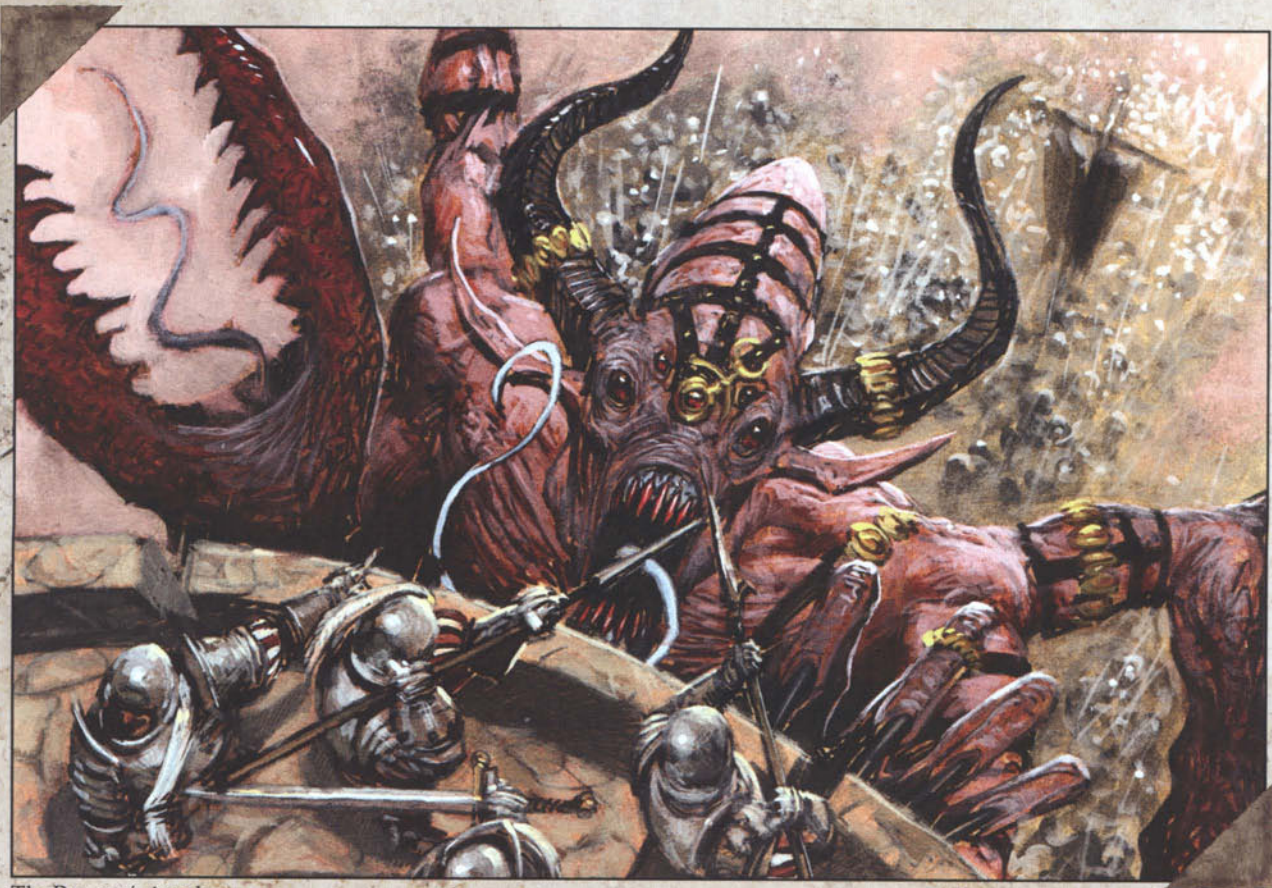
Eager to put a final end to this war, Karl Franz ordered Ludwig and Helborg to march forth with him just after first light, towards the much-diminished personal army of Archaon. None of the men in the ranks spoke a single word. They knew what they had to do and what had to be sacrificed to achieve it. The Hellcannons of Archaon's Horde rained down salvos of daemonic energy into their ranks, but none of Karl Franz's men would flee whilst under the eye of their emperor. We could see them marching down as we came from the forests to the east, only a few hundred of us now, led in hymn by Valten and Huss.

The view that struck us as we marched onto the fields of battle was enough to make the stoutest heart quail. Acre upon acre of land was filled with the roiling armies of Chaos, or with those of their greenskin allies, or the corpses of their dead. The sea of warriors was punctuated by unholy siege towers [I have enclosed a sketch of one of these infernal creations, the better to describe it], and amongst the orc ranks two more towers of unprecedented size were being rolled toward the city. The sky was plagued by a trio of wheeling dragons—dragons, no less, I have seen dragons!—each had two heads, breathed acidic fire onto the battlements. There was an ear-splitting

boom and I saw one of them come apart in a shower of blood and scaly flesh. I later learned that this was the last act of Ulric's Thunder; its giant loader had been overcome by a plague of Chaos and had to be put down, so the defenders of Middenheim had instead filled its cavernous barrel with the broken war machines from their walls, and fired the lot like grapeshot. Then we too were under fire.

The Hellcannons had changed their target. Hissing balls of balefire arced towards the head of our column. Some of us scrambled for cover, some of us held true, our symbols raised. The ground was ripped up and dozens of us were flung into the air where the cannonade struck home. I saw one land directly upon Valten himself; his steed, Althandin, was torn limb-from-limb. The Champion of Light was flung into the air, landing with a sickening thud. I cried out in anguish as I ran toward the smoking crater where the shot had landed. In its centre, Valten got to his feet, his face burned with flecks of molten gromril and his blonde hair scorched black. Making the sign of Sigmar at his attackers, he marched onwards on foot.

To the west, the air seemed to writhe and shimmer, and the skies themselves seemed to split apart like the stomach of a corpse. A great lake of darkness spilled out, coalescing into a hundred times a



The Daemon's Attack

hundred daemons as it stretched out towards Middenheim. Eyes glinted in that shadowy veil, and cruel laughs and nightmarish curses were carried across to us upon a hot wind. The waves of darkness were falling over Karl Franz's armies, and we could almost see the terror spreading; hundreds of men kneeling and clawing at their eyes as a great shadowy winged figure rose into the air above the unnatural legion.

This must have been the horrific creature that I glimpsed that night with Blind Jasper! Stefan, boy, you impress me more than words can say that you faced such a being.

He gestured, and his daemon servants galloped and loped towards us up the hill to intercept us. Many they were, and terrible. I cannot go into detail, for the sake of my sanity; be content to know that I led perhaps two dozen of our number to meet them, our holy symbols held high, and

they could not approach us. To our dismay, they instead flowed around us, cutting our army off from that of Karl Franz and leaving us to face Archaon alone.

As if that were not bad enough, the woods to the south erupted with savage greenskins, led by a towering warlord who I have since been informed was none other than Grimgor Ironhide himself. He hacked and slew everything in his path: man, woman, daemon, even orc, fighting like a thing possessed, his axe screaming with every kill. I tried to join the fray but Valtan commanded that we press on, press into the heart of the battle to engage Archaon himself.

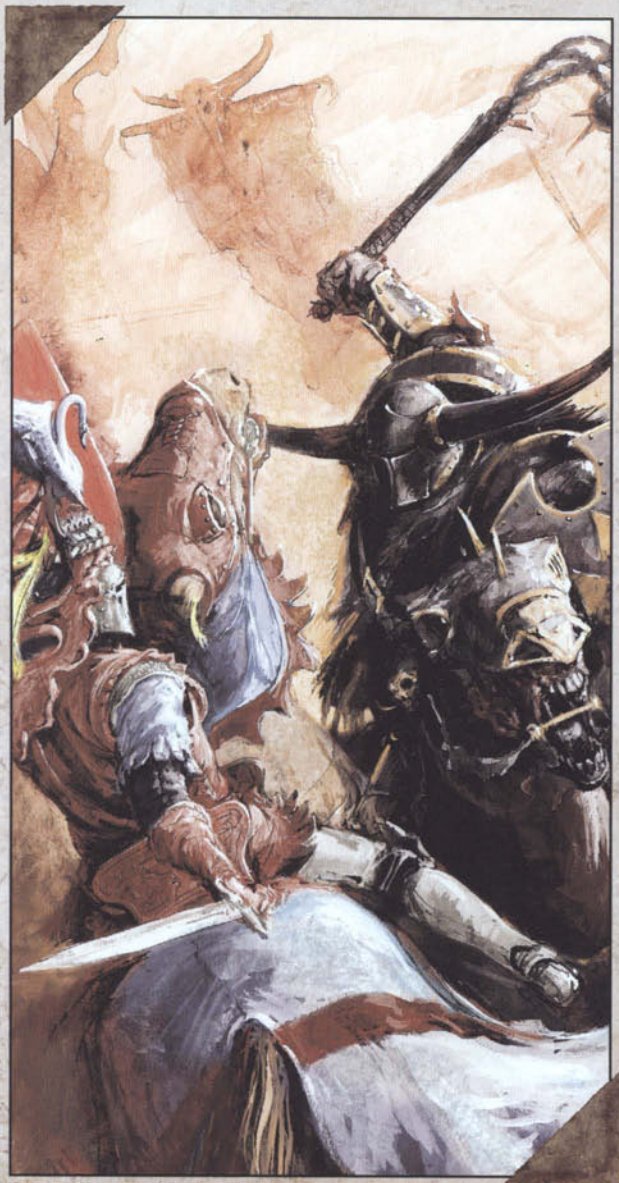
The Circle of Light

As we fought our way further down the slopes, I spotted a splash of white breaking the darkness that was engulfing Karl Franz and his men. High elves, no less; Teclis's fabled bodyguard of Swordmasters of Hoeth, wherever Hoeth is.

Ulthuan, boy, Ulthuan. Didn't you listen as a child?

They formed a circle with the Great Mage at its heart, and their greatswords whipped and danced around them, carving apart the incorporeal bodies of their unholy assailants. They fought with unparalleled skill, but they were few, and each one that fell was replaced by a forest of claws and fangs. The night-winged shadow daemon, many times the size of Teclis, dived from the skies toward him, and I gasped, for he was vulnerable. I saw him drink deep from a cup that glittered and shone. Just as the hateful shadow-daemon fell upon him, he seemed to be at the heart of an explosion of white flame that forced me to look away, and when I looked back I saw a hemisphere of magical fire that was expanding outward, the mage at its centre. The screeches of daemons filled the air as it passed over us and beyond. When my eyes adjusted, they were no more—even the great Shadow-Lord that sought to rend the elf-lord apart had become a patch of darkness in the air, until that faded. Not a daemon remained upon the field.

This allowed us a clear run at the Everchosen. He was mounted upon his great snorting Steed of the Apocalypse. He seemed to be looking straight at us, sketching a mocking salute with his sword. We sprinted down the slope, a great war cry on our lips, Valtan at our head. The warband of Archaon parted, and history unfolded around us.



Clash of Arms





Now, before I elaborate, understand one thing: I remained alive through this ordeal by my faith and my faith alone, and faith is not some wavering thing that peeks out when it is convenient. I know full well that I could have been killed, and I nearly was, but surely that is the point. So I will suffer no lecture from you about the rashness of my actions upon my eventual return.

Or so you think, my brave, foolish child.

Valten came upon Archaon in a great rage; he swung Ghal-Maraz at the Chaos Lord's daemonic steed, which came apart in an explosion of flame and oily black smoke. Archaon was hurled to the ground, and Valten lunged forward to press home his advantage, raising his hammer high. The air crackled as Archaon, [or his daemon-sword, I know not which] gave a great screech. The Chaos Lord struck out with a strength borne of madness and hatred, and his blade, rippling with the power of the daemon bound inside it, bit through Valten's gromril armour and into his gut, just as the sword of my first beastman assailant had plunged into mine. I cried out in disbelief as I saw it come through the back of Valten's armour.

But the Exalted is a hardy warrior and, grasping the sword so that Archaon could not dodge, brought his hammer down hard, smashing the Chaos Lord to the ground and tearing open his armour. Valten tried to pull the hissing sword from his belly, and Archaon, returning to his feet in the blink of an eye, took advantage of the distraction. He wrenched the sword free and struck again, carving apart Valten's breastplate and sending him onto his back, stunned and bleeding. I could see the birthmark upon his chest, unmistakably a twin-tailed comet through the slick of blood. Archaon took a step back, perhaps in shock. At this point I could not prevent myself from running to Valten's aid as he had mine before. "Get back, you monster," I shouted, in a voice that seemed pitifully small over the din of battle. Archaon laughed at me: deep, malignant, full of scorn and hate. I shudder at the recollection.

Luthor Huss launched himself at Archaon from the side, landing a mighty blow to Archaon's helmet that broke off one of its horns and sent him down on one knee. I saw black ichor seep from his gorget. The next blow did not land, for Archaon had raised his shield, jarring the hammer from Huss's fingers. I watched, not wanting to leave Valten's side as the Everchosen flung out his arm, his weight behind it, and Huss sailed through the air to land with a crunch. Something massive and green barrelled past me at waist height. It was the black orc warlord, and his head connected with Archaon's before the Lord of the End Times could

regain his footing. The orc hefted his greataxe, swinging it in a wide arc that sheared Archaon's shield in half and sent him sprawling backwards. All around me, the orc's veteran guard were falling upon the Swords of Chaos, Archaon's Chosen knights. I could hardly believe that our salvation had come from this most unexpected of quarters, but there was no time to waste. I began to drag Valten away from the maddened beast.

As I watched, Archaon's daemon sword flicked out again, but the blow was blocked by the haft of the orc's axe. The savage warlord stomped down hard on Archaon's sword arm, knocking that infernal, burning blade from his grasp, and brought the flat of his axe down hard onto Archaon's helmet with a resounding clang before planting the tip of the blade on his throat. The orc shouted something at the sky, some kind of guttural victory chant, and he and his warriors turned south and left the battle.

Luthor Huss, having regained his horse, took Valten from my arms and rode toward the East Gate [which by this time our forces had won back from the mutant wall-climbers assailing it] with the Exalted unconscious over the saddle. Archaon and what remained of his bodyguard fled the hill, desperate to regroup after the twin assaults of the faithful and the beast.

Word has it that Huss made it to the shrine of Shallya in which I now languish, and only when he was assured that Valten would live did he allow himself to collapse from his wounds. Every rib in his chest had been broken by a single blow from Archaon's shield. His body was carried to the main shrine by none other than Volkmar who, they say, had not only freed himself from the banner of the Shadow Lord with a great effort of will, but taken a great toll of the daemon ranks whilst doing so.

This city plays host to some of the greatest heroes the world has ever seen.



Archers Without Match



As it transpired, we would have been well advised to push on after Archaon as he retreated. Our advance scouts had reported, with infinite weariness, that Archaon had not only marshalled his forces at Sokh, but had been rejoined by the blood-hungry warriors of Haargroth and legion upon legion of beastmen under the command of Khazrak One-Eye. Up until two days ago I think I was the only person in Middenheim to have never heard of this fierce beastman warlord, but apparently it was he who put out Graf Boris's eye and vice versa, and the two have a long-standing feud. Even after we gave everything we had to shatter his thrice-damned siege, Archaon still comes back with yet more armies. We were at a loss.

We had no real choice but to attack before Archaon's forces swelled any more. Kurt Helborg warned us that this would be no easy victory, for those forces left to Archaon had survived for a reason—they were veterans all, most brutal and monstrous.

The Imperial artillery began its bombardment just before noon, raining cannon and mortar fire into the village. Less than an hour after the bombardment had started, the guns were assaulted by Khazrak the

Beastlord, who had eluded Graf Boris's armies in the forests. I could hear the roar of volley guns and the horrifying bellows of giant beasts that the Middenheimers called Shaggoths, as I marched once more to observe history unfolding alongside the remaining state troops of Middenheim, now few in number.

Might I add that many recognised me and congratulated me on my bravery from the day before.

The first men into Sokh were the Teutogen Guard, led by Ar-Ulric himself. The midday sun flashed bright on their armour, a spear of white that plunged into the crimson-armoured warriors of Haargoth, the Bloodied One. Ar-Ulric roared a challenge, and Haargoth ploughed through the flank of the Teutogens towards him, trailing dismembered bodies and severed heads. He had killed at least three dozen victims to reveal Ar-Ulric, whose ensorcelled hammer smashed into Haargoth's helm with such force it drove the Chaos general's head into his chest.

Despite this victory, there proved to be far more warriors of Chaos in and around Sokh than we anticipated, and they forced us to fight on a narrow frontage so that we could not bring our numbers to bear. The



Black Orcs





battle ground down to a bloody war of attrition that, in the end, we lost.

At first, the exhausted warriors who fell back from the battle did so in good order, but as crimson-hued thunderclouds began to appear in the twilight sky, more and more of our regiments retreated until it was little short of a full-scale rout. We fell back to the city, the scions of Chaos on our heels, cutting down the stragglers. I could see something coming over the hills from the south. Strange noises were emanating from the darkness, and there were brief illuminations of tattered heraldry and polished bone. Slowly, the night began to glow red, pulsing like a heart, revealing an army standing perfectly still in the twilight. They were still because they were dead, Old Man. An army of the dead had come to assail us, just as the armies of Chaos had regained the upper hand.

The pale rider at their head, a tall, aristocratic man with jet-black hair, led his minions in an unholy chant, and the air began to swirl. I swear it was a vampire! It must have been a vampire just like the ones you used to tell me about when I had strayed out of bed in the night. It brought its pallid hands together, thunder clapped at the same time and lightning flashed down onto the battlefield. All around him the dead began to rise where the lightning struck, Chaos and Empire soldiery standing back up and picking their weapons from the floor with cold, dead hands.

It transpired that the vampire was Mannfred von Carstein himself. He rode down the slope towards us, flanked by his undead warriors. But they were attacking the warriors of Chaos, too, and the vampire plunged into the ranks of the dark warriors pursuing us. He laid about himself with his sword so fast he became a hissing blur, the blood from one decapitation not having reached the floor before he had slain another, then another. I saw him struck in the back by a Norse chieftain whose spear lifted the vampire from the ground. The vampire collapsed into ash, only to burst into life like a phoenix, his fangs clasped tight to the Norseman's neck. He fought with a savagery that outweighed even that of Middenheim's daemonic foes, and soon it was the Chaos forces' turn to rout.

I would have gladly watched that creature butcher the rest of the Chaos forces, but a shambling host of the dead was stalking through the trees towards us. I tried to marshal the men around me to stand fast, but almost all of them were fleeing. It dawned upon me that maybe they were right, and that I could not hold them by myself. I turned to go, and found myself looking into the dead face of the innkeeper from Gutenbad, who I had marched beside in Huss's army of the faithful. I was frozen with shock, for his skull was split apart.

He punched his rake into my chest, and I fell.



Footsteps of Doom



I woke up here, in the Temple of Shallya, badly wounded. The sisters tell me I was carried here by the state troops of Karl Franz, lifted on their shoulders with great care and carried through the turmoil back to Middenheim. With an army of the dead cutting him off from the City of the White Wolf, Archaon ordered the retreat north. It is thought he made his way back towards Brass Keep.

The story goes that the vampire Mannfred marched up to the walls of Middenheim with his armies of the dead at his side, growing in number with almost every stride he took. The fields of corpses twitched and writhed at his passing. He stood at the foot of the eastern causeway,

At this point the boy's letter trailed off. My heart sinks when I think of him in such poor form.

Apologies, my strength is at a low ebb. I have lost a lot of blood, apparently, and reliving these experiences to inform history is taking its toll. If the healers found out I was still writing this "foolish letter" as they call it, they would give Frau Weirde a run for her money as far as tongue-lashing is concerned. This is why I now write at night.

Speaking of night, I believe I was on the matter of Lord von Carstein's demands outside the gates. He is said to have called upon the city to surrender to him, and that he only made war upon Chaos so that his "cattle" [by which he means us humans] would stay where he wanted them. Well, by this time Volkmar had recovered almost fully, and he marched out to face Mannfred with the same faultless courage he exhibited when he confronted Archaon. They exchanged words, though none could hear what they were, but Volkmar's aura of faith was almost visible, it burnt with such brightness. Some say it was a Grand Theogenist who destroyed

Mannfred's father Vlad, and maybe this is why Mannfred turned around his nightmarish steed and rode back the way he came, his deathly army following in his wake—or perhaps he had achieved what he had wanted.

And so the Battle of Middenheim ended. For the first time in nearly three months the forests were silent. But the ravaged land did not speak of victory. Archaon's horde has spread misery and death across Ostland, Hochland and Middenland, and ravaged Kislev. Many are the folk who have been driven insane through terror or misery. The forests crawl with fools who have bartered their souls to the dark powers when they felt all was lost. The battlefields are wreathed in a freezing fog, and through it tattered corpses stumble, the walking dead left in the vampire's wake. Zundap is overrun with the vermin-things they call skaven. Some say the earthquake we experienced two days hence was caused by a device these Chaos-spawn placed deep inside the undercity of the Ulricsberg. Middenheim's causeways are choked with the dead; even now I can hear the scrape of shovels on hard stone as the bodies of monster and hero alike are shovelled roughly down the sides of the Fauschlag.

It makes me so angry to think of it, all those lives lost to entertain the whim of the dark gods. How I wish that Valtan would rise up from his deathbed and smite them! How I wish I could do more than just scratch away with my quill in the darkness like my father's son!

The forests are still haunted by the dark ones. I have reached a resolution. I cannot sit by and do nothing for a moment longer, for I am no longer an observer.

I pray this reaches you, Old Man. One day you will understand. Please explain things to mother.

Your loving son,

Stefan

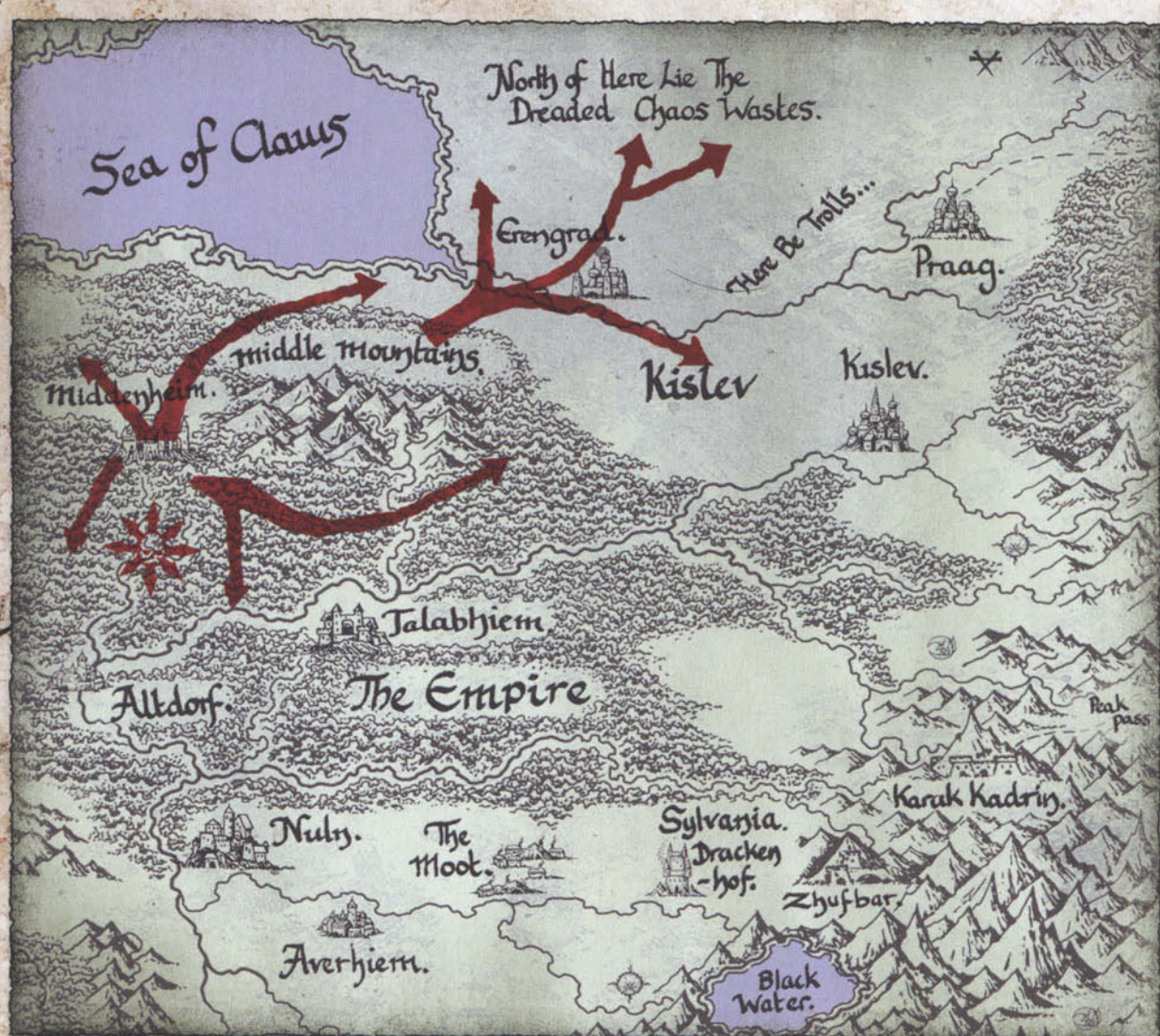






Epilogue

The Empire Reels



The Foe Retreats

And so, Middenheim held against the cursed foe, and Archaon was pushed back. Ostland, Hochland and Middenland are in ruin, and tens of thousands of Empire citizens are now homeless and starving. Cities, towns and villages lie in blackened destruction, and countless thousands have been slain. Confronted by the horror of Chaos, the lands are now overrun with those driven insane. Worse, many citizens, seeing no escape from Chaos descending upon them, embraced the gods of darkness, and are now stalking the forests and burnt out ruins, having bartered their souls.

Although the main armies of Archaon have retreated, many war bands and beast herds have merely gone into the darkness of the Drakwald. There they will continue to prey upon an already beleaguered nation. Brass Keep is high in the mountains, and no doubt they will use this as a staging ground in future seasons. The defence of Middenheim has spent the armed

forces of the Empire, and there are none who can be spared to root out that evil at this time.

So it is. The enemy has been halted, but our Empire is in flames. The land is ripped apart with famine, death, destruction and the continued threat of civil unrest. It will remain to be seen how we fare in the coming years, but of this I am sure: the times of darkness are not over. No, it would seem that they have only just begun.

For days Valten has lain within the shrine of Shallya in Middenheim. There he was carried by Huss, having been struck down by the instigator of this grand invasion, Archaon himself. Many were the wails when he was felled, for many believed that Valten would smite his enemy and stand victorious—alas, this was not the case.

Although the forces of Chaos have been pushed back, Valten was grievously wounded by the blade of the Chaos warlord. His gromril armour, gifted to him



The Backbone of the Empire

by the dwarfs, was shattered by the blow, exposing the twin-tailed comet upon his breast.

Since the forces of Chaos have been pushed back, a new and more insidious danger has assailed our Empire: internal division. A schism has threatened to throw our fair lands into civil war. Such a thing would destroy us.

While Valten lay comatose within the temple of Shallya, Huss praying at his side night and day, the Grand Theogonist Johann Esmer arrived at the gates of Middenheim. With Volkmar the grim seemingly alive and well [a somewhat suspect recovery from his apparent death], many have argued that he should take back his position. Huss's rabble-rousing, fire-breathing followers called for Esmer to give up his position. In the midst of this religious turmoil, the followers of Ulric added their voices, calling for their church to have more power within the court of electors.

Even amongst all this brouhaha, there was one potential problem that was even more threatening to the stability of our Empire: Valten himself. His ardent followers flocked the streets of Middenheim, proclaiming that he should, once he had recovered, become the new emperor. Others claimed that, having been laid low by Archaon, he was clearly not the divine god that many believed him to be. This schism had the potential to fracture our Empire further—civil war has started for much lesser reasons.

Karl Franz, in his political wisdom, was clearly well aware of the potential dangers to both his rule and the well-being of the Empire. Already Middenland has become rife with looting and lynching, and rumour has it that many worshippers of the dark Chaos gods has gone into hiding within society. He locked himself in council with his advisors, including the religious leaders of Sigmar [diplomatically including both Esmer and Volkmar] and Ulric. I would assume that he would have been reluctant to hand on his role to the young Valten [there was still doubt of his divinity],

and yet to not do so would brand Huss a liar—and surely more trouble would come of the emperor denying Valten's divinity. If my sources are correct [and Shallya knows that they have not always been so, much to my consternation] it was said that Esmer and the proud Boris Todbringer did ask the emperor for three days to solve the delicate situation.

Alas, a solution did present itself, but one that none would have wished for, and it has sent the Empire into further despair and mourning.

Valten is dead.

This, I must stress, is only what I have heard from my sources [who shall be nameless here, to keep them from danger]. Luthor Huss, even as I write, rides from village to village around the Empire, and thousands clamour to hear his words. Judge for yourself the deeper meaning behind them:

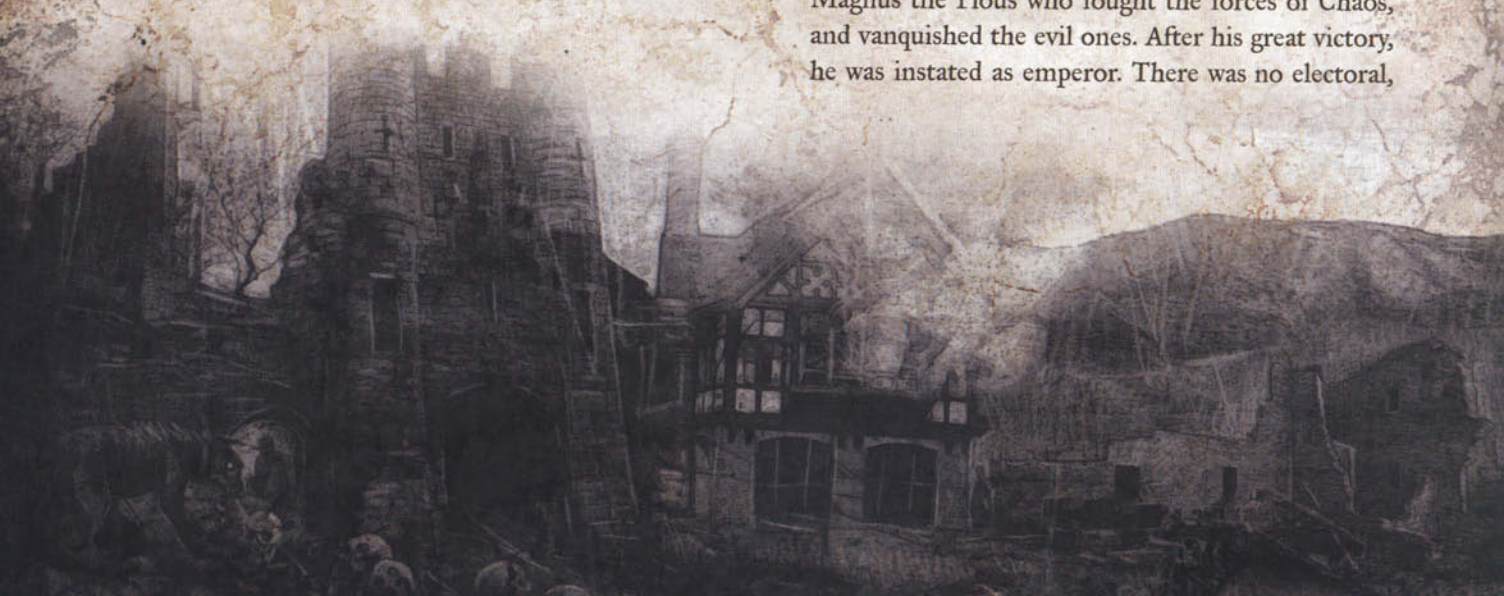
"Sigmar has left us, his duty done and the Empire saved. But fear not, noble sons and daughters of his light, for when we have greatest need of his aid once more, he shall return."

These are the words of Sigmar's prophet, Luthor Huss. The great sheep herd of society laps up his nobly spoken words, and yet there are those who whisper of more sinister occurrences.

These dark whispers [which I must stress are unfounded and mere speculation] say that Valten was found murdered within the temple, a dark, glowing, serrated blade lodged deep within his heart. However, these nefarious whisperers say that all evidence of his demise was mysteriously covered up.

One could discount these tales, and yet even I, who has an intense dislike and disgust for unsubstantiated beliefs and speculations, can sense something strange about this situation. I feel in my heart that many people would benefit from the removal of Valten. He posed a terrible problem to the emperor himself.

To put this into context, one must remember what happened after the end of the Great War Against Chaos, two hundred years ago. In that time it was Magnus the Pious who fought the forces of Chaos, and vanquished the evil ones. After his great victory, he was instated as emperor. There was no electoral,





the populace demanded it, and to deny the public their desire would have led to great civil unrest, and probably war.

If Valten had lived, then the populace may well have insisted that he become emperor—I certainly know that my dear son Stefan would have done so. This would have certainly led to civil war. The Grand Theogonist Johann Esmer [who still holds his post, despite many wishing him to give it back up to Volkmar] rigidly opposed Valten, and continues to dispute the claim of his divinity. Division at such high levels of the Church of Sigmar would have led to much strife. It still could, for there is an even split of support between Esmer and Volkmar.

But perhaps more dangerous was the position of the church of Ulric and its supporters, notably Todbringer. The church of Ulric would never support Valten as a new emperor, for it knows this

would add pressure to them. It is certain that if Valten were made emperor, the church of Ulric would wage war against him. And at the side of the church of winter would ride Boris Todbringer and his northern allies, including a handful of elector states.

And so Valten clearly proved a political problem. But from experience, everyone is happy with Karl Franz, who has been acknowledged from all parties as being a great mediator and diplomatic emperor.

Perhaps I go too far here. I pray that none of our great leaders would ever stoop so low as to cover up murder.

Whatever the true case, Valten is no longer with us and the Empire mourns his passing. The threat of civil war has, for the moment, passed.





Dear Herr and Fraue Weirde,

It is with great regret that we must inform you that your son, Stefan Weirde, has passed into Shallya's mercy.

Stefan was found on the steps of the temple, still in his nightshirt, with a hammer clasped tightly in his hands. His body is with the priests of Morr, but should you wish it, we can arrange for it to be sent back to Altdorf to be interred after a funeral fit for such a heroic young man.

Yours in faith,

Sister Superior Felicity, Temple of
Shallya, Middenheim

My own son lies dead. My only child is slain, laid low by the enemy. For several weeks I have been unable to write, but I feel a duty to complete my notes.

The great hope of the Empire, Valtan, too lies slain, and his death has created confusion and widespread despair, as well as prompting questions that may never be answered. What a terrible time this is. Yes, we held back the Storm of Chaos, but did we win a victory?

The north is in ruin. It will be many years before those lands heal, if they ever shall. Now we must begin the difficult process of recovery. Already starvation is rampant, and there are countless thousands who have no home to return to. Villages and farms have been destroyed. Cities lie in ruin. Refugees are flocking into the south, many making their way towards Altdorf. This is putting a tremendous strain on these places, food runs short, and I can foresee the streets choked with refugees, starving and cold. Raiding and looting is commonplace, for people are desperate. This winter will take a heavy toll, and I fear that we may well lose as many from cold and starvation as we have from the armies of Archaon.

The elves and the dwarfs are leaving our lands once more. Already they have fallen into old feuds and arguments. Harsh words were spoken on both sides, and we are lucky that blood was not spilt between them. The dwarfs return to their holds, to barricade themselves within their stone walls, adding fresh names to their books of grudges and singing sagas to their fallen kin. They still face war,



for their lands are not cleansed of enemies. The elves bear their wounded and dead back to Ulthuan. They are haughty and arrogant towards the men of the Empire, their disdain for us is clear.

Most of the knights of Bretonnia return to their lands, their honour achieved. Others who still lust for honour and renown have dispersed on their own individual trials and quests—a great many journey even now to Brass Keep to do battle with the monsters there. There they will find only death, I'll wager.

The electors too have fallen back into their time-old political divisions and feuds. It is so demoralising that in this time, a time when we need to come together for strength and comfort, when we must be united, we are failing so miserably. Mayhap it is the hand of the gods of Chaos working against us still, seeding discord and disharmony. They seek to weaken us before the time comes again when we face their warriors on our doorsteps.

I am no general or warrior. In all my histories, I have read about hundreds of wars and thousands of battles. In all those histories, the victor is just that—victorious. I have no knowledge of this cold reality. Although history may record that in the year 2522, the Emperor Karl Franz did lead an alliance of light to victory at Middenheim against the forces of Chaos, the reality is more complicated. Perhaps that has always been the case. There are no victors in war. The price the victors pay is sometimes so high that defeat and loss is the only reality. Our history books lie to us. I will not do the same.

That is one of the reasons that I have put together this volume, to give a human perspective of this war, to show that war is not glorious, or proud, or



Warrior of Darkness

Battering Ram



great. War is the death of loved ones. War is the destruction of all we take for granted. And in the end, war destroys those who fight it, whether they are victorious or not.

Middenheim, the site of the major battle of this war, will forever bear the scars of this time. Its walls bear testimony to the power of the Chaos hellcannons. Even after the siege was broken, it faces danger. A great explosion deep beneath Middenheim flooded the tunnels with strange, green fire that melted rock and people alike. It is believed that this was caused by some diabolic device planted below Middenheim in order to destroy it completely. However, it is believed by many that this device is still there, and is just awaiting the moment until it unleashes the full power of its destructive force. It may well wipe Middenheim off the face of the Empire.

The Templars of Sigmar, Johann Esmer's much maligned witch hunters, have been granted additional powers to use as they see fit. The Empire is rife with mutants and cultists, a great many of whom have been exposed and destroyed over the



Chaos Warriors

past year. Still, the presence of daemons within the Empire itself seems to have tainted the lands, the animals and the citizens of the Empire, and secret cults are being exposed and burnt at the stake on an almost daily basis. Two hundred and seventeen people have been slain as witches here in Altdorf alone. The people are fearful.

I don't know if the Empire can ever recover from this war. It seems to me that we will be slowly torn apart by feuding nobles, arguing religious leaders, starving populations and over-zealous witch hunters. I fear that the days of our great Empire may be drawing to a close; it is burning, and I don't know if we have the strength to quench the flames.



Ludwig Schwarzhelm

And so another chapter in the history of the Empire closes, but there is no rejoicing in the streets this day. I feel nothing but emptiness within my soul. As I gulp my port, it is tasteless in my mouth. Frau Weirde has taken to her bed, refusing to eat, to move or speak—a grieving malady of sadness brought on by the loss of our brave son.

I see only darkness ahead. The bloodthirsty killers of the north will return. And we will be forced to fight them once more. And if we drive them back once again, they will only return. And so it will continue, war fought after war until the time comes when this land I love is nothing more than one great battlefield of corpses, the river Reik will run red with the flow of blood, the sky will become obscured by smoke and flame, and there will be no more sons to fight the enemy.

We cannot win this long war. To win it, we would not only have to weather the storm that assails us, but we would need to attack back against the foe, and destroy them utterly. We would have to ride into their lands and wipe them from the face of the world. We would have to slay every man, woman and child of these people if we wished to win this war. And in doing that, we would destroy ourselves, becoming the very thing that we hate.

No, we are a doomed people, living in a doomed world. My decanter of fine Estalian port is almost



empty now and the numbness it brings upon me is most welcome.

All my research points towards one fact. The invasions of Chaos are becoming more frequent. Thousands of years passed between the first incursions—it took thousands of years for the forces of Chaos to gather their strength for another attempt to overthrow the world. Then those thousands of years became a thousand years. Then five hundred years. The Great War was fought only two centuries past. When can we expect the next? My guess is within the next half century. Some of those valiant men who fought on the walls of Middenheim may well find themselves doing so again. To fight Chaos twice in one lifetime is a horrible fate! Truly we live in a cursed time. And if that invasion is halted, when would the next come? A dozen years later? A score? And after that time, then what?

I see the future in my mind's eye, and it is dark. The world will be plunged into one endless, unstoppable and inevitable war. Eventually, that war will engulf the entire world, and all will be destroyed.

Mayhap there will always be one Champion of Light to fight the darkness when it rises. If such is the case, then that last Champion will surely stand alone, the entire world overrun and destroyed around him. He will watch as one by one his friends and family are slaughtered, as his home is burnt to the ground, and as every nation and land in the world is stamped out. Alone, he will shine but briefly, facing off against the untold darkness and horrors that beset the world.

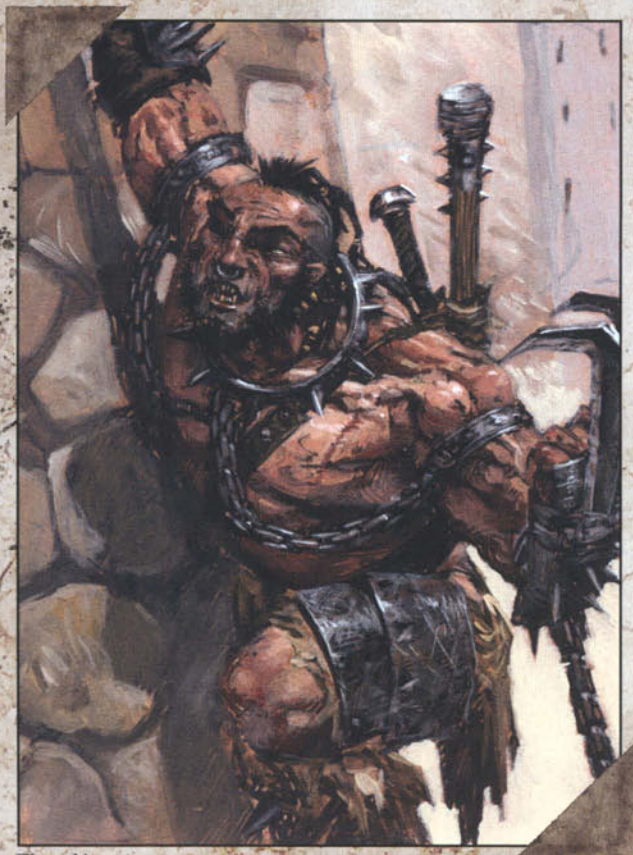
And alone he will perish, and with him, this world.

In the end, even his light will be snuffed out.

And then, there will be only darkness.

I go now to my bed. If Morr is kind, perhaps I shall not wake. May Shallya be merciful to you all.

Frederich "Old" Weirde, Altdorf



Flayerkin







Phil Kelly is not your average Essex boy. At an early age he spurned the ways of the gold earring, instead reading rather a lot of books. He left for Nottingham late last cen-

tury, where he spent time making body parts and mucking about with skeletons before returning to Southend to work as a handyman in an all-girls grammar school. When it all got too much for him Phil headed back to the Midlands to work for Games Workshop, where he now leads a peaceful life writing about fantastical creatures in between drumming, scuba-diving, free running and, just lately, extreme ironing.



Anthony Reynolds hails from the sunny shores of Australia, though he has been living in the UK since the year 2000. Intending to backpack around Europe, he

seems to have got stuck in Nottingham after blagging his way into Games Workshop's design studio and securing himself a role as a Games Developer. He has worked on many Warhammer army books, including the Lizardmen, the Bretonnians and the Wood Elves. He has now entered the ranks of Studio management, and is currently working on not picking up an English accent.

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5 011921 916252 >

Games Workshop
Product code
6071 0299 079

Printed in the EU.

