

The logo for Warhammer Age of Sigmar, featuring the word "WARHAMMER" in large, stylized, gold-outlined letters with a blue gradient fill, and "AGE OF SIGMAR" in smaller, gold-outlined letters below it. The text is set within a decorative, metallic-looking banner with sharp, pointed edges.

WARHAMMER
AGE OF SIGMAR

BROKEN REALMS

A detailed illustration of a chaotic battle scene in a dark, greenish-yellow, hazy environment. In the foreground, a large, horned dragon-like creature is engaged in combat with a winged demon. The background is filled with various other creatures, including more dragons and demonic figures, all in the midst of a fierce battle.

THE PRICE OF
TREASON

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‘Give ‘em a volley!’

Sergeant Hascull tasted the bitter tang of valchemite as flame and smoke erupted from the barrels of a dozen muskets. The disciplined fire cut down a score of the advancing enemy, each well-aimed ball punching a hole through steel plate, flesh and bone. But it was not enough. More aelven warriors came striding across the sodden ground, the tips of their long spears gleaming in the mist, their tower shields locked in perfect formation. One of their number held aloft a profane banner emblazoned with foul iconography and two familiar and despised words: Har Kuron.

Har Kuron. That was the name the Khainites and their fellow insurrectionists had given to Hascull’s home city of Anvilgard, the city they had sacked in the name of the arch-traitor, Morathi. Hascull’s hatred all but choked him. So many comrades dead and lost, and soon the sorry remnants of his command would join them. This time, there would be no retreat.

‘Second ranks, fire!’ he roared, and another rippling volley scythed across the enemy. Then the aelven spearmen were at the foot of their makeshift barricades. With eerie calmness, they began to haul themselves over the muddy ridge, ignoring the bayonets that jabbed down at them.

‘It’s been an honour, lads,’ Hascull said. ‘Let’s show these faithless curs how Charrwind Rangers meet their fate.’

Not for nothing were the Rangers considered elite soldiers amongst the ranks of the Anvilgard Freeguild. Hascull’s platoon fought like angered Gryph-hounds, taking up hatchets, daggers and billy clubs and hurling themselves into the fray. But the enemy numbered at least three score to their paltry dozen, and they were not exhausted and starving from weeks of flight through the sweltering jungles of the Charrwind Coast. With cold focus and dexterous skill, the aelven warriors drove Hascull’s soldiers to the ground, impaling them with precise thrusts of their spears or battering them into unconsciousness with the skull-marked bosses of their shields.

‘Traitors!’ Hascull roared.

The sergeant flipped his musket, catching it by the barrel and swinging the heavy ironwood stock underneath a raised shield to sweep an oncoming aelf off his feet. The aelf rolled and came up with blinding speed, his eyes as blank and emotionless as those of a flayer shark. With one hand, Hascull cleared his pistol from its holster and fired. There was an eruption of pink mist as his enemy was sent toppling away.

Dropping the musket, Hascull cracked open the breech of his pistol and rammed home another bullet. The ranks of the aelven spearmen opened, and a figure strode regally through the gap, pale skin glistening in the fading light. She wore a robe of midnight and carried a forked staff of gold. A thick mane of white hair whipped about her cruel, angular features as she fixed her gaze upon Hascull. The sergeant raised his pistol, but before he could even squeeze the trigger, the aelf-woman uttered a single, harsh word.

Agonising pain enveloped Hascull from head to toe, as if his skin were immersed in boiling acid and frenzied rats were clawing their way loose from his innards. He toppled to the marshy ground, gasping and writhing, grinding his teeth together so fiercely that he felt them splinter in his mouth. Blood poured from his eyes and nose. Through a blurry haze of agony, he saw the aelf-witch approach, staring down at him as if he were nothing more than a bug that she had crushed beneath her toes.

‘Tedious creatures,’ she said. ‘Do you lack the wit to even understand your time is over?’

Hascull tried to curse her as a betrayer, but all he could manage was a wordless moan.

‘Kill them all,’ his tormentor said. ‘And be quick about it. I tire of hunting these parasites.’

Two of the witch’s blank-eyed minions loomed over Hascull. As they raised their spears, he closed his eyes and awaited the God-King’s judgement.

‘Hold there, covener.’

The clear, commanding voice carried across the clearing, above the groans and wailing of the wounded. Hascull blinked and saw a gleaming spear-point hovering a hair’s breadth from his eyeball. The sorceress had raised a hand and was now staring towards a solitary figure draped in a lizard-skin cloak, his hands resting easily upon the hilts of the two jewelled scimitars at his belt.

The newcomer was another aelf, and, judging by his gaudy finery and the tattoos and vicious scars that criss-crossed his bald skull, he was of the Scourge – one of the beast-hunting corsair aelves. Any hope that Hascull had had of rescue was dashed immediately, for these privateers had been amongst the first to turn their cloaks at Morathi’s behest. Indeed, Hascull knew these cold-blooded killers all too well, for the Charrwind Rangers had fought beside the Scourge in many a vicious border war.

He found himself wishing his fate lay in the aelf-witch’s hands after all.

‘I am Yhuveth Trask of the *Tide Serpent*,’ said the corsair. ‘And I lay claim to these prisoners.’

‘You have no authority over me, sea-scum,’ said the sorceress, her words dripping with contempt. ‘I serve Drusa Kraeth herself, and the coven matron has ordered all loyalists within a hundred leagues of Har Kuron to be purged. Begone.’

The Scourge aelf strolled closer, apparently unbowed by the glittering array of spears and repeater bows now aimed in his direction.

‘The *villeth* are ours,’ he said. ‘As agreed with Morathi-Khaine herself. No one denies the Scourge their due, covener. I will not ask a second time.’

‘You dare threaten me?’ spat the aelf-witch. ‘Seize this fool at once. I will enjoy peeling the skin from his arrogant bones.’

Several pale-eyed spearmen advanced, spears lowered at Yhuveth Trask’s gut.

The bald aelf shrugged and raised a slender finger to the skies. ‘So be it.’

There was a whistling rush of air and black-flighted bolts grew from the throats of the aelf-witch’s thralls. They toppled, twitching, more missiles riddling their frames. Hascull rolled to the side, placing one of the dead aelves between him and the sudden storm. Trask’s twin scimitars were in his hands in an instant, and he darted across the clearing towards the sorceress, rolling to avoid the bolts of black flame that she hurled at him. Blades clashed upon metal as the aelf-witch lashed out with her staff, her face twisted in fury.

More missiles came whipping through the air, cutting down blank-eyed aelven warriors in droves, even as they reformed their shieldwall with silent efficiency. Then, with blood-curdling cries, figures spilled from the swamp-groves all around the clearing – corsairs and green-cloaked forest aelves, but also humans besides, the latter wearing tattered tunics of black and scarlet.

‘Anvilgard endures!’ they roared, and Hascull felt the first stirring of hope he had known in days.

He staggered to his feet and scrambled in the mud for his loaded pistol. His fingers closed around the reassuring coldness of its ironwood grip. No more than a dozen feet away, the corsair captain exchanged a lightning flurry of blows with the aelf-witch, who parried and slammed her staff into Trask’s midriff before locking her weapon horizontally across his neck.

‘You side with *humans*?’ she spat, pressing down against the corsair’s throat. ‘Against your own kind?’

‘My fate is mine alone to decide,’ said Trask, face twisted as he tried to break her grip. ‘And I’ll have no part of the Shadow Queen’s delusions.’

Hascull’s hands were trembling, but he braced himself against the corpse of a slain aelf and took the shot. His aim was true, and the aelf-witch screeched and whirled, clutching at a bloodied shoulder. Her gaze flashed towards him, promising death, and she thrust her hand at his chest like a claw.

At that moment, Yhuveth Trask’s twin scimitars plunged through her gut. The sorceress gave a piercing shriek, and then her pitch-black eyes rolled back in her skull. The corsair eased the corpse free from his blades and turned to Hascull.

‘Good enough,’ he said, with a grudging nod.

Approaching, the aelf extended a hand and hauled the sergeant to his feet. Around them, the sounds of battle had faded. Hascull saw his wounded being seen to by their rescuers, while corsairs walked amongst the bodies of the foe, dispatching the survivors with efficient thrusts.

‘Can you and your people still fight?’ said Trask, wiping his blades clean on a dead spearman.

‘Aye,’ said Hascull. ‘But I don’t understand. Why—’

‘Because not every aelf of Anvilgard wants a part of this madness,’ said Trask. ‘And because there are those of us in the Scourge fleets who know not to mistake a mask of benevolence for the serpent’s face beneath. Take up your weapons. There is a great deal of killing to be done.’

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