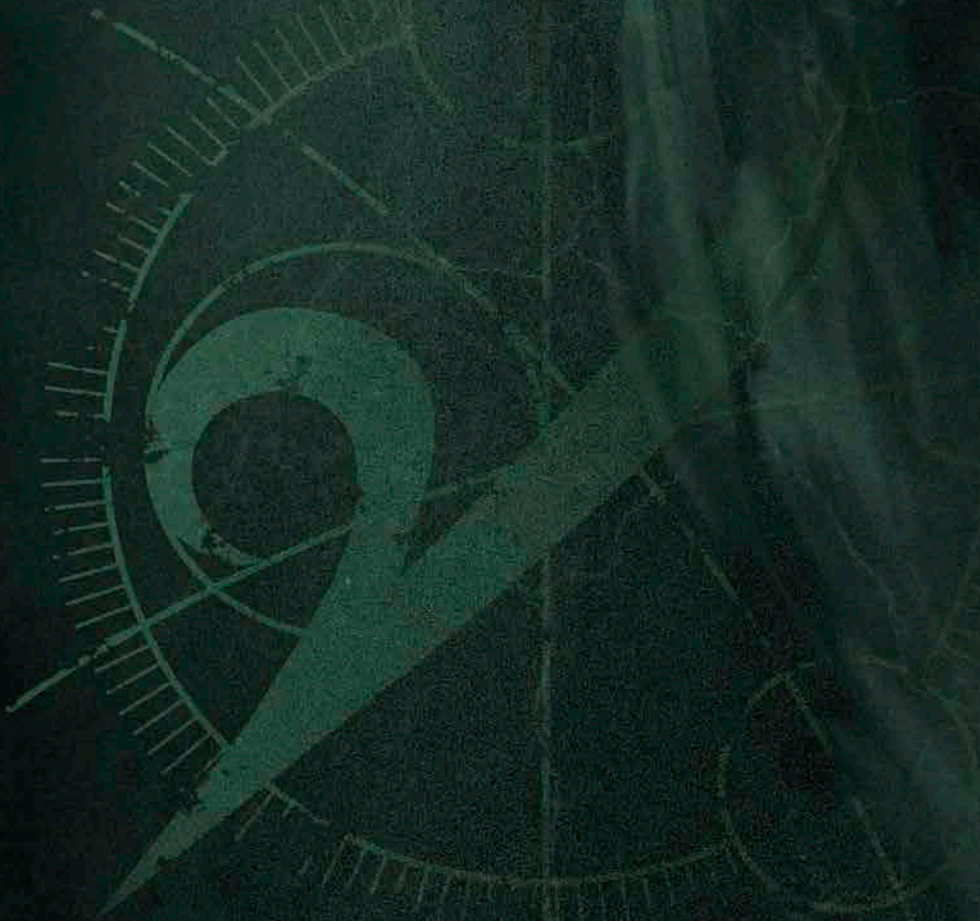




WARHAMMER

**WARHAMMER**  
AGE OF SIGMAR

# MALIGN PORTENTS™





The Warhammer Vault exists to preserve the rich lore and background of Warhammer 40,000 and Warhammer Age of Sigmar. As such, outdated game scenarios and unit rules have been removed from this publication.

The logo for Warhammer Age of Sigmar, featuring the word 'WARHAMMER' in a large, stylized, golden font with a blue and black gradient, and 'AGE OF SIGMAR' in a smaller, similar font below it. The text is set within a decorative, golden, spiked border. The background of the entire page is dark and atmospheric, with a glowing green, flame-like border framing the central text area. On the left side, there is a partial view of a character in dark, ornate armor with a skull-like helmet. At the bottom center, there is a glowing green, flame-like shape that resembles a skull or a piece of armor.

# WARHAMMER

## AGE OF SIGMAR

From the maelstrom of a sundered world, the Eight Realms were born. The formless and the divine exploded into life. Strange, new worlds appeared in the firmament, each one gilded with spirits, gods and men. Noblest of the gods was Sigmar. For years beyond reckoning he illuminated the realms, wreathed in light and majesty as he carved out his reign. His strength was the power of thunder. His wisdom was infinite. Mortal and immortal alike knelt before his lofty throne. Great empires rose and, for a while, treachery was banished. Sigmar claimed the land and sky as his own and ruled over a glorious age of myth.

But cruelty is tenacious. As had been foreseen, the great alliance of gods and men tore itself apart. Myth and legend crumbled into Chaos. Darkness flooded the realms. Torture, slavery and fear replaced the glory that came before. Sigmar turned his back on the mortal kingdoms, disgusted by their fate. He fixed his gaze instead on the remains of the world he had lost long ago, brooding over its charred core, searching endlessly for a sign of hope. And then, in the dark heat of his rage, he caught a glimpse of something magnificent. He pictured a weapon born of the heavens. A beacon powerful enough to pierce the endless night. An army hewn from everything he had lost. Sigmar set his artisans to work and for long ages they toiled, striving to harness the power of the stars. As Sigmar's great work neared completion, he turned back to the realms and saw that the dominion of Chaos was almost complete. The hour for vengeance had come. Finally, with lightning blazing across his brow, he stepped forth to unleash his creation.

The Age of Sigmar had begun.

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*The scent of blood and death fills the air as four factions clash over the Penultima Citadel. This is a crux point in the history of Shyish, for here a Darkoath Warqueen, a Fungoid Cave-Shaman and a Lord-Ordinator do battle to claim the site's fortune-scrying power – while an undead Knight of Shrouds seeks to slay all living things.*

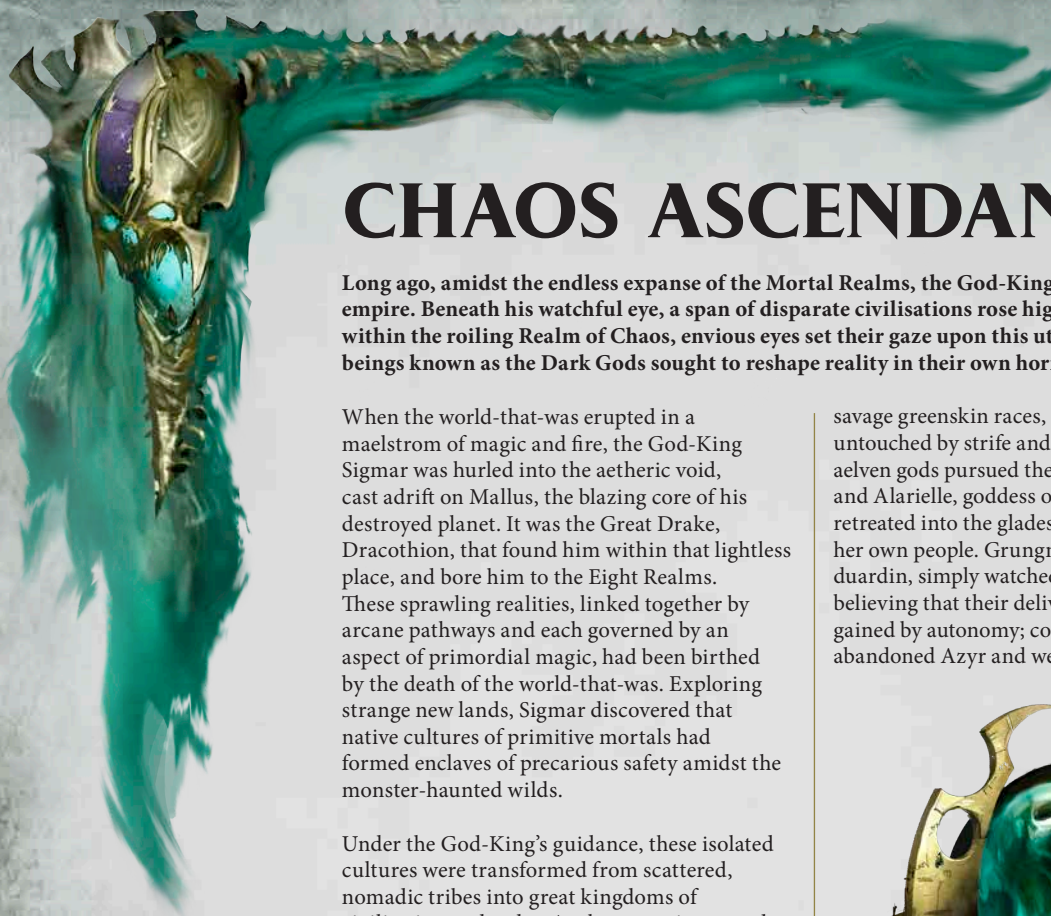




**I**t began with unsettling dreams, and unnatural lights in the sky. Many sleepless nights were spent huddled in fear of spectres that haunted the mind, and that deprivation of rest was itself a curse. Tempers frayed, families fractured and rulers became irate as their subjects fell to distraction and gossip. There was something in the air, they said. Some malediction yet to be, a baneful hour that threatened to turn the feeling of disquiet into a palpable aura of dread.

Waking nightmares spread across every land, promising a deathly fate or the abstract terror of oblivion. As the nights grew longer, a dark solstice dawned, a season of discontent that grew to cast its pall over even the most vigorous soul. In parts of the Realm of Death they called it the Long Helsnacht, or the Hexensendt; in the principle cities of Aqshy, it came to be known as the Ash-smother, while many in Chamon referred to it as the Glimmerdun. Strange phenomena abounded, every traveller bearing a different tale – some were told with shaking hands and wide eyes, others with morbid relish. Traders and explorers carried these ominous accounts and theories through Realmgates to pastures new, only to find that those on the other side had disturbing stories of their own. This period became known to the free cities as the Time of Tribulations, and it was well named.





# CHAOS ASCENDANT

Long ago, amidst the endless expanse of the Mortal Realms, the God-King Sigmar forged a mighty empire. Beneath his watchful eye, a span of disparate civilisations rose high under his rule. Yet within the roiling Realm of Chaos, envious eyes set their gaze upon this utopia. The malicious beings known as the Dark Gods sought to reshape reality in their own horrifying image...

When the world-that-was erupted in a maelstrom of magic and fire, the God-King Sigmar was hurled into the aetheric void, cast adrift on Mallus, the blazing core of his destroyed planet. It was the Great Drake, Dracothion, that found him within that lightless place, and bore him to the Eight Realms. These sprawling realities, linked together by arcane pathways and each governed by an aspect of primordial magic, had been birthed by the death of the world-that-was. Exploring strange new lands, Sigmar discovered that native cultures of primitive mortals had formed enclaves of precarious safety amidst the monster-haunted wilds.

Under the God-King's guidance, these isolated cultures were transformed from scattered, nomadic tribes into great kingdoms of civilisation and order. As the centuries passed, Sigmar's worshippers built soaring monuments in honour of their deity, and forged firm bonds of brotherhood and trade with their neighbours. Humble townships were quickly transformed into sprawling metropolises, works of soul-stirring art and song were created, and across the Mortal Realms the light of hope and reason banished the darkness.

Meanwhile, Sigmar searched high and low for his fellow gods, those he had known from the old world. One by one he found them, scattered across reality, awakening them from their slumber. Sigmar formed a godly pantheon, and for a time the nations of man, duardin, aelf, orruk and even the living dead worked towards the same goal – that of making the Mortal Realms their own.

With tensions undermining it from within, Sigmar's grand alliance was not to last. The Dark Gods of Chaos – those ancient powers birthed by the raging emotions of mortal-kind – had not abandoned their desires to conquer reality. Slowly, insidiously, they worked their fell influence into the grand civilisations that Sigmar had established. Old hatreds were rekindled, and the seeds of treachery were sown deep.

Sigmar, striving to keep his fracturing pantheon together, did not see the sickness growing at the heart of his new order. Nagash, Supreme Lord of the Undead, scorned the God-King's attempts at diplomacy. Gorkamorka, bestial deity of the

savage greenskin races, cared nothing for a world untouched by strife and warfare. The mercurial aelven gods pursued their own mysterious ends, and Alarielle, goddess of the Jade Kingdoms, retreated into the glades of Ghyran to be amongst her own people. Grungni, the godly smith of the duardin, simply watched as his people suffered, believing that their deliverance could only be gained by autonomy; consumed with guilt, he abandoned Azyr and went into exile.



Sensing weakness like sharks drawn to blood, the Chaos Gods launched their invasion of the Mortal Realms. Daemonic legions poured into reality, burning and butchering at will. Great kingdoms were brought down overnight, their citizens slaughtered or forced to swear their souls to the Dark Gods. While Sigmar's armies rallied and fought back bravely against the rising tide of Chaos, it was a valiant but ultimately hopeless effort. His heart heavy with grief, Sigmar was forced to withdraw to Azyr, abandoning his people to the depredation and suffering that would characterise the centuries that followed – a period that came to be known as the Age of Chaos.

Yet Sigmar had not forgotten his tormented flock. In Azyrheim, the seat of his power, the God-King forged an army like no other, an army born to battle the twisted horrors of Chaos. Celestial lightning roared across the Heavens, and the thundering of forge-hammers was like a relentless drumbeat heralding the wars to come. The forces of order would return to reclaim all that they had lost, and the fury of their vengeance would shake the foundations of the realms.

Screams filled the air, the cacophony swelling with every chopping axe and slashing hellblade. The daemons of Khorne had been drawn to the slaughter of the Brazier Promontory – there, blood ran in great rivers, spilling over the cliffs and coastal paths in sheeting waterfalls. Even Borghaster, the towering Bloodthirster that had led a daemon horde since the dawn of mankind, found that sight pleasing to the eye.

The last of the Brazier Tribes had put up a spirited defence of their homelands, but against the Goretide they had already proven far outmatched. When the daemons came for them, drawn by the scent of carnage, the tribespeople were scattered, broken and hacked down. Only a handful survived to see the skies split open, and they were too far gone in their terror to do anything but flee.

A blinding flash came from above, reflected in a hundred congealing pools of gore and glinting in a thousand daemonic eyes. The skies boomed, a war cry from the heavens, a thunderclap so intense it could split time itself. Then came the first of the stormbolts, great columns of electric force that slammed down from above to scorch the earth black.

Out of each fading dome of energy strode a new breed of warrior clad in gleaming armour from head to toe. Tall and strong, their faces covered by impassive masks, they wielded hammers and blades that crackled with the aetheric power of the tempest above. These newcomers fell upon the daemons with a great roar of battle-lust, pent up over the Long Wait. They fought like lions as they slew and slew again.

The daemons of Khorne love nothing more than combat, and they counter-charged their new enemies on a hundred fronts. Long did that conflict rage. Where weapons of holy sigmarite smote a daemon down, it vanished with a howl to the Realm of Chaos from whence it came. Where a daemonic blade or axe felled a Stormcast Eternal, their essence would disincorporate, flashing back up to High Azyr. At day's end, the battlefield held only a knot of battered and weary warriors of Sigmar, and even they trudged south to reinforce their kin.

When the promontory harboured only the slain, a dark energy shimmered across it. Slowly, one by one, the corpses of the Brazier Tribes rose unsteadily to their feet and staggered through the mud, their eyes locked on something no living man could see.





# THE VENGEANCE OF HIGH AZYR

In a furious eruption of light and thunder, Sigmar's Tempest broke across the Eight Realms. Warriors clad in gleaming plate armour slammed to earth upon columns of celestial energy, driving back the legions of Chaos through bloody sacrifice. These champions were the Stormcast Eternals, and their coming would herald a new age of hope and righteousness.

Sigmar's long isolation upon the throne of Azyr was not easy. Every fibre of the God-King's being yearned to return to the Eight Realms, to make war upon the hated Chaos Gods and their twisted servants. Yet in his heart, Sigmar knew that there could be no triumph with the forces he had at his disposal, outnumbered and overpowered as they were by the horrors that were sweeping forth from the Realm of Chaos.

To fight back he needed a new breed of warrior, able to face the manifold abominations of the Dark Gods with no fear or doubt in their hearts. And so it was that the Stormcast Eternals came to be. The moment before they gave their lives in the war against Chaos, the spirits of mortal heroes were called to Azyr upon the celestial storm, there to be transformed into champions of peerless martial prowess and indomitable will. Clad in gleaming sigmarite, wielding blades and hammers imbued with the God-King's lightning, they became the ultimate weapons in the war against Chaos. Even death could not claim them, for when struck down they would return to Azyrheim as blurs of celestial power, ready to be reforged anew.

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*This night we ride the storm. This night we smite the savage and the daemon.*

*This night, we fling open gates long closed. The fallen will be avenged a hundredfold, and the Dark Gods themselves will feel our fury.*

*This night, brothers, we bring war!*

*- Vandus Hammerhand,  
Lord-Celestant of the Hammers of Sigmar*

---

The Stormcast Eternals' first challenge would be to claim the precious Gates of Azyr. These transdimensional portals would be vital in the conflict to come, for they opened the paths between realms, allowing armies to travel unthinkable distances in mere moments. The first lay within the Brimstone Peninsula, which had long been claimed by the mortal legions of Khorne. The Hammers of Sigmar, first amongst the Stormhosts, were hurled into the field upon bolts of heavenly lightning. Led by the valiant

Lord-Celestant Vandus Hammerhand, this spearhead force was met by the Goretide of Korghos Khul, amongst the mightiest of mortal devotees to the Blood God Khorne. Energised by the prospect of a fresh and worthy foe, the frenzied berserker horde fell upon the Stormcast Eternals. After a hard and bloody struggle, the God-King's warriors broke the back of the Chaos army and flung open the First Gate of Azyr, clearing the path for the armies of the heavens. The first engagement of the Realmgate Wars had been decided in the God-King's favour, but there would be many more battles to come.

The strife that followed shook the realms to their core. Great hosts of daemons and slaving barbarians fell upon the Stormcast Eternals and their allies, driven to incandescent rage by this intrusion into their domain. Yet the Stormcast Eternals would not be denied. Sigmar's champions strove ever forwards, claiming Realmgate after Realmgate. The blood of heathens and savages ran in gushing torrents.

Amongst the armies of order, too, there were many casualties. The servants of Chaos, swollen with power after an age of slaughter and conquest, proved deadly foes, and many noble warriors were sent back to Azyr upon the storm. Though the Stormcast Eternals were to all intents and purposes immortal, they were immune to neither blade nor spell. When they fell in battle their bodies could be remade, but each fresh Reforging stripped them of a little more of their humanity.

In a final, tumultuous showdown before the great fortresses of the All-gates – fortified portals that led from each realm to the contested Realmgate nexus known as the Allpoints – the Realmgate Wars came to a close. At great cost the forces of Sigmar had won valuable territory, establishing new outposts and raising cities of order that stand tall and proud to this day. Yet even now this hard-fought frontier remains far from secure. The hosts of Chaos strike back daily against their hated foes, and the greenskin tribes have been roused to fresh heights of savage fury by the escalating conflict. Meanwhile, in Shyish, the Realm of Death, the power of necromantic magic swells further with every passing day...



**A**rkhan the Black, monarch of the ancient dead, master of the Black Disciples and First of the Mortarchs, ascended the ninety-ninth stair of Nagashizzar. Behind him stalked his dread abyssal steed Razarak, the giant creature's furnace-hot breath curdling the air. Nearly eight feet in height, Arkhan was an undead colossus, clad in the magisterial robes of sacrament and wielding the fabled staff Khenash-an. He was a breaker of nations and the lord of uncounted skeletal legions. Yet he was an insect in comparison to the godly monstrosity upon the shadeglass throne before him.

*'YOU MAY SPEAK, FAVOURED SERVANT.'*

The words reverberating through Arkhan's skull shook him to his core. He knelt, took off his towering helm, and bowed his head. 'Master,' he said, 'I exist to obey. What conquests do you ask of me?'

*'LOOK AROUND YOU, ARKHAN THE BLACK.'*

Arkhan dutifully turned and took in the deathly panorama; visible from Nagash's dais of supplication was a vista that stretched for miles around. Reaching to the horizon was a vast metropolis under construction, work-gangs of the living and the dead grinding themselves to nothingness in monotonous, clockwork labours to

raise monuments to Nagash's glory. Skull-faced statues, runic obelisks and monolithic black pyramids – some of which were inverted and hanging in the air – covered the lands.

*'WHAT I REQUIRE IS FOR YOU TO FASHION ALL THE WORLDS IN THIS IMAGE.'*

'Would that I had the might,' said Arkhan, 'I would already have done so.'

*'I HAVE THE POWER TO DO IT, FOOL. IT IS YOU THAT MUST SUPPLY THE IMPLEMENTS.'*

Arkhan bowed his head once more. 'Of course, my liege. Merely ask it of me, and it will be done.'

*'YOUR LEGION WILL BRING TO ME THE GRAVE-SAND REALMSTONE OF THIS LAND, GRAIN BY GRAIN IF NECESSARY.'*

'That grand labour would take millennia, master.'

*'WHETHER IT TAKES A THOUSAND YEARS,' boomed Nagash, 'TEN THOUSAND, OR TWENTY, IT WILL BE DONE.'*

'Of course,' said Arkhan, 'in gathering Shyish's power, your divinity will scale new heights.'

*'THE DEAD ARE MINE, AND MINE ALONE. I WILL ENSURE IT. NOW GO. DO MY BIDDING.'*

Arkhan the Black bowed low, picked up his helm, and began the work of aeons.



# THE MORTAL REALMS

Eight vast realities hang in the starless void, each governed by a different aspect of primordial magic. These sprawling worlds are enormous in scope – far beyond the measure of mortal minds. Dotted with ancient wonders and time-ravaged ruins, they are home to dangers beyond counting. They are the Realms of Life, Beasts, Metal, Fire, Death, Shadow, Light, and Heavens.

In the wake of the destruction of the world-that-was, great concentrations of magic were expelled into the cosmic void. Slowly, this eldritch matter began to coalesce, dividing – according to the mysterious yet immutable laws that bind like unto like – into eight loosely spherical realities, each dominated by a single elemental force. Over time, the magical essence that comprised each of these realmspheres crystallised, forming landscapes of astonishing scale and grandeur. Thus, the Eight Realms were born.

Surrounding the realms is a great expanse of unaligned magic, a featureless emptiness known as the aetheric void or the Great Nothing. Beyond this is the churning nightmare of the Realm of Chaos, domain of the Dark Gods. Some Azyrite scholars teach that tendrils of hateful matter constantly reach forth from this roiling hellscape, forever seeking to pierce the veil between worlds and spill the essence of Chaos into reality. The Realm of Heavens, Azyr, gleams at the apex of the cosmos. This realm alone stands apart from the Dark Gods, for it is the seat of Sigmar's power, and it was here that he retreated during the terrible Age of Chaos.

The innate essence of each of the Eight Realms shapes not only its physical formation, but also moulds the spirits of all who dwell there. Three realms above all others have been resettled by the free peoples since Sigmar's Tempest roiled across the lands. Aqshy, the Realm of Fire, is a place of raging passions and blazing intensity, dominated by volcanic mountain ranges, boiling seas and smouldering ash-wastes corrupted by the ravages of Chaos. Its people are hot-blooded and impulsive, taking fierce joy in the moment rather than worrying for the future. Their lives burn bright but briefly.

Chamon, the Realm of Metal, is an ever-shifting array of drifting sub-realms and transmutational oceans, bound together by mystical bonds like the crazed invention of some omnipotent alchemist. Chamon breeds mercurial souls; change is constant in the Realm of Metal, especially since Tzeentch staked his claim to it and twisted it beyond the bounds of mortal sanity. Those of its people who survived the maddening flux brought unto their homelands by the Architect of Fate have learned to accept the impermanence of existence and the need to adapt at will.

Ghyran, the Realm of Life, is a place of growth and abundance. Here, living cities of vine and bough reach up to taste the sunlight, while vast oceans of swaying crystal-grass fill the air with their haunting melodies. The people of Ghyran once celebrated the waxing and waning of a dozen different seasons, at one with the harmony of nature. Since the coming of Chaos they are locked in a constant battle for survival against the corruption, entropy and rampant disease spread by Nurgle.

Ancient portals known as Realmgates connect the Eight Realms to one another, and also join locations within each realm. These passages bridge the void between worlds, allowing intrepid souls to travel between and across them. Realmgates can take many forms. Some are soaring archways of weathered marble, covered in runes and warding glyphs. Some take the form of night-black pools of chill water, or mist-shrouded stone circles. Others are still more elusive, only appearing when the constellations are aligned and the omens right. The touch of Chaos has warped many of these eldritch passageways, allowing the Dark Gods to spill their malignant legions from the nightmarish hellscape of the Realm of Chaos into reality.

## LIGHTS IN THE DARKNESS

Sigmar's victories in the Realmgate Wars began an age of renewal and consolidation. Great cities were raised upon the ruins of the past, fortified with mighty war machines and guarded by the shining hosts of Azyrheim. Gradually, worship of the God-King began to spread across the Eight Realms once more.

The Stormcast Eternals had made many gains during their initial campaigns against Chaos. Swathes of enemy territory had been reclaimed at great cost, and then consecrated with the blood of the faithful, banishing the taint of corruption. Sigmar now aimed to secure these reconquered lands. He desired to establish a resurgent empire, a network of great cities that would act as havens and bastions for the scattered mortal tribes that had been so devastated by the depredations of Chaos. This would be no simple task, for the Dark Gods were far from defeated, and launched fresh assaults upon his domain with increasing regularity.



Hammerhal, the Twin-tailed City, was the first foundation of the God-King's new empire. This metropolis was built around a vast portal between the Realms of Fire and Life. It is, in effect, two great settlements governed as one. Hammerhal Aqsha is the industrial heartland, an urban sprawl guarded by towering walls and the rumbling cog-forts of the Ironweld. Hammerhal Ghyra is a verdant mirror of its twin, a lush garden-city set amidst the overwhelming fecundity of Ghyran. Great lava-moats channelled from Hammerhal Aqsha keep the endless forests of Ghyran at bay, and in return, Hammerhal Ghyra provides vast bounties of healing water and rare trade goods.

More settlements followed those first hard-won beachheads. The Seeds of Hope – a trio of mighty bastions – were established in Ghyran. The Living City, the Phoenicium and Greywater Fastness are their names, and each was forged in the crucible of war. Hordes of monsters, twisted cultists and war-crazed greenskins sought to topple these bastions of law and sanity from the moment of their inception, but the forces of Order fought back with bravery born of desperation. The forest-folk known as the sylvaneth came to the aid of Sigmar's people and

their allies, and in a series of momentous battles, the siege of darkness was shattered. The Seeds of Hope stand stronger than ever.

Years on from the culmination of that bloody campaign, many new cities have been established by the God-King's forces, every one built around the formidable shadow of a Stormkeep – the imposing citadels of the Stormcast Eternals that guard each reclaimed Realmgate. Anvilgard and Tempest's Eye in Aqshy, Excelsis in Ghur, Glymmsforge and Lake Lethis in the Realm of Death – these beacons of progress teem with mortal souls, and their battle-hardened garrisons and defences keep the manifold threats of the realms at bay.

Yet the inhabitants of these havens would be fools to think they are safe behind their high walls. Power invites challenge, and the Eight Realms are filled with warlords who would see the sacking of one of these great cities as proof of their might. Spies and cultists seep into the bloodstream of civilisation like a spreading poison, and ancient things stir in the dust-laden catacombs far beneath bustling city streets. The forces of Order must remain ever vigilant, for their empire is built upon the precipice of ruin.

---

*'There are places where  
valour reigns, my child,  
where death does not  
thirst so for the souls  
of the living. Some say  
that Hammerhal Ghyra's  
gardens can feed a million  
mouths, and that the  
Phoenicium has the power  
to bring a man's spirit back  
from Shyish. But these  
places are few, and still  
assailed on all sides. We  
must fight the darkness  
each day so they may  
thrive, and our people will  
thrive with them.'*  
- Elder Cahastor of Neos

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At first, the doom that was to cast its shadow across the dawning Age of Sigmar was slow, insidious, and all but ignored. After all, Chaos' hold upon the Mortal Realms was still strong, and far more immediate threats abounded.

The first month saw strange omens and dark prophecies emerge like mushrooms after a spring rain. Here, a farmer would shuck an ear of maize to find not rows of corn kernels, but scatterings of human teeth. There, a maid would milk her cows to find them yielding only blood, whilst herdsmen ran for dear life as their wild-eyed livestock stampeded in rabid confusion. In coastal villages, entire populations disappeared overnight, the cold mist of morning trailing like sea serpents through empty buildings. In the hills, travellers seeking succour would reach hamlets and townships only to find their inhabitants comatose, yet floating at waist height in the air, or sleeping unwakeable under their beds. Millers awoke at dawn to find the sails of their windmills inextricably strung with corpses, and palace servants found bloody footprints appearing from nowhere to mar freshly scrubbed flagstones.

Even the land itself was changed by these omens. Through gardens and cemeteries grew roses that dripped with human blood and stank of decay; their thorny vegetation choked wholesome plants and pierced lush vegetation. Dark and scuttling things were brought to the surface of the waking world too. Swarms of skull-faced insects thrashed and roiled in the skies. Dust-trailing moths fluttered thick in barnyards and libraries. Flesh-eating scarabs burrowed up from dried mudflats and beaches to sink razored mandibles into those that trod nearby.

Larger entities redolent with darkness and doom roamed at will, for they came in such numbers that the free peoples had no chance of holding them at bay. Carrion crows cawed and chattered in every field, preying upon lesser birds in great masses, only to leave the bodies of their victims mangled but uneaten. Black dogs, slavering of maw and red of eye, walked over crossroads at midnight on their nameless hunts. Hideous scarecrows, as much bone as straw, fluttered their rags even when there was no wind, sometimes even taking wing to fly backwards around the steeples of temples and town halls. Everywhere that an animal sickened or grew near death, it stared in accusation at any who met its gaze, as if privy to something that no other living soul knew.

The second month saw the first deaths, as the omens worsened to become lethal curses. Wispy marsh lights lured the incautious to drown in

peaty bogs, or to fall into open graves, there to be clawed to their own demise by the wriggling corpses inside. In townsfolk's kitchens, carving knives would spontaneously rattle in their blocks, or even fly across the room to impale their owners. Graveyards would come alive, skeletal hands reaching from the earth to grab at the ankles of passers-by – and would not let go. In such places, victims turned to living corpses too, grabbing at those who came after them until chains of cadavers spanned many boneyards.

That the phenomena were linked to Shyish none could deny, and in every realm, superstitions old and new became ever more popular. The reaction of many Aqshians was to burn all the brighter, carrying lit candles upon which they could sear their skin – or even wearing them as apparel – each scorch or dribble of hot wax causing a sharp sting of pain that would keep them focused and vital. Those in Ghyran who worshipped the eternal cycle saw everdusk lead to the season of death, as ever – but when looking for the blessed sunlight of rebirth and green shoots of springseed, found nothing. Many Ghyranites made offerings from their dwindling food supplies in the hope that the cycle of seasons would be renewed, but their cries for help went unheard, and they starved nonetheless. Those in Shyish were aware of the nature of the undead, and responded with a grim practicality. Some wrapped their deceased in tough ironthorn vines. Others used great digger-winces to inter their dead upside-down in deep pits, or buried their relatives in cold iron grave-cages so that even should they be raised, they could not plague those who still walked by the light of day. Yet the disciples of death were many, and thrived in the darkness.

Even to High Azyr, word of these forbidding omens was carried. Yet the God-King had little time for tales of woe and hardship, for he knew that his people experienced fresh hells every day in the name of his great endeavour. Only when one of his most trusted generals came to him, troubled to the depths of his soul, was Sigmar moved to act – and in doing so, change the fate of the Mortal Realms.

Sigmar's reaction to the deathly omens spreading across the lands was not to venture into Shyish with the intention of calling Nagash to account. Neither was it to amass his armies and send them on pre-emptive strikes against the strongholds of the dead. For Sigmar was no longer a warrior-god who fought with strength as his weapon and indignant fury as his driving force; he had become wise, steeped in the knowledge drawn from defeat as well as victory. And in this, he had become mightier than ever before.

**V**andus Hammerhand awoke in his meditation cell, his breath coming in ragged gasps.

Sparks crackled around the Lord-Celestant's heart as it beat fast and hard, booming within his chest like a war drum sounding the charge. He had experienced the vision again, another visitation from the figure of pure celestial energy he had come to think of as the Lightning Man. This time the thing had been even closer – so close he could make out its whispers under the rumble of storms to come.

'Look not to the horizon,' it had said. 'The danger is that which dwells beneath. There is another tide rising. A tide of death.' The words resounded around his head, echoing still, as if the Lightning Man had been murmuring its crackling warnings in the cell with him. And perhaps he had.

Morbid scenes filled Vandus' mind: carrion feasting on abattoir wastelands, barren grey deserts, and great churning whirlpools that drained all life into a bottomless pit of nothingness. All the folk tales in Azyrheim's lesser districts, all those traveller's myths and stories he had lately dismissed out of hand – perhaps they were not idle rumours after all, but the ripples of causality bleeding out from a cataclysm yet to be.

Vandus pushed down the splitting headache that threatened to consume him, stood tall, inhaled the incense of the meditation cells, and gathered his wits. The God-King must be informed.

Even after so many audiences, the majesty of Sigmar's throne room still took Vandus' breath away. The air under its vaulted ceiling was a cosmos wrought in miniature, a constellation of purest Azyrite energy. There, at the grand chamber's heart, was the God-King, sat proudly upon his throne. Starsilver glowed around him, flares of energy reaching out to connect with the elaborate golden orrery high above.

'Approach, Vandus Hammerhand.' The God-King's voice was the rumble of distant war. 'You have no need to kneel.'

'My liege,' said Vandus. 'I bring warning of dire portents – but to my shame, no proof. I ask only that you listen.'

'What have you foreseen, son of the heavens?'

Vandus talked of his visions, his fears, and the consequences of a failure he could not countenance. He talked of dooms to come, of vistas of shattered ruin, and of a realm torn asunder. But most of all, he talked of death.

'These are truths yet to be,' concluded Vandus. 'Unless we make of them falsehoods.'

Sigmar said nothing, brooding for so long that Vandus felt himself diminished by the silence. Then the God-King nodded, rose to his feet, and walked from the throne room towards the High Stair of Sigendil.





# WARSCRYER CITADELS

Warscryer Citadels are impressive strongholds built upon meteorites hurled by Sigmar himself. These heaven-sent monoliths, named scryer-stones by those who first discovered them, are potent sources of celestial magic – those who master them gain the power of prophecy.

The God-King's first act after Vandus Hammerhand had brought news of his visions to his throne room was to ascend the golden stairs that led from the Sigmarabulum towards the High Star Sigendil. He made that sheer climb up cliffs fashioned from sheets of cosmic light, and underwent journeys of the mind into the stars themselves. Legend has it that though it burned him in body and soul, he took the brightest celestial bodies from the great vault of the Heavens, scooping them from the skies in one great motion and hurling them with all his might across the cosmos. Hundreds of comets burned through the aetheric void, flickering with the azure flames of Sigmar's will. In every realm save Azyr itself, those who looked up to the firmament witnessed a meteor shower like no other.

The God-King's undertaking was for more than mere spectacle, however. Blazing through the skies, the meteors plunged through clouds and fog-thick miasmas to strike home with earth-shaking force, each embedding itself deep within a land already freed from the yoke of Chaos. Only then did Sigmar reveal to his trusted warriors that which he intended – and not to the rank and file of his Stormhosts, but to the Lord-Ordinators, experts in the engineering of fate itself through the medium of war.

Sigmar's Lord-Ordinators forged a path to the site of each meteor's impact, their given duty to use their prophetic powers for the betterment of the greater crusade. Each of the celestial meteorites was rich in realmstone, a substance often thought of by seers and wise men as crystallised magic. In truth, realmstone took a different form in each of the Mortal Realms and beyond; in Aqshy, for example, it was like dense coal permanently aflame with primordial fire, whereas in Blight City it was a dark green-black mineral so baleful a shard could slowly kill its bearer by proximity alone.

Within the earth-bound comets were rich veins of the Azyrite realmstone known to some as celestium, deposits of stardust twinkling white and blue wherever they were exposed by the sheared surfaces of the rock. Learned men with willpower enough to focus through the fractured visions they granted could mine these monoliths to divine visions of the future, and espy those deeds usually invisible to mortal eyes. Word spread swiftly of their power, for as cities such as

Excelsis had proven, even a glimpse of the future could be of incalculable value. So it transpired that when the Lord-Ordinators sent by Sigmar reached the sites of their quarries, many had already been claimed by the mages and seers of the nearest free cities. Scaffolds, stairs, even dwellings had been hastily built around each scryer-stone; many boasted battlements, or domed arcanoscopes that could be adjusted by the cog-toothed winch mechanisms within.



The Lord-Ordinators were quick to claim these sites as their own. Where Warscryer Citadels were held by scholars of one of Sigmar's cities, or garrisoned by the Freeguilds, the arrival of a Lord-Ordinator had already been foreseen in the omens given by the meteor's realmstone, and they were yielded without strife. Where they were occupied by another race that traced lineage to Sigmar's Pantheon of Order, the sheer splendour and bellicose authority of a Lord-Ordinator were usually enough to convince them to yield command. Those possessed by the agents of darkness were besieged by the Lord-Ordinators and the force of Stormcast Eternals sent at their side – so sudden were their strikes that before long, the usurpers were hurled down and the Warscryer Citadels claimed by their rightful inheritors. In some cases, those victories were but the first strikes in a wider war for control that saw a Warscryer Citadel change hands many times, for even the primitive shamans of the savage races realised they were valuable indeed, and that those canny enough to make use of their power of prophecy would be greatly rewarded.

# LORD-ORDINATORS

Masters of celestial engineering, the Lord-Ordinators are wise men who have shaped the Mortal Realms through the word of Sigmar and the readings of the heavens. When their sharp and serious minds alone cannot remould reality, they take up their hammers and march to war, hewing the future with each blow as a master mason shapes the stone of a temple to Sigmar's glory.

The Lord-Ordinators were the first Stormcast Eternal officers to reinforce those territories claimed by Sigmar's Tempest. Working in close concert with the Lord-Castellants that guarded each site, the Lord-Ordinators oversaw the construction of the Stormkeeps, and dealt extensively with the Dispossessed work gangs that raised them high. Each a combination of arcane engineer and celestial prophet, the Lord-Ordinators are tasked with helping to shape the future to the God-King's will through the observation of these two sacred duties.

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*'The Stormhosts change the fate of the realms with each thunderous strike. Yet next to the innumerable minions of darkness, we are few indeed. We cannot fail, nor lose our way, for we must shape the future with hammer, blade and bolt.'*

- Vorrus Starstrike, Lord-Ordinator of the Hammers of Sigmar

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The first duty – that of arcane engineer – is an art form as much as a science. Overseeing the construction of every major keep, castle and fortress to bear the icon of the twin-tailed comet, the Lord-Ordinators plan the sacred buildings of Sigmar's new civilisations from the ground up. In conjunction with the most expert masons of the free peoples, they will ensure that every design, cornerstone and sacred mosaic is in its right place, the better to channel the power and energy of the stars above. Through careful ritual and the correct placement of holy scripture, it is the Lord-Ordinators that sow the magic of Azyr into Sigmar's defences – thus elevating simple structures into arcane defence networks that can guard the spirit as well as the body. Should a person gifted with the

witch-sight look upon a building raised by a Lord-Ordinator for long enough, they would see traces of glittering celestial magic outlining every lintel, line and junction within that structure. In this way, the Lord-Ordinators' first duty lends Sigmar's strongholds a measure of protection from the supernatural foes that would see them torn down. These structures are further bolstered by ensorcelled artillery pieces of sigmarite and blessed steel. Woe betide those that stray beneath their vigil, for they will likely end their days as a mangled and blackened corpse.

The second duty – that of prophet – is even more complex. It is for them to set the future in motion according to Sigmar's will. They must scry the stars, sift the omens and arrive at useful truths, all the while walking a line between visionary seer and rational mathematician. They must be the masters of the gilded orrery, the cosmograph, the arcanoscope and the divining needle, applying strict logic and taking leaps of faith as necessary.

During the Time of Tribulations, it fell to the Lord-Ordinators to track the movement of spiritual energies across the realms, and draw conclusions accordingly. They were entrusted with an irreplaceable resource in order to achieve this, with Sigmar himself sending meteors rich in celestium through the cosmos for the betterment of the God-King's cause. Whether the Lord-Ordinators can engineer the culmination of Sigmar's plan to safeguard the future remains to be seen. What is certain is that, to a man, they have witnessed a great deal of spiritual emanations coming from the realm of Shyish...





**U**p stretched the throne of skulls, up and up again, an impossible mountain of heads claimed in the Blood God's name. At its peak, far beyond such notions as sanity and cosmic law, was a monolithic and ornate throne of brass, and atop this structure sat the being that men call Khorne. He brooded, his loathing so intense it crackled around him to blacken the air.

There was sorcery on the wind. He could smell its foul stench over the familiar scents of boiling blood, scorched bone and red-hot metal. Sorcery – the last refuge of cowards, cheats and weaklings. Khorne's cavernous nostrils flared once more in his bloodstained snout. Yes, the stink was becoming stronger.

Khorne bit into his own claw, a fang like an iceberg drawing divine blood. He rubbed the liquid between his calloused fingers with a sound like a distant earthquake, and drank in the scent once more. His mind was filled with pleasing visions of skulls, more numerous than ever before, stretching far out into the distance. Skulls twice-reaped, thrice even – all buried, exhumed and claimed again in his name.

But no blood.

In this vision, even the brackish, clotted blood of the risen corpse dried out and turned to dust. Endless ranks of skeletal forms marched, some headless, some armoured, some monstrous, yet all acting in perfect synchronicity as they fought one another with clockwork, emotionless movements. There was no fury here, no righteous anger. None of the red vital fluid that flowed in rivers to please him, to invigorate him, to allay his unquenchable thirst. Only magic.

Khorne snarled, taking up a vast brazen skull from the foot of his throne and crushing it into a billion splinters with his fist before hurling them out into reality, where they would lodge into the minds of mortals and ensure this vision would not come to pass. There would be a great deal of blood spilt every day in his name. Oceans of it.


**T**he Great Architect's fractal mind span and whirled as his countless consciousnesses warred, riddled, made pacts with and betrayed each other. Like some cosmic kaleidoscope it refracted reality over and over as it contorted and folded in mind-boggling profusion. Along the crystal strands of thought the many minds roamed, ensuring victory here, undermining themselves there. Tzeentch's needling mind-fingers plucked at the skeins like the legs of a demented arachnid, expertly changing the state of a thousand realities with every passing second.

It happened slowly at first, but unmistakably. Though some of those threads sung with fresh arcane possibilities under his multitudinous gaze, many of the strands that made up the tapestry of the future had become brittle. Some broke even as he observed them, and turned to dust.

Unchanging and inert.

Almost all of Tzeentch's minds felt a backlash of intense antipathy at the sight. They led to a future, vast and growing ever more so, that consisted of order, predictability and stasis. That appalling dystopia was far off, and yet undeniable in its potential. A great will was driving parts of the tapestry towards it, strand by dusty strand.

Keening in a hundred thousand mortal languages at once, Tzeentch reached out the needle talons of his mind and set to work.



**N**urgle hummed softly to himself in the basement of his manse, stirring his cauldron with a ladle that could hold seven seas at once. He breathed in deeply, blighted lungs flapping within his long-rotten chest, and sighed in contentment. The bouquet of stench rising from within was so strong it would kill a godbeast. But then...

Brows like mountain ranges furrowed, their hillock pimples squirting pus into the multi-coloured broth below. Something was just not right. The Plague God raised the ladle to his ravaged, rubbery lips, and stuck the tip of his long black tongue in the liquid. So very, wonderfully foul. Yet true enough, there was something wrong with it. The bland taste of ashes filled his mouth.

Ashes and lifeless dust.

Below, the cauldron's broth began to turn grey, the steam rising from it thinning as it grew cold and congealed. Nurgle began to feel something akin to revulsion as he saw his cauldron's surface as a landscape of dunes. Skeletal corpses marched across them in long columns. They were not properly alive, nor fertile ground enough to host smaller forms of life. Indeed, they boasted nary a maggot between them. Through the magic of another, they had been cut from the glorious cycle of life and death, claimed by a force of horrible stasis that had no respect for entropy, nor true rebirth.


The edge of the cauldron, fashioned in the guise of a snake consuming its own tail, started to shudder and writhe. The serpent choked, coughing up its cannibal's feast, and the cauldron began to spill Nurgle's concoction all over the floor of his mansion. Panicking, the Plaguefather put his vast, flabby hands on the edge of the cauldron, flesh sizzling as he tried to scoop the burning-hot liquid back in place. Pushing his mountainous gut against the rim, eyes stinging with disbelief and confusion, he managed to stuff the cauldron-snake's tail back in its maw, and seal the rim back together with a great gobbet of his own sputum. He stood back, gasping after his sudden and unexpected exertions. Soon his anguish turned to fury – the fury of a patriarch who sees his dynasty threatened by something that would take his children away forever.

'No,' said Grandfather Nurgle, the word booming across the cosmos to unsettle stomachs and trouble bowels in every realm.

Outside, in the garden, threatening storm clouds gathered.

**S**laanesh gave a moan like the music of the spheres, caught somewhere between crippling agony and blinding ecstasy as the tiniest wisp of energy was drawn from within his essence. At the height of the spasming torture, at the zenith of sensation, he saw a flash of potential futures. A realm of dust, of bone, of lifeless nations remade and re-ordered to please one single soul. That ancient spirit was steeped in excess. Slaanesh could feel its need, its megalomania, drawn towards obsessions that it could never escape. Something like a smile tugged at Slaanesh's chain-pierced lips, but it soon faded. Where were the bacchanals in his name? Where were the pleasures of the flesh? The manic dancing, the false joy, the frenzied, desperate hunger? What victory could be called complete without riotous, extravagant celebration? To have reality brought in thrall to one singular, overwhelming desire was not enough. It would...

Slaanesh could barely bring himself to conceive of the horror, thrashing in mad, bellowing panic against his penumbral chains. It would be... dull.



**T**he Great Horned Rat crawled between the hidden places of the void, his thirteen sky-scratching whiskers twitching as he stared down at the teeming multitudes of Blight City. Their endeavours were pleasing to him, as they had always been. So many, now, it was hard for even him to keep track. Let the Four take the brunt of the God-King's resurgence. The myriad swarm would continue to grow more powerful in the corners of each realm, burrowing through time and space to make ready for the great upheaval even as his fellow Dark Gods and the Pantheon of Order expended their strength. When the time was right, he would turn the Mortal Realms to blighted wastelands fit only for glorious vermin, thereby rising through the Chaos pantheon to make the other Dark Gods kneel before him. It was a solid plan, and the Great Horned Rat was in no mind to change it.

His whiskers twitched again, sending rippling auroras of green-black energy cascading across the skies of the Mortal Realms. There was something coming; its rippling in the smog-ridden miasma of Blight City was unmistakable. It was the touch of death – or rather undeath – laced through with the arid tang of the desert tomb. Something that sought to contend for the same power he himself would rightfully claim.

A rival.

The Great Horned Rat curled his lip, the glow of warppfire and infernal industry glinting from colossal chisel-like teeth that could sever realities. No rival would take his place on the ladder. No would-be godling would disrupt his ascension. He was the lord of pestilence, of vermin and of endless, starving wastelands, and he had already suffered the sneers of the Four for far too long.

If the cosmos was to turn to utter ruin, it would be him and him alone that would ensure it.

Slowly, one by one, the tribes and nations that worshipped the Dark Gods were visited by powerful visions. Only those who paid homage to all the Ruinous Powers experienced these glimpses of glory and incredible epiphanies in full – most of the Gods of Chaos wished to unite their mortal followers under one banner, no matter which god they called patron. With the worshippers of Khorne, Nurgle, Tzeentch and Slaanesh fighting as one they could conquer any obstacle.

So it was the gods sent visions to those in their favour. Barbaric champions found splinters of brazen rage wedged into their minds. Across seas and through Realmgates they roamed, the shards of certainty driving them on without rest even as they empowered them to bring warring tribes to heel with displays of strength.

Hardened survivors were visited in the night by tiny flies that alighted upon them in their sleep. They awoke with a burning, feverish need to tell of the deathly threat to their clans, their tribes, their nations – even their species. The word of the coming cataclysm spread like wildfire, and before long, armed hosts of dozens of different nations marched across the wilderness in search of war.

Gifted war-leaders were visited by disturbing dreams in which their people were buried alive in corpse-dust. Confiding in their nearest kin, they found that they too had experienced the same nightmares. Though they kept their reasons a close secret, these inspirers of men took their people on a great exodus, their sermons and speeches bringing ever more hosts unto their banner.

After the celebrations of their latest victories, many warlords awoke with a doleful dirge stuck in their heads – a minstrel's verse that repeated over and over, infuriating in its constancy, and only abated when they spoke of it to others. The verse talked of a time where death alone would rule, so vivid and unsettling in its description that warriors and kings alike swore to do everything in their power to avoid it coming true.

In the shadows of toppled civilisations, the sewer-riddled bowels of cities and the gnawed-out spaces between reality, tiny albino rats climbed the shoulders of those who schemed over conquests long-planned. With a whisper here and a sharp bite there, they put the notion of oncoming disaster in the minds of a thousand influential men – and told them that if they did not act, everything they had worked for would come tumbling down before it reached fruition. Self-interest is a powerful tool, and before long, a thousand roads had been scuffed by the footsteps of armies far and wide, each general in search of whatever power they could amass before the storm broke.

Though these emissaries of the Chaos Gods travelled across the Mortal Realms, though they recruited from every race, colour and creed, they had one enemy in common, and one destination in mind.

Shyish.

# DARKOATH WARQUEENS

Thousands of mortal tribes have bound their fates to the will of Chaos, and at the fore are the Darkoath Warqueens. These are souls who have committed all manner of atrocities in order to attract the favour of the Dark Gods. With a fierce animal charisma and the fires of ambition fuelling their every move, they are deadly warriors all, but their true power is the favour of the Dark Gods, and their supernatural ability to unite the hordes of Chaos as one.

Only the strong can hope to survive in the living hellscape that is the dominion of Chaos. Only those with a touch of madness to fuel that strength can hope to prosper. Each Darkoath Warqueen has clawed her way to supremacy over the bodies of a thousand challengers. Her path to ascension is paved not only with the corpses of those who thought themselves her equal, but also the monstrous cadavers of behemoths she has slain to prove her might.

As they rise to the heights of glory, Darkoath chieftains frequently seek out other tribal leaders to engage in ritual combat, especially those with rival patrons. When two of these champions duel to the death they do so in the manner of gladiators, their tribes content to shout abuse or encouragement as they see fit – for to interfere in a leadership challenge is punishable by a gruesome death. Their amphitheatres are the wastelands and mountains of their bloodstained territories, and their audiences the dark powers they call their gods. When a victor emerges from the duel, bloodied but triumphant, a gory trophy will often be taken from their foe – a scalp, a finger, even a decapitated head. The champion will take the vanquished leader's followers for their own, and mark the tribe's icon on their shield to show their conquest. The most skilled Darkoath chieftains are adorned with the skins and skulls of mythical beasts as well as humans, but they do not take the title of queen or king until they have been matched against a powerful daemon and emerged triumphant.

On the eve of battle, a Darkoath Warqueen will be visited by a mind-

numbingly stark vision of the future their gods require of them. This is not a prophecy as such, for it will not happen unless she makes it so. Yet with that notion of slaughter, excess, pestilence, plague or anarchy planted in their minds, these chosen warriors wage great wars to bring that very future about, many of which have capsized whole nations.

Every Darkoath Warqueen is a gifted leader. These champions have sworn on the sacred oathstones of their tribes that they will see the will of the Chaos Gods made manifest, and staked their heart and soul on the outcome. In return they have been gifted a measure of divine power – not merely to bolster their strength, but to give them a prescience as to what the gods intend for their followers. Those who swear allegiance to these monarchs in turn become devoted to their cause, for they can feel the touch of destiny upon them. They know that the desires of the Darkoath Warqueen channel and interpret the desires of one – or in rare cases, more – of the gods, and that only a craven or a fool would dare to thwart those designs.

In battle, the Darkoath Warqueen is resplendent. Axe glowing with a killing animus, the protective runes upon her shield blazing with power, the visionary warrior is crowned with an almost palpable aura of dark glory. But though they count themselves as monarchs, though they wear the trappings of rulership, they too are but pawns in the Great Game with which the Dark Gods while away eternity.



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*'The gods have not asked much of you this day. Simply fight beneath my banner, sow these lands with shattered bone and water them with blood. Do this, and your deeds will be remembered forever.'*  
- Marakarr Blood-Sky,  
Warqueen of the Reaver Wastes

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# DESTRUCTION RISING

The omens blighting the realms affected man, duardin, aelf and greenskin alike. But where the civilised races huddled together in front of the fire and told one another cautionary tales, the hordes of destruction fought the terrors of the mind the same way as they did every other threat – by answering it with a bellowing, battle-hungry tide of violence.

**S**nazzgar Stinkmullett muttered gibberish to reassure himself as he hobbled through the dank, algae-slicked guts of One Toof Mountain. Ever since he had passed the huge, gaping maw of the cave entrance, with its jagged stalactites and jutting stalagmites, he had harboured the distinct feeling that he had been swallowed whole. Now, his shortcut to power wound through the labyrinthine tunnels that – according to legend – led to the darkest underworld of all. His growing feeling of dread was reinforced with every new tunnel and crawl-hole he felt his way along. He was in the belly of the great stone beast, and the only way out was down.

The shaman chuckled to himself as he splashed through a brackish brown stream. Where there's water, there's fungus, he thought, and what beauties this horrible hole would yield. He could well believe that Old Maggis was right, and that in the pitch darkness he would find the greatest bounty an old shroom-mage could ask for.

Tap-tap-tap went Snazzgar's staff, swinging side to side as his surroundings became ever darker and more dismal. He had already been wandering down here for days, and midnight – when he would be able to get the most out of his prize, should he find it – was rapidly approaching. Better not sleep, he thought. Better make it count, and find them before he fell off the edge of an abyss or into the lair of some subterranean predator. Every moment he expected to feel the bear-trap jaws of a cave squig, ending his not-so-promising career as a shaman forever more.

Then, with a delightful squelch, Snazzgar's long-nailed foot found something spongy and disgusting.

The shaman sniffed the air, eyes screwed up tight despite the fact it was as dark as a necromancer's heart. There was something there, under an overpoweringly rank smell reminiscent of a squigbat's bottom. Yes. A faint scent of spores.

Snazzgar gave a nasty giggle, pulling a tinderbox from his robes and lighting a bit of parchment he had robbed from the still-warm corpse of a Freeguild messenger. The paper illuminated a charnel scene, the bodies of a hundred half-eaten grots scattered across the green-grey gullet of a tunnel. Sprouting from the corpses were clusters of large, plate-like mushrooms, each with a marking atop it that looked not entirely unlike a grinning skull.

*Deffcaps. Thousands of 'em.*

Snazzgar cawed, punching the air, making obscene gestures and dancing around until his fiery parchment burned out. Suddenly sobered, he broke off part of the nearest mushroom cluster from a bloated corpse and gobbled it down. It tasted truly foul, sitting in his stomach like bad meat. He waited a minute before eating another few mushrooms, just in case the first had been a duff batch.

A vision of mind-blasting potency blossomed within Snazzgar's mind. Legions of armoured skeletons marched across dunes made entirely of greenskin corpses, each in a different state of decomposition. Witch-lights glowed in fleshless skulls as long-dead warriors hacked down tribes of orruks, falling upon their encampments in the dead of night even as hungry ghouls feasted on the bloodless corpses of their grot sentries. Pillared vaults at the heart of overgrown temples slid open to reveal divine treasure and the horrific sentinels that guarded it. The skies blackened with bats, blotting out a moon that spattered rains of dark gore across the land.

Snazzgar shuddered, his eyes rolling back in his head. In his mind's eye, hideous, pale knights charged with their lances lowered against the finest boar-riders of the orruk tribes, spitting them through in explosions of violence. All the while, a massive triangular shape loomed in the far distance, its baleful emanations sending shamans stark-staring mad as they gobbled down more and more mushrooms in a desperate attempt to fight back with the god-given cunning of Mork. Everywhere the pitted, rusted blades of the undead clashed with the cleavers and axes of the greenskins, and in every flashing vision, the tribes were slaughtered, hacked to pieces, flung back before counter-attacking in brutal Waaaghs! that were almost certainly doomed from the moment they began.

Then, at last, a measure of lucidity descended on Snazzgar as the vision began to wear off.

'Blimmin' eck,' he spluttered through a mouthful of vomit. A broad grin split Snazzgar's face as the implications dawned on him. He got to his feet, filled his stealin' pouch to the brim with deffcaps, and cackled as he started the long journey back.

*'Just wait 'til I tell the lads!'*

# FUNGOID CAVE-SHAMANS

The mushroom-gobbling grot Cave-Shamans are not right in the head, even before they become host to colonies of potent fungi. To these green-skinned lunatics, to get lost in a manic vision is to grow closer to the side of Gorkamorka that epitomises cunning and trickiness over brute strength, which is the side that all grots like best. The Fungoid Cave-Shamans were the first to direct the hordes of Destruction to Shyish in search of the Waaagh! to end all Waaaghls!

Fungoid Cave-Shamans are visionary figures amongst the Moonclan Grots. They claim to be connected to Mork, and to be vessels for the raw energy of the Waaagh! – and perhaps they are right, for theirs is the role of war-finder, and they do it very well. They therefore have a great deal of influence amongst their society, and vast hordes of greenskins will regularly assemble to hear them speak. The Cave-Shamans are seen by not only grots but also orruks, ogors, troggoths and gargants as the mouthpieces of Mork; this status nearly always saves them from a brutal walloping, an absent-minded devouring or simply being sat on by mistake when their larger kin are nearby.

Being one half of the deity Gorkamorka, Mork is only made manifest when the great orruk god has a violent falling out with himself and splits in two to better settle his differences. Mork is famously cunning but brutal (whereas Gork is brutal but cunning). He knows well that a sneaky blow that clobbers his enemy from behind is just as good as a punch in the face, perhaps better. It is this mindset that drives the Fungoid Cave-Shamans to act in the closest fashion the greenskins have to grand strategising, planning wars that span continents or even multiple realms. They do so not by careful consideration of the enemy, or by what the greenskins call plottin' an' skivin', but by ingesting great quantities of poisonous fungus and gibbering about the resultant visions to anyone who will listen.

Being part fungus themselves, Cave-Shamans can stomach natural poisons and even home-brewed toxins that would turn a human's mind inside out within minutes – and his guts shortly after. Having grown up on a steady diet of hallucinogenic mushrooms and exotic insect venom harvested from the most forsaken subterranean domains, they have come to enjoy the brain-bending assault of visions Mork sends them whenever they are blasted out of their tiny little minds.

The most inspired of their number can turn these visions into horribly surreal emanations of magical power. Leering fungus-moons might manifest around them, orbiting their heads to gnash at those enemies nearby, or herds of phantom cave squigs might grow out from their mouths as they gabble gibberish, their bite no less lethal for their half-real nature. By eating the rare deffcap, also known as the necroom, these shamans cause fungi to grow within their own brains, which sometimes even burst out of their craniums in grotesque profusion. This allows them to commune with death itself – they believe that the deffcap is an incarnation of their own souls, and that to ingest them is to devour their 'earth-spirit' and hence gain power over their own mortality. Whether there is any truth to this is highly debatable. Still these fungus-loving freaks wander the

Mortal Realms more or less at will, spreading their phantasmagorical visions to the greenskin tribes. Many of their number seek out the harbingers and prophets of their rivals, aiming to prove that Gorkamorka is the strongest god of them all. Since they have done so, the forces of Destruction have been on the rampage more than ever before – and in the dark hinterlands of Shyish more than anywhere else.

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*'Splitcap, deffcap, grinnin' moon,  
Give ta me your bestest boon,  
Them dreams wot set ya  
head ablaze,  
To find the Waaagh! at the end  
of days!'*

*- Snazzgar Stinkmullett's  
gobbla-chant*

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# DEATH ON THE WINDS

The icy talons of Nagash claw at every nation in the Realm of Death, and have gained purchase in a hundred civilisations besides. As portents of doom appear in all the realms, those with the witch-sight bring warning to their masters, hoping against hope to stop their worst fears from coming to pass. But Nagash has played this game for millennia, and his ultimate victory is close.

Though the mortal races are growing wise to the fact that disaster looms in Shyish, none are certain of its nature. Some have foreseen a tide of deathly energy covering all the realms, others a great gnashing whirlpool or a sucking pit of black quicksand with an immense presence hiding in its depths. Prophets of doom, scholars of the skies above and readers of spilt guts alike have gone from inklings of disquiet to an iron certainty that the forces of undeath are about to multiply their power by a terrifying degree. Yet as those who would stop Nagash are putting their plans in motion, the Great Necromancer is bringing his own to a realm-shaking climax. Long has he laboured in secret, and though the immensity of his ambition cannot be hidden forever, he has kept his works shrouded for so long that some of the seers who have foreseen them fear it may already be too late.



The towering ego of the Great Necromancer has grown in proportion with his power. Recently he has turned to gloating, assured that his victory is inevitable, for the gigantic structure he is assembling – an inverted pyramid of vitrified realmstone – is all but complete. As if to flaunt the impossibility of his ambitions being thwarted, he has begun sending his emissaries to those peoples and nations whom he sees as worthy of serving him in his empire of undeath.

The majority of Nagash's heralds are taken from the ranks of his Nighthaunts. These ethereal gheists are able to float through even the stoutest defences and fortress walls to bring the word of Nagash to the inner sanctums and bedchambers of their intended targets. The most common

heralds of this spectral host are the Knights of Shrouds. These traitors to the living still possess a good deal of their former personality – albeit a twisted and irredeemably evil version of it. They make excellent war-leaders, and often travel the realms at the head of a vast horde of disembodied spirits – the Knights of Shrouds were generals in life, and are every bit as cunning in death. Those that react with violence to the very suggestion of serving in Nagash's armies usually find that later that night they have to participate not in a battle of words, but a desperate fight for survival against a host of pitiless wraiths.

Should those without unbending morals pledge allegiance to a Knight of Shrouds, or another nightmarish bearer of ill tidings, they are given the Nekrosene Mark – a magical brand that ensures their soul is given to Nagash at the end of their days. In accepting the mark, they forsake any chance to win a place in Sigmar's armies. They forgo the salvation of those reincarnated by the Phoenicium's innermost temples, or reborn in the purest of the Jade Kingdoms. They even forfeit the last resort of pledging their souls to the Dark Gods. Their fate is set – those who reach Nagashizzar carrying this dark discolouration will be spared an unliving purgatory as an ambulatory corpse, and instead be slain in ritual, then resurrected as a powerful undead marshal or sorcerer. Such individuals know for certain they will be given immortality upon death, albeit one spent at the beck and call of a vile and necromantic god.

Nagash has an abiding obsession with the act of soul-theft, for over the millennia he has convinced himself that every departed soul is rightfully his. Wherever his divinations find a site from which a soul has departed to a location other than Shyish – perhaps to High Azyr, Ulgu or the Realm of Chaos, his minions can soon be found. Crypt ghouls sniff and prowl in search of bodily evidence of the theft, Necromancers cast their rune-bones to scry the location of the lost soul, and Soulblight vampires ride their hellish destriers through Realmgates and hidden portals to track down the errant spirits. Though few are successful, some of those who believed that they have escaped Nagash's clutches are dragged screaming back to the heartlands of Shyish, reclaimed and given a terrible new form by the dark power of Nagashizzar.

# KNIGHTS OF SHROUDS

The Knight of Shrouds is a traitor to his own kin, a turncoat who took the chance to rule in Nagash's hellish dystopia rather than serve in Sigmar's heaven-sent armies. He has bartered away his soul in exchange for generalship of a powerful undead host. He commands a great number of Nighthaunt wraiths in battle, and gathers the forces of the dead behind him as he travels the lands, ever seeking to bring Nagash's justice to errant souls.

On the bleakest nights of the human soul, the Knight of Shrouds rides at the head of a massed gathering of the undead. He drives his fellow Nighthaunts to slaughter the living wherever the light of hope and progress shines out from the darkness, his disembodied voice ringing out over the moans of the deceased. With him comes disaster, for he is a dread omen given form, a herald of deathly fates sent to bring the word of Nagash to those who would defy him.

Each Knight of Shrouds is a fearsome combatant and driven leader, for he seeks at all times to justify his decision to betray his former kin. All of these sinister emissaries were once respected leaders in their mortal lives – most hailing from Shyish – but they were steadily ground down by the horrors of war against the undead, and ultimately pledged allegiance to Nagash instead of striving against him.

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*'You who think yourselves safe from the fate you so richly deserve. Look upon these legions of the dead, and know that you will soon be amongst them, with maggots in your belly and dust in your lying mouths.'*

- Keldrek, Emissary of the Prime Innerlands

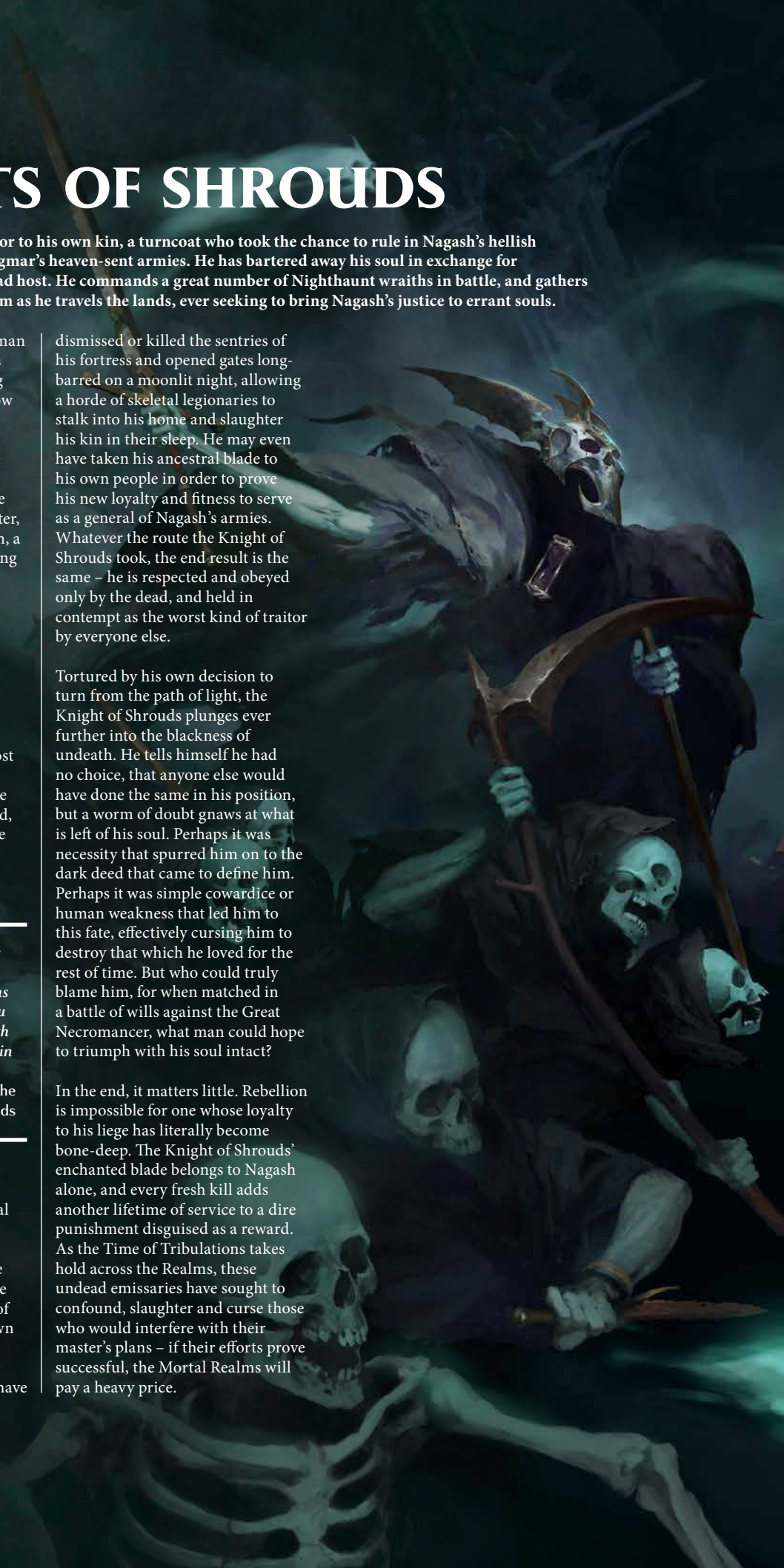
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A Knight of Shrouds will always have a tale of tragedy and betrayal in his past. He may have led his own forces into an ambush, only to ride away mere minutes before the trap was sprung. He may have watched from afar as the blades of an unliving host cut his men down and Necromancers raised them back up as a fresh army for the legions of Nagash. He may even have

dismissed or killed the sentries of his fortress and opened gates long-barred on a moonlit night, allowing a horde of skeletal legionaries to stalk into his home and slaughter his kin in their sleep. He may even have taken his ancestral blade to his own people in order to prove his new loyalty and fitness to serve as a general of Nagash's armies. Whatever the route the Knight of Shrouds took, the end result is the same – he is respected and obeyed only by the dead, and held in contempt as the worst kind of traitor by everyone else.

Tortured by his own decision to turn from the path of light, the Knight of Shrouds plunges ever further into the blackness of undeath. He tells himself he had no choice, that anyone else would have done the same in his position, but a worm of doubt gnaws at what is left of his soul. Perhaps it was necessity that spurred him on to the dark deed that came to define him. Perhaps it was simple cowardice or human weakness that led him to this fate, effectively cursing him to destroy that which he loved for the rest of time. But who could truly blame him, for when matched in a battle of wills against the Great Necromancer, what man could hope to triumph with his soul intact?

In the end, it matters little. Rebellion is impossible for one whose loyalty to his liege has literally become bone-deep. The Knight of Shrouds' enchanted blade belongs to Nagash alone, and every fresh kill adds another lifetime of service to a dire punishment disguised as a reward. As the Time of Tribulations takes hold across the Realms, these undead emissaries have sought to confound, slaughter and curse those who would interfere with their master's plans – if their efforts prove successful, the Mortal Realms will pay a heavy price.





# REALM OF SHYISH

The Realm of Death was once the sovereign domain of those who had passed from the mortal coil. Such souls found themselves remade as a spectre or shade in their particular version of the afterlife. Since those simpler days, Shyish has been twice conquered – once by the coming of Nagash, who brought the scourge of undeath to the land, and once by the ravages of Chaos.

Every Mortal Realm is, at its heart, a convergence of magical energy blended with the raw stuff of creation. When the realms came into being after the destruction of the World Before Time, the vast majority of Shyishan magic – the energies of death – came to rest in one area of the aetheric void. That area is known to Azyrite scholars as the Shyishan realmsphere, or the Realm of Death.

Shyish is a place of endings and silent decline. It is not a contiguous domain, but a myriad of underworlds, all coalesced upon the same plane. They are crystallised into being from pure death magic, and such is the richness of the energies contained within the underworlds, both Nagash and the Dark Gods have sought to break them apart in order to feed upon their power.

The nature of Shyish is the subject of constant study and debate amongst the peoples of other realms, for all mortals wish to know what will befall them at the end of their allotted span. Every society has preconceptions about where they will end up after death, handed down to them from their fathers and their fathers before them; in Shyish, each of these imagined fates is granted first a spiritual presence and then later a physical manifestation. The men and women of a Chamonian culture who have faith that an ordered golden paradise awaits them will, upon their death, be sent to an afterlife of that very description. Duardin that believe in the existence of an endless mine of diamonds will

posthumously find themselves, favourite pick in hand, joining their ancestors in the joyous prospecting of the Glittering Seams.

Conversely, those who believe they will be punished for their wrongdoings are spirited away to terrible purgatories of their own culture's creation, burning endlessly in a lake of fire or trapped in a colossal spiderweb as the eternal playthings of giant arachnids. Neither good nor evil, the Realm of Death is simply the end of all things, where every soul will – or should – find their due.

The most fundamental truth of Shyish, then, is that it is not comprised of one single underworld, but of every possible afterlife given credence by a sentient race. This is already the prevalent theory amongst the wise and the civilised of Azyrheim and its fellow centres of learning. The proof of that notion is the province of those who have passed into Shyish and somehow strayed from their own underworld to another, there to encounter the departed spirits of other races, nations and peoples. To cross the border of an afterlife – be it a cold and misty sea, an impossibly high cliff or gaping chasm – and thereby enter another afterlife altogether is an act so profound it can drive weak-willed souls insane, and even cause a spirit to cease

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*'Once, Shyish was as much a paradise as a living hell. Every conceivable afterlife has materialised within its reaches. Since the coming of Nagash, many of these have been enslaved by the power of Undeath – and the scourge of Chaos has driven the rest to the brink of utter damnation.'*

- Katophrane  
Jensai Mor

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existence completely, its consciousness dispersed in the aetheric void. Though some of these haunted domains were once idyllic, almost all have been colonised or conquered by the forces of Chaos at some point, their lands twisted, fortified and melded into horrifying new shapes by the forces of the Dark Gods. Even those territories taken by the undead hosts of Nagash still bear the scars of these malefic conquests.

Some civilisations depict the underworlds of Shyish as an endless archipelago, whilst others think of it as a set of continental plates suspended, one atop another, in an inverted pyramid of magical energy. Many ogor tribes see it as an impossibly huge mouth that devours all things, whereas the vermin-worshipping tribes of Ratburrow think of it as a set of pitch-dark burrows that never end. Such is the nature of trying to define that which a mortal mind cannot hope to fully comprehend.

The gods of the Eight Realms have a better understanding, for they are able to think in ways that mere mortals cannot. They have come to learn that as a new mythical underworld gains ground in the belief system of a society, the magical energies of Shyish coalesce within the Realm of Death to form a reflection of that afterlife. Shapes crystallise in the amethyst clouds of the realmsphere, becoming increasingly real until a new underworld is formed and settled by the departed souls of those who truly believed in its existence while they were still amongst the living. Even though the fundamental nature of Shyish has been forever changed due to Nagash's baleful influence, this process continues unabated.

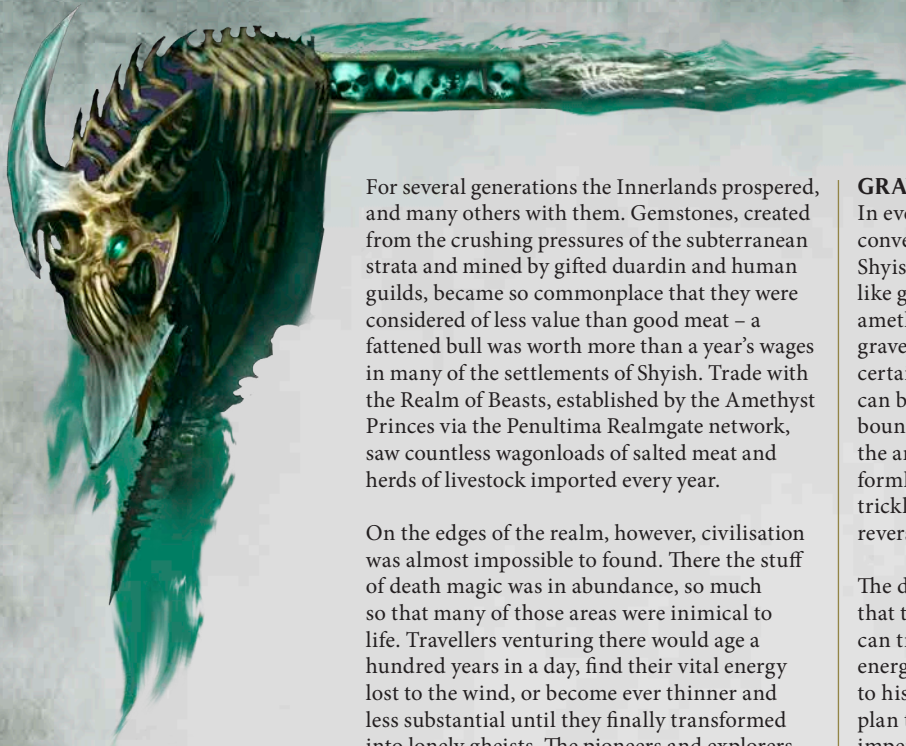
#### ANCIENT HISTORY

Shyish was settled by the living during the Age of Myth. There they came to coexist with the dead, finding the spirits of their own ancestors and even learning how to repel those souls that had taken the malice of their former lives into their new existences. As with all Mortal Realms, the greatest concentration of pure magic in Shyish is found at its edge. Meanwhile, at the core of that deathly reality, magic is scarce and difficult to harness, for the motes of energy that made up its eldritch power were few and far between. It is there, towards the centre, that the civilisations of Shyish are most like the heartlands of the other Mortal Realms.

When Sigmar first brought his Azyrite culture to the Realm of Death, uniting under his rule the disparate mortals that eked out a life there, whole nations were founded in the lands of Shyish. They thrived most of all in the heartlands of the realm. Though there was a morbid cast to all aspects of society in such places, crops were grown, children were sired and brought up, and wonders of civilisation were raised from crude clay and rock to become spectacles of dizzying grandeur. It was there that the tribes and nations of men, duardin and aelf introduced to the realm took deepest root.

The people of the Shyish Innerlands flourished most of all, innovating and creating new advances with every passing year. Soulful music and amethyst sky-lanterns filled the skies above their territories at night, keeping fear and despair at bay with the glow of civilisation.





For several generations the Innerlands prospered, and many others with them. Gemstones, created from the crushing pressures of the subterranean strata and mined by gifted duardin and human guilds, became so commonplace that they were considered of less value than good meat – a fattened bull was worth more than a year’s wages in many of the settlements of Shyish. Trade with the Realm of Beasts, established by the Amethyst Princes via the Penultima Realmgate network, saw countless wagonloads of salted meat and herds of livestock imported every year.

On the edges of the realm, however, civilisation was almost impossible to find. There the stuff of death magic was in abundance, so much so that many of those areas were inimical to life. Travellers venturing there would age a hundred years in a day, find their vital energy lost to the wind, or become ever thinner and less substantial until they finally transformed into lonely gheists. The pioneers and explorers of the lands soon learned to avoid such places and instead settle in those underworlds that had coalesced into being near the heart of Shyish. There the living coexisted with the dead in a hundred different nations and more. For a while, order and progress reigned, for Nagash had not yet cast his shadow across the lands.

At the dawn of the Age of Myth, Nagash had awoken to find himself buried alive under a vast mountain-cairn, trapped by the cataclysm that had destroyed the world-that-was. It was Sigmar that released him from this fate, for the God-King hoped to win an ally in his great quest to bring Order to all the realms. Being a creature of twisted justice, Nagash honours his debts, just as he punishes transgressions against him.

Drawn to the power of the underworlds, the Great Necromancer made his home near the centre of Shyish, that he might better control its every incarnation. At first, Nagash and his unliving servants worked alongside the Pantheon of Order to build Sigmar’s civilisation. But the God-King had, in his mercy, given freedom to a powerful enemy – and in doing so set in motion a chain of events that would see Shyish imperilled more than ever before.

## GRAVE-SAND

In every Mortal Realm, the energies of magic converge into a substance known as realmstone. Shyishan realmstone takes the form of sand-like granules, ranging in hue from mauve to amethyst to black. It is said that each grain of grave-sand is intrinsically linked to the end of a certain thing or person, and a mortal’s lifespan can be measured by how much grave-sand is bound to their spirit. Should a man gifted in the arcane arts be stalwart enough to roam the formless dunes of Shyish, he might find his own trickle of sand, capture it in an hourglass, and in reversing its flow extend his life significantly.

The deserts of Shyish are so dire and malignant that their power is not easily seized. No mortal can truly wield it, but Nagash embodies the energies of undeath and easily binds them to his will. At first, the Great Necromancer’s plan to seize all of Shyish was subtle, almost imperceptible. When the forces of the Dark Gods rose to prominence, he saw his domain contested, even conquered by the armies of Chaos over the course of the War of Bones. But he would not let this interfere with his schemes. He shifted his power bases when necessary, rebuilt after each disaster, and continued to spin the webs of his grand plan unabated. It would be long decades before even the far-seeing sorcerers and shamans of Tzeentch perceived his intent, for the mindless, predictable cadavers that do Nagash’s bidding are of little interest to the Architect of Fate. Without so much as a whisper to any save his closest and most faithful servant, Arkhan the Black, Nagash began to amass the realmstone of Shyish and build monuments to his own ambition within his long-claimed territory.

Countless thousands of skeletons were sent each year to the edges of the Realm of Death. Being already dead, they were more resistant than mortal men to the baleful amethyst energies that shimmered over those dunes like an Aqshian heat-haze. Their task was to claim the grave-sand that cascaded down the dunes there, and bear it back to their master’s inner sanctum. Yet even an unliving warrior can be undone by harnessing too much Shyishan energy.

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*‘Let Sigmar and the Dark Gods fight themselves to a bloody standstill over the other realms. Everything here belongs to the Supreme Master. We all come to do his bidding sooner or later, be it living or dead...’*

- Fedrenn of Nulahmia

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Each skeleton took but a single grain of grave-sand from the Realm's Edge – inadvertently shortening the spans of those whose life-streams they stole from – and bore it back with painstaking care across ten thousand leagues and more.

The skeletal undead do not tire, feel boredom, or entertain doubt, and so the strings of unliving servants stretched out across the land like colonies of ants collecting grains of sugar from a larder to bear back to the nest. As generations of mortal lives came and went, these legions of bone amassed a huge amount of grave-sand at Nagash's bidding – a quantity so massive it has changed the nature of Shyish itself.

Nagash vitrified this realmstone hoard using his own dark arcana, fashioning it into obsidian-hard bricks of the substance known to men of learning as shadeglass. Unseen by any save the dead, new monoliths of this strange material began to take form near Nagashizzar. Using work gangs of skeletons driven into frenetic, clockwork motion by necromantic overseers, Nagash began the building of vast cyclopean monuments that dominated the skyline.

The largest by far was to be the Great Black Pyramid, a colossal structure built upside-down at Shyish's heart. The ripples and eddies in Shyish's energies that began to cascade across the cosmos caused dark omens to take form in the other Mortal Realms – and many a necromancer's spells to raise far more undead than they intended – but few knew the true cause of the phenomenon. Those Shyishan seers and soothsayers that had an inkling of the disaster on the horizon knew better than to speak of it openly, lest they be seen to challenge

Nagash's plans and pay for their transgression with an eternity spent as an undead slave. Those prophets and visionaries in the other realms who had come to believe the threat to be real marshalled their armies, and in places even invaded Shyish en masse, but the Great Necromancer's works were already covering the land. Inverted pyramidal altars of magical stone and rune-inscribed obelisks were found at a hundred magically potent sites, but one posed a threat above all.

### THE GREAT BLACK PYRAMID

When Sigmar's Tempest broke across the lands, Nagash's aeon-spanning endeavour was well underway. Already he had annexed dozens of underworlds, and overcome and consumed those minor gods of Death that ruled them. Though he made great gains in power by doing so, every such conquest was secondary to his true agenda.

So slow had Nagash's grand plan been in coming to fruition that few comprehended its majesty and scale. No deity is without ego, and many saw the colossal pyramidal monument he was building over Nagashizzar as the arrogance of one used to enforcing his own worship. None realised that within that edifice's mirror-smooth exterior was a network of impeccably placed tunnels and tubes that resonated with, and to some extent channelled, the energy of the aetheric void. Neither did Nagash's allies and enemies fully appreciate that by gathering such a vast amount of grave-sand at a single point, Nagash had ensured that the greatest concentration of magical energy in Shyish was no longer at its edge, but at its centre. It was a work of cosmic ambition that, if allowed to reach completion, would have truly horrific consequences.

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*'I saw it a hundred times in my dreams, yet I knew not what those portents heralded. The pyramid, inverted. Solemn and black, and heavy with menace. Perhaps, if I had comprehended the magnitude of that omen, I could have somehow averted that which came next...'*

- The Grey Oracle

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# THE DOOMED MARCH

With dark portents abounding, and seers and prophets from every race seeking to allay this new doom, dozens of harbingers led warhosts into Shyish to attack the Great Necromancer's seat of power. They were likely going to their deaths, but they went nonetheless, for it was not in the nature of these leaders to sit idly by and do nothing whilst Nagash consolidated his grip.

The first Chaos host to reach Shyish's Innerlands was that of Marakarr Blood-Sky. A trusted member of Archaon's inner circle who had won her reputation in the Varanspire Arenas, Marakarr already had a history steeped in gory conquest. Though young, her wit was as razor-sharp as her axe. The shamans and priests of a score of Chaos tribes had foreseen her coming, and with Marakarr's determination and sheer force of personality bolstered by the omens of the Dark Gods, she had united them as one.

Marakarr's armies marched through the Abyssal Fires that led to Shyish, braving the mind-searing kiss of those Realmgates to emerge in the realm beyond. The Bloodbound tribes of Aqshy's Sootstain Hills acted as her vanguard, with a ponderous host of Rotbringers behind them. She had promised the leaders of both armies a feast of violence – and they were not to be disappointed. The armies of Chaos do not

overly care for caution, nor for stealth, and their passing through the Abyssal Fires was marked by bellowed war cries and fluttering banners. Its procession was watched by many a curious eye, amongst them the agents of Snazzgar Stinkmullett, a Fungoid Cave-Shaman who had foreseen a great Waaagh! taking place in Shyish. The grot made his own preparations, seeding the idea of following the Chaos horde whilst remaining out of sight – and then, when Marakarr's host inevitably became embroiled in battle against hosts of Shyish's living dead, attacking the survivors to claim a resounding victory over Chaos worshipper and undead alike.

The Bloodbound hordes were the first to come under attack by the denizens of the Realm of Death. The spirits of those they had slain on the Plains of the Bloody Sky – and subsequently cannibalised in the dark feast at the battle's end – were waiting for them, for the ghosts of



Shyish have long memories indeed, and they too know how to read the omens of war. Before long, Marakarr's vanguard found themselves fighting an army of vengeful spirits and half-eaten corpses. Even those fallen warriors whose skulls had been claimed for Khorne's throne attacked their former killers – their missing heads had been replaced with bundles of blades, dead ravens, and rotten pumpkins at the hands of nameless Necromancers.

Marakarr's exhortations roused her warriors to such fury that they overcame their assailants in a single hour of frenzied, unrelenting axe-work. The devotees of Chaos are not easily scared, and that which they had once killed they would gladly kill again. Yet the vengeful dead had pulled down over a twelfth of their number, and wounded or exhausted far more – not that they would admit their tiredness to their comrades, of course. Still seeking Nagashizzar, the tribes under Blood-Sky fought on regardless, plunging their way ever deeper into the afterlives of Shyish. They crossed impossibly deep chasms, threaded their way through pitch-black caverns and fought undead monsters the size of ale houses, but still the land of the Great Necromancer remained out of reach. Though they sought out those places where mortals



subsisted, hoping to gouge the answer from their victims, they found none who would show them the way. Many chose a painful death instead, for the people of Shyish know well that though physical pain is transitory, the endless curse of undeath can be eternal – they feared Nagash's ire far more than that of a mortal warlord.

On the seventy-seventh day of the Chaos tribes' travails, Marakarr's ally, the Lord of Blights known as Ghrottol Bluger, claimed to have been sent a guiding vision in the form of a fever dream. Striding confidently onward, he led their combined forces deep into a mist-wreathed forest, and there into the Hangman's Wood. He secretly desired to sow his own cadaver-crop amongst that underworld's corpse-nooses, consolidating his strength and taking control of the entire expedition as his power waxed high.

Amongst those wooded reaches the tribes found ungors of the Throtter Brayherd. Their bodies painted as skeletons with charcoal and chalk, the beastmen were atavistic and strange. They claimed to know how to reach the city of the Great Necromancer, but would only help if the newcomers proved themselves worthy of the gods' favour. Marakarr settled the matter by duelling their Wargor leader at the Battle of the Great Headstone – though she was disarmed by the brutish killer, she bashed his horned head in with repeated blows from the edge of her runeshield and claimed his broken skull as her trophy. Impressed, the Brayherd's beastmen then guided her through the Hangman's Wood in the direction of a distant warscryer citadel – the Copper Pinnacle that stood on a mountain range overlooking the lands of Nagashizzar.

Content to watch Marakarr leave and instead consolidate his new arboreal power base, Lord Bluger remained. He commanded his men to fortify the heart of Hangman's Wood. There he built a massive edifice of bone, twisted oak and green-black stone. After seeing an omen of his army reaped by spectral scythes, he instructed his sorcerers to inscribe his Dreadfort's walls with runes that could turn a ghost into harmless mist. It was a wise precaution, but it was not enough to save him from what was to come. On the night of the fort's completion, its garrison was attacked by Hexwraiths, the ethereal horsemen riding up from beneath the earth to bypass his defences completely. The Knight of Shrouds known as Keldrek was at their fore; sent by Arkhan the Black to ensure the interlopers did not interfere with Nagash's great work, it was he who engaged Bluger in single combat and beheaded him with an ancient sword. With that, the battle turned from a surprise assault to a desperate last stand. Not a single Rotbringer survived the night, for even they could not

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*'From behind the lens of my observatorium's arcanoscope, it seemed to me that even the forces of Chaos sought to hold back this rising tide. Those benighted hordes did battle against the dead as often as they did the living. Then, one day, I watched a sorcerer's warband fight against a retinue of my brethren even as a wave of undead closed over them. There is but one constant amongst the worshippers of the Dark Gods – they seek only anarchy and carnage.'*  
- Lord-Ordinator Mehga

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stand against foes that melted out from the mists, struck with unearthly weapons that could penetrate the thickest armour, then faded away as if made of smoke. That night, even the most stalwart devotees of Nurgle came to know fear.

Meanwhile, Marakarr followed her bestial guides across the Ossian Dustsprawl. With the Beastmen to guide her, she made good progress, only to find herself intercepted by a new breed of foe – the Mortisan Chamber of the Anvils of the Heldenhammer. The Anvils had staked out the Ossian Dustsprawl ever since Lord-Ordinator Vorrus Starstrike had come to them from High Azyr. Through his divinations in the observatorium of the Citadel of Heavenly Truths, Starstrike had foreseen rivers of blood flowing between the Dustsprawl's barrow-mounds, and correctly interpreted the vision as a metaphor for a Chaos invasion. With the advantage of surprise, the Stormcast Eternals struck from the midst of a grey-black dust storm to fall upon their foes. But Marakarr too had seen an omen – that of the blood moon rising. At midnight the troubled skies above the Dustsprawl began to rain gore, invigorating the Chaos hosts with the blessing of Khorne. Their desperate defence turned into a determined counter-attack, and the Anvils were pushed back.

Further along the road to Nagashizzar, Lord Starstrike had found common cause with an outrider host of Stormcast Eternals led by Raelus of the Galewalker Vanguard Chamber. Together they made great progress in destroying the strange processions of skeletons that spanned the lands. After the third victory over such an undead army, Starstrike consulted the stars, and saw that he had eliminated but a fraction of their number – thousands more such processions still stalked the wastelands towards Nagashizzar. Worse still, the Lord-Ordinator saw portents of his fellow Stormcast Eternals hard-pressed against the armies of the Blood God. It all but drove him to distraction, for in mortal life, Starstrike's people had been killed by a ravaging horde of Khorne worshippers.

When Raelus Galewalker learned of this fact, he repeatedly asked Starstrike how he could leave his kinsmen to die once again. Already at his wits' end after fighting every day for months, Vorrus' frayed temper finally snapped. He turned back from the road to Nagashizzar, leading his great Azyrite host not to the Great Necromancer's strongholds, but to attack the Chaos armies that the Galewalkers had reported were in their wake. With Starstrike's force acting as a hammer to the Mortisan Chamber's anvil, the scale of the conflict escalated once more, drawing in ever more Chaos forces until the Ossian Dustsprawl was littered with corpses.

As the red moon rose higher, blood fell in torrents from the skies until every combatant was drenched in gore. The ground became soggy and treacherous, revealing ancient graves underfoot, and soon what had started as a clash of battle lines had degenerated into a desperate, undisciplined melee. Seeking to tip the balance, Starstrike had his Stormhost's Lord-Relictors summon a great bolt to smite Marakarr and end the threat she posed once and for all. At the culmination of their tempest ritual a giant sky-bolt blasted down, splitting the earth open like a yawning mouth to swallow Marakarr and her champions. In doing so, it revealed a set of subterranean catacombs that had lingered long beneath the Dustsprawl. Within them was a new foe – a teeming host of Moonclan grots that had followed the Chaos invaders via the subterranean warrens that criss-crossed that part of Shyish. Shrieking with indignation that his cunning strategy had been stymied, Snazzgar Stinkmullett commanded his hordes to attack Stormcast Eternal and Bloodbound alike.



With the forces of the Chaos incursion locked in battle against a determined Stormcast assault and an ambush from below, the progress of all three forces upon Nagash's heartlands slowed to a crawl, and finally ground down to nothing. The resultant bloodbath lasted six days, the ebb and flow of battle so chaotic that not a single army made it to Nagashizzar's shadow.

As for Vorrus' ally, the Vanguard rider Raelus Galewalker, he had vanished without trace. When he was certain that the invaders would be locked in futile battle against one another, he snuck away into the darkness, in the process transforming into a faceless daemon clad in a billowing robe. Cackling, the Changeling made for the strange Copper Pinnacle on the horizon, which in the wan gloom of the Shyishan night looked more like a Silver Tower than a true scryer's citadel. His work was complete, and the pieces set in motion for the game to come...

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*This night feels heavy with destiny, the potential of a hundred futures crackling just out of reach. I do not claim to know that which the gods plan for us, but I know this – we stand upon the cusp of something that will change the face of the realms forever more.'*

- Aliadrenne Verentrai,  
Silken Seer of the  
Eldritch Council

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# THE TIME OF TRIBULATIONS

As the malignant omens of Shyish's ascendance spread across the lands, every one of the Mortal Realms found itself assailed by new perils. Some of the most unscrupulous peoples found opportunity in this time, but most girded themselves for battle against a new foe – the restless dead. Led to war by those amongst them who claimed to have seen the only true path to avert the disaster to come, they fought tooth and nail against the darkness.

## THE MESSENGER

The Swifthawk Agents of Anvilgard are entrusted with the findings of Lord-Ordinator Varangenesis, including important information regarding the encroaching Khornate attack from the land known as Khul's Ravage. The Swifthawk leader, Gossamon of the Winged Helm, is told to bring the news to the Tempest's Eye. Before he leaves Anvilgard he consults with the Lord-Relictors of the Anvils of the Heldenhammer, even as a storm closes overhead. Many question his decision even before he leaves, for the storm forces his Skycutters to fly low to the ground. His leadership comes under fire when his small contingent of Swifthawk Agents is attacked by a far larger host of Slaaneshi riders – a force every bit as fast and twice as bloodthirsty.

Only when the storm breaks does his gambit become clear. Knowing where every bolt of lightning will strike, Gossamon draws his enemies into the path of each stormbolt, systematically blasting their warband apart in a running battle over the course of six hectic hours. The message reaches Tempest's Eye in good time, though a tiny pinprick wound that Gossamon sustained in the battle becomes infected and eventually causes his death by blood poisoning.

## CLAIMED BY THE GRAVE

When his city comes under undead attack for the fifth time in as many nights, the desperate monarch Keldrek of Helspoint rides out at dawn in search of parley. He finds the one he suspects to be behind the attacks – an old enemy from his regimental service days known as Draeburn. During their recriminations, Draeburn's master arrives, a towering, skeletal apparition known as the Lord of Black Manor. A deal is struck, and King Keldrek returns to his city

wearing a glove of golden chain mail on his right hand. Though the undead attacks cease, Keldrek's behaviour becomes ever more erratic, and according to his queen, he does not remove the glove even whilst he sleeps. Ten days later, the city is overrun with the undead; twenty days after that, a Knight of Shrouds wearing a golden chain mail glove is seen riding out of Helspoint with an army of undead in his wake.



## SEARCHING FOR SOULS

In every Mortal Realm the unquiet dead seek out sites of magical potency. Wherever a land has seen Stormcast Eternals returned to Azyr, the dead gather upon the churned earth to stand motionless, as if waiting for the golden warriors' reappearance. Wherever a Darkoath champion is claimed body and soul by the Chaos powers they worship, cadavers mill and moan at the site within days, ghouls sniffing the air as if to pick up a scent. In shadowy Ulgu, masses of skeletons clamber on top of each other to form bony columns that claw at the winged aelves in the gloom above. Nowhere is safe for those who would evade Shyish's grip.

## THE SWARM AND THE FIREGALE

The forests, gardens and farms on the outskirts of Hammerhal Ghyra are assailed by ravenous swarms of scorpion-locusts and biting death's-head moths. They buzz so thick that even walking from one side of a field to the other is a harrowing ordeal, and they devour much of that season's crops. Attempts to disperse them are in vain, and the city's Sylvaneth allies claim the insects are not from Ghyran at all. Though Hammerhal Ghyra has grain stores enough to endure, its Aqshian equivalent – reliant on food from the Realm of Life – does not receive its due through the twin city's great portal, and begins to starve.

After lengthy debate, the city's Grand Conclave interprets the burning trajectory of Acelestis, the Falling Star, for a possible course of salvation. Inspired, it gathers every bright wizard it can find, bidding them conjure a vast firestorm in the firmament. Binding the inferno with djinn-spirits and volatile Aqshian curses, they bring it with them through the Realmgate to Hammerhal Ghyra. Just as they are about to set it loose upon the swarms, Nighthaunt invaders rise from the ruined croplands and assails the fire mages, but the spectral hosts are destroyed by Hammerhal's many standing armies. The firestorm incinerates every last insect before the bright wizards set it free into the skies.

## STRATA OF SKULLS

Across the realms, the leaders of the free cities and resurgent towns rebuilt in the wake of Sigmar's Tempest receive dozens of reports from seed farmers, dirt guilders and harvestmen that their fields are barren. More disturbing yet, they cite the cause as a layer of human skulls beneath the cracked earth and dried-out topsoil.

### THE DREAD PACT

The Knights of Shrouds ride out across the Mortal Realms, bringing to the leaders of countless armies the same devil's bargain they themselves made with Nagash. They concentrate their efforts most of all in Shyish. In the warrior nation of Hallost they are seen as but another variety of monster to be slain, whereas the Amethyst Princedoms – or what is left of them after the Battle of Burning Skies – unite to keep them away. The terror they bring is not easily ignored, however, and though the vast majority of leaders refuse their cold ultimatums, there are those that turn against their own kind in the name of survival, leading their hosts into the arms of the Mortarchs and the immortal master they serve.

### THE CORPSE OF SHADESPIRE

Fleets from Barak-Zilfin move through the Lesser Mawr-Portal in the skies of Viscid Flux, despite the fact that the dreams of their admiral, Drekk Leifson, are haunted by the sign of the Bloodied Skull. The fleetmasters claim to be going in search of new seams of aether-gold, but in truth they seek the arcane bounty of Shadespire. Through windswept mountain passes they travel, fighting against winged vampiric horrors and swarms of flesh-eating bats. Such is the skill of their admiral that they make it across Penultima to the Desert of Bones and the ruins of Shadespire. Several search parties move into the urban wilderness of that ravaged city, though only ten duardin return, raving of strange living statues and penumbral dimensions. They bear with them an artefact they call the Magnificent Mirror, within which is trapped the vainest soul ever to have existed. They send word of their discoveries to Barak-Zilfin by way of a clockwork hawk, but none of them ever make it back there in person.

### THE GREAT DELUGE

Horticultural Slimux sees his spore-seed fall barren after his battles against Neave Blacktalon on the Coast of Tusks. Disquieted, the daemon Herald seeks out an old ally of his, the greater daemon Rotigus Rainfather, in the depths of Nurgle's

swamps. At first Rotigus is sceptical of Slimux's concerns about Shyish – but when Slimux implies Rotigus cannot bring fecund life to Shyish, the Rainfather rises to the challenge. A great deluge of rot-water hammers down upon the Shyish Outerlands, flooding the ashen plains. Floating corpse-islands and giant maggots flop and bloat in the water as it gushes across the lands. The local people and their undead relatives fight as one, trying to stave off the floods and the tide of plague daemons they bring. A great battle begins, but as Slimux fears, the Garden of Nurgle itself finds little purchase upon Shyish.



### THE SPIRIT ENGINE

The skaven Grey Seer Scrickrack, seeking a route to arcane power after witnessing a vision of the Black Void, burrows into Shyish through strange tunnels in reality known as gnawholes. His minions begin mining the seams of grave-sand they find near the Realm's Edge, their sorcerous machines sifting the realmstone from the common sand with ingenious swiftness and efficacy. A great many malevolent spirits are attracted to their industry, for they stray so near the Realm's Edge that ghostly apparitions are a daily occurrence. The Grey Seer's agents use his invention of the spirit-siphon, an eldritch lodestone that draws gheists towards it, to prevent the Nighthaunts from attacking at full effect. Eventually

the device draws unto it a veritable choir of howling, vengeful banshees. The resultant cacophony is so soul-rendingly terrifying that the next batch of skaven the Grey Seer sends to reinforce the site find only verminous corpses, their fur turned snow-white in deathly fear.

### THE GLIMMERINGS OF EXCELSIS

With the benefits of accurate prophecy changing from a matter of profit and status to one of survival, the glimmering shards bartered in the free city of Excelsis more than triple in value. Each of these tiny fragments – mined from the monolithic Spear of Mallus that juts from the Coast of Tusks – provides a glimpse into the future. As the Time of Tribulations takes hold, they become so precious the city is soon under siege from without as well as within. Only the heavy-handed justice of the Knights Excelsior, led by the terrifying figure known as the White Reaper, keeps the city from plunging into total anarchy.

### THE STARVING ALFROSTUN

The ogors of Skulgourd Alfrostun, having brains enough to see the strange omens of the balemoon but not enough to interpret them, bring their Everwinter through the Misten Caverns and into Shyish. Growing hungrier, they go on the rampage wherever they see lights on the horizon, but all too often find will o' the wisps leading into graveyards full of bad meat. The living dead that attack them are frozen in place by the Everwinter's bite, then shattered by those club-wielding grot scavengers still brave enough to follow in the ogors' wake. Those grots soon become a food source when the Skulgourd ogors wander the lifeless wastes of Charnelcourt, and with no other option, many of the muscular steeds of the Beastclaw tribe are devoured soon after. By the time they reach the lands claimed by the Flesh-eater Courts, the ogors and their beasts are little more than starving, fur-clad Gorgers, entirely possessed by hunger. Finding new homes and existences for themselves in the Flesh-eater Courts of Charnelcourt, they learn to subsist on the rotten meat of the long dead.

### THE DEATHLY SHADOWS

In the skaven stronghold of Blight City, a spate of high-profile deaths is blamed on shadowy spectres, creeping phantasms and dark figures in the night that carry blades of pure darkness. The fact that this exact description can be applied to the mercenary adepts of the Clans Eshin is not openly highlighted, for those who speak of the connection are often the next to be visited by a ghost in the night.

### TRINKETS AND TALISMANS

A market in various items of arcana that supposedly function as proof against undead predation thrives in Shyish, with additional trade routes established to satisfy the rising demand amongst Azyrite settlers. Some of these trinkets lend a critical advantage when the dead things prowl, whilst others prove nothing more than expensive bric-a-brac, dooming their credulous new owners to spend their final moments screaming in denial and terror.

### A CURSE IN VICTORY

The Freeguilds of Nevermoat fight so hard and so well against a Deadwalker host that threatens to overwhelm them that every one of the thousands-strong zombie horde is struck down over three months of gruelling battle. The stooped crone that raised them from their graves, known as Moard the Hag, uses her dying breath to curse the Freeguilds to eat of the dead. It is the first step on a dark road that leads them to an eternity of cannibalism and deathly delusion, convinced that Moard's master, Mannfred von Carstein, is a saint of the Sigmarite faith sent to deliver them.

### THE TOTEMS OF WAAAGH!

The savage tribes convinced to follow the now-infamous Snazzgar Stinkmullett into Shyish are soon rewarded for their faith. Almost every day they are hard-pressed, ambushed, harassed, besieged, cut off and surrounded by legions of the undead, and none of them can remember having such a good time. Wolf-riding grots spread the word to other concentrations of greenskins across Shyish, just as strange visions spread from shaman to shaman

in the Mortal Realms through the favour of Mork. The Waaagh! to end all Waaaghs! gathers pace. To mark where the best fighting is, Snazzgar – along with those warbosses he has convinced to accept him as advisor – raise great totem poles of boulders, skulls and grave-sand as markers for their fellow tribes. Many of those giant effigies, when the din of battle grows loud nearby, come to life and lumber into the fray before heading off towards the next big fight with trails of raucous greenskins in their wake.



### THE TWINNED TOWNS

In Shyish, the twin towns of Belvegrod are heavily assailed by ghostly visions and spectral visitations. Westreach is a town built from the ground up by the Azyrite hosts sent out by Sigmar in the wake of his Stormhosts' victories, and is known as a centre of learning, culture and golden glory. Its people are largely unafraid of the omens that blight the land, for many have fought alongside Stormcast Eternals, and their lords have spoken with Sigmar himself. Eastdale, by contrast, is a town resettled amongst the ruins of a once-proud nation cast into dust by the scourge of Chaos. Its people are the Reclaimed, those scattered tribes and refugees that were forced to flee into the Shyishan wilderness before Sigmar's conquests allowed them to rebuild their former lives. They see the arrival of so many dark omens and visions as a dire warning indeed.

Scholars from both towns make use of the Belvegrod Lighthouse, a strange high tower atop the misted cliffs of the isle's northern reach, to scry the future, but they react in different ways.

In Eastdale, every possible superstition is adhered to, with the town's militia bedecked in black wheat, holestones, crow's wings, spider traps, twelve-man-motleys and vials of sacred water taken from the High Lake. The Westreach citizenry instead turn to military training and the creation of artillery networks, for they see the superstitious precautions of Eastdale as the acts of bumpkins lacking in faith and intelligence, and many a cruel jibe or mocking verse is spun at Eastdale's expense.

When an army of the dead marches upon the twinned towns, both Westreach and Eastdale are beset. The first few days see Westreach's artillery batteries decimate the Deadwalkers and undead beasts that shuffle and lope towards the city, but when a sea of Nighthaunts pours through the ranks of the walking dead, only the mages of the city are able to hold them back – and they cannot be everywhere at once. In Eastdale, the people's superstition and experience at dealing with the undead hold them in good stead, for those goodwife tales and elder stories all have their basis in fact. Many an ethereal terror is banished with sacred water or held back by a wreath of silvered hawthorn, and the militia, having battled undead horrors every month for as long as any can remember, prove every bit as potent a defence as the well-drilled Azyrite echelons of Westreach.

The war for the twin towns comes to a head when Westreach is finally conquered by the Nighthaunts that drift through its stout walls. The people of Westreach are resurrected as grotesque creatures and their numbers added to the armies of the dead assailing Eastdale. With the ranks of the invaders bolstered twice over, Eastdale's tenacious defence is finally breached. It falls soon after, the people devoured by undead from the neighbouring town.

# MACABRE SPLENDOR





*Led by a Fungoid Cave-Shaman, a tribal alliance of the Waaagh! to end all Waaaghhs! charges headlong against the deathless legions of Nagash. They seek not victory so much as unending battle – and they may yet get their wish...*

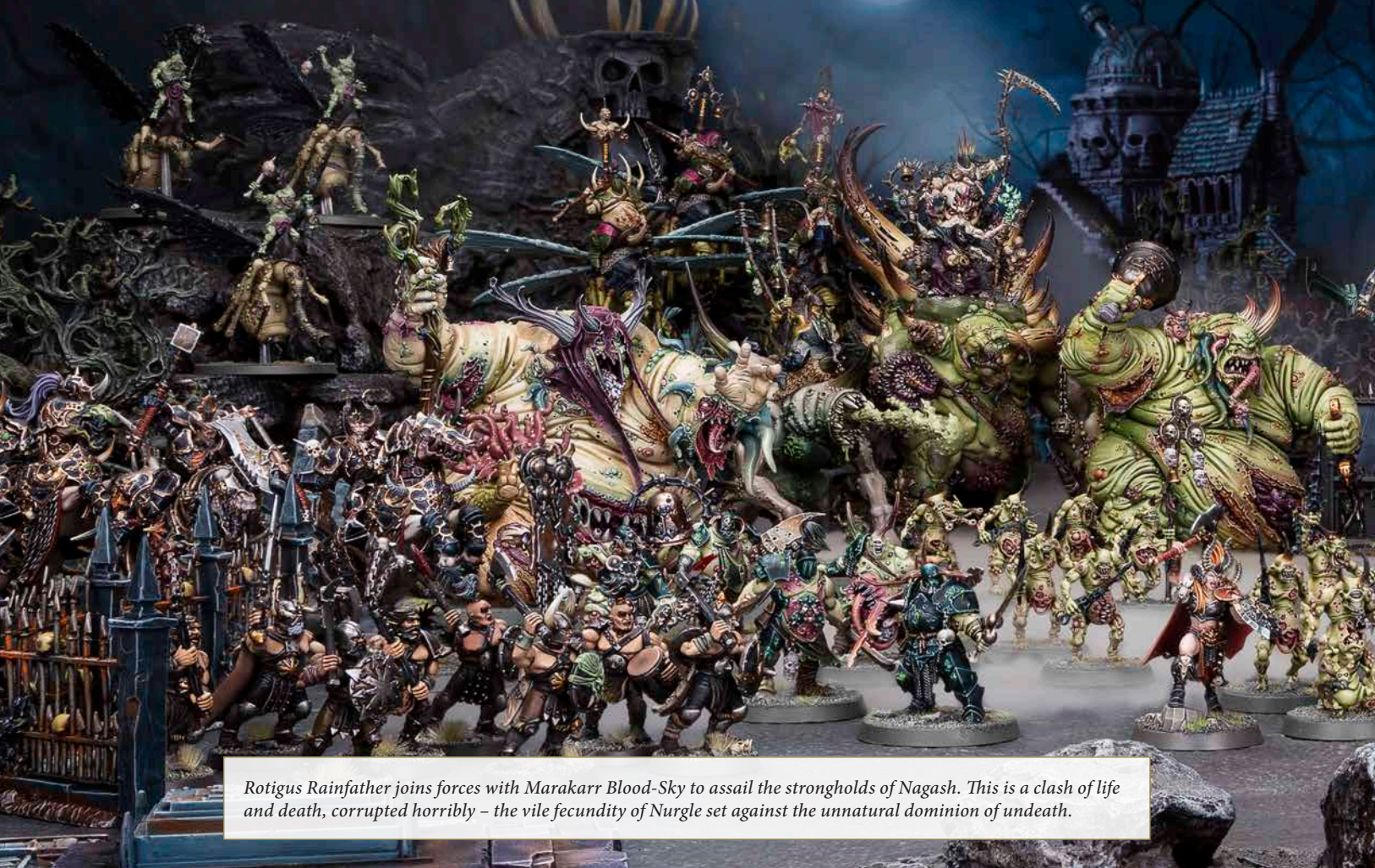




*On the haunted island of Cadavaris, a Darkoath Warqueen directs the Slaves to Darkness in a pre-emptive strike – any that get in her way, be they man, beast or greenskin, will feel the wrath of the Chaos Gods.*



*Supported by his skeletal and vampiric allies, a Knight of Shrouds leads a host of ethereal Nighthaunts against the Stormcast Eternals that have strayed into his realm – and in doing so, risked being trapped in Shyish forever more.*



*Rotigus Rainfather joins forces with Marakarr Blood-Sky to assail the strongholds of Nagash. This is a clash of life and death, corrupted horribly – the vile fecundity of Nurgle set against the unnatural dominion of undeath.*



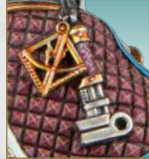
*The Hammers of Sigmar find their path to the heart of Shyish barred by none other than Godrakk, Fist of Gork, and his elite Ironjawz bodyguard, led to the battle by the foresight of their ally, the harbinger Snazzgar Stinkmullett.*



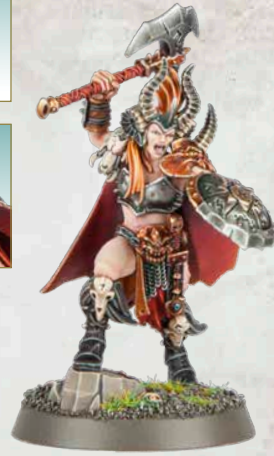
*Lord-Ordinator Vorrus Starstrike, having consulted the omens from the Twilight Citadel of Modrhavn, leads a well-timed attack upon the Chaos horde that would ransack the Land of Dead Heroes on their journey through Shyish.*

*Old enemies clash as Lord-Ordinator Vorrus Starstrike seeks his vengeance, leading forces from his Stormhost's Extremis and Vanguard Chambers against the legions of the Blood God. Only death will win victory this day.*

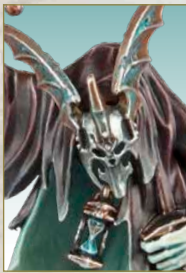




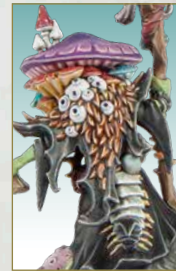
*Lord-Ordinator Vorrus Starstrike*



*Darkoath Warqueen  
Marakarr Blood-Sky*



*Keldrek, Knight of Shrouds*



*Fungoid Cave-Shaman  
Snazzgar Stinkmullett*

# RISE OF THE DAMNED





