



WARHAMMER

# WARHAMMER UNDERWORLDS

# NIGHTVAULT



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 As such, outdated game scenarios and unit rules have been removed from this publication.

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SHADESPIRE WAS ONCE A CITY OF WONDER AND MAGIC, A MERCANTILE METROPOLIS RISING FROM THE UNFORGIVING EARTH OF THE REALM OF DEATH. COUNTLESS RACES DWELT WITHIN ITS WALLS, TOGETHER CREATING ARTEFACTS OF ASTONISHING BEAUTY AND POWER. THE CITY'S MOST TREASURED SECRET WAS THE PROCESS OF REFINING SHADEGLASS, A MIRACULOUS SUBSTANCE THAT COULD STORE THE SPIRITUAL ESSENCE OF THE DEAD FOR ETERNITY. IN THIS WAY, THE RULING KATOPHRANES OF SHADESPIRE LIVED ON AFTER DEATH, THEIR WISDOM STORED WITHIN THE DEPTHS OF ORNATE MIRRORS, FLOWING GLASS FOUNTAINS, CRYSTAL LOOKING-STONES AND OTHER MARVELS. THIS DEFIANCE ENRAGED NAGASH, LORD OF UNDEATH, WHO SOUGHT TO PUNISH THE OCCUPANTS OF THE CITY FOR DENYING HIM HIS RIGHTFUL TITHE OF SOULS.

YET TO SIMPLY DESTROY THE CITY AND DRAG ITS INHABITANTS TO THE UNDERWORLDS SEEMED TO NAGASH AN INSUFFICIENT PUNISHMENT. INSTEAD, THE GREAT NECROMANCER WOVE A RITUAL THAT DREW UPON THE MYSTERIOUS POWERS OF THE CITY'S SHADEGLASS CONSTRUCTIONS, SIPHONING AWAY THE LIGHT AND GLORY OF SHADESPIRE AND CREATING A TWISTED REFLECTION OF ITS FORMER SPLENDOUR. SHADESPIRE WAS TRAPPED HALFWAY BETWEEN ULGU – REALM OF SHADOWS – AND HYSH – REALM OF LIGHT. BOUND WITHIN THIS DARK REFLECTION, REFRACTED BETWEEN THESE TWO DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED REALMS, THE SOULS OF THE FALLEN COULD NEVER ESCAPE THE MIRRORED CITY AND MAKE THE JOURNEY TO THE UNDERWORLDS. NONE WITHIN ITS WALLS WOULD BE GRANTED THE RELEASE OF DEATH. NAGASH WOULD FOREVER DENY THEM THAT GIFT.

THE MIRRORED CITY OF SHADESPIRE IS A NIGHTMARE PLANE OF ILLUSIONS AND MADNESS, AN EVER-CHANGING LABYRINTH OF ENDLESS STAIRS, CRAMPED STREETS AND SOARING ARCHWAYS. THE ORIGINAL CITY IS DRAINED OF ALL COLOUR AND LIFE, AND FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS IT HAS RESTED AS A FOREBODING RUIN. THOSE UNFORTUNATE, BRAVE, OR FOOLHARDY ADVENTURERS THAT SET FOOT WITHIN ITS WALLS ARE DRAWN THROUGH THE VEIL BETWEEN REALMS AND TRAPPED WITHIN THE MIRRORED CITY. FOR SUCH WAYWARD SOULS, ALL HOPE SEEMS LOST. YET THERE ARE THOSE WHO WILL NOT ACCEPT THEIR FATE WITHOUT A FIGHT.

## THE MIRRORED CITY

The Katophranes, lord-wizards and master inventors of Shadeshire, were the first to discover that souls of the deceased could be captured within shadeglass. They swiftly put this knowledge to work, creating a network of soul-mirrors around the city to store their living essence in the event of their own deaths. In this way they could continue to provide their expertise to the next generation of thinkers, and this advantage allowed the city to grow greatly over a relatively short length of time, from a humble desert outpost to a sprawling metropolis filled with innovative wonders.

Over the centuries, the Katophranes began to further unlock the secrets of the shadeglass, even inventing artefacts that would allow the living to enter the Faneway mirror – the gleaming nexus that linked every fragment of shadeglass in the city – and interact with their ancestors. Further remarkable inventions followed. The city's outer walls were suffused with the spirits of elite warriors who

had fallen in battle – an eternal watch against the manifold threats of the surrounding Desert of Bones. Treasures were produced that were magically linked to the Faneway, so that a grieving relative might converse with their lost loved one via an enchanted amulet or brooch. Shadeglass golems were created, given motion by the soul essence of loyal retainers who continued to serve their masters even in death.

When the city was swept into shadow by the magic of Nagash, many of these objects of power were destroyed, or warped by the power of the Lord of Undeath's magic. The Faneway itself was shattered into a thousand fragments, each shard scattered about the Mirrored City – with the nexus of the soul relay broken, no soul could leave the nightmarish prison that held them captive. For thousands of years the Katophranes sought to undo the curse of Shadeshire. They hypothesised that recovering artefacts of pure shadeglass, and utilising them to restore the great Faneway mirror, might break Nagash's spell, but trapped as they were within their soul-storing prisons, they could not carry out this task themselves.

At first they attempted to utilize their subjects, the citizens of Shadeshire, but madness and paranoia swiftly overcame these unfortunate souls. It seemed as though the city itself was warping and shifting with every passing hour, hiding its secrets away behind illusory walls and impossibly dimensioned chambers. No sooner was a precious shadeglass treasure recovered than another was lost, as the city's streets shattered and reformed, or a great stairway shifted, sending doomed souls tumbling away into darkness. Minds destroyed by this maddening existence, souls trapped within their decaying bodies, the people of Shadeshire shuffled and groaned in the dark corners of the city. They cursed the torture of their eternal undeath, as both their hope and their flesh slowly withered and rotted away.

Worse still, regions of the city were slowly morphing under the will of Nagash. The image of the Great Necromancer would appear half-glimpsed in a reflection, or slowly form in the architecture of a great tower, his pitiless gaze further tormenting those who had defied his will. Many were driven to terrified insanity, blinding themselves with shards of glass so that they could not look upon his dread visage. Others turned to worshipping Nagash, and claimed great sections of Shadeshire as their own, guarding their territory with a ruthless zeal. Believing that only



by petitioning the God of Death for forgiveness could they absolve themselves of their prideful sins, they raised monuments and shrines in his honour. They claimed all shadeglass relics as the property of Nagash, and sequestered those they recovered within great sepulchres of bone and wasting flesh, built from the still-conscious bodies of heathens and intruders.

For many centuries the shadow-cloaked ruins of Shadeshire lay dormant, a malevolent scar in the centre of the vast Desert of Bones. During much of that time there were few fresh victims of the city's terrible curse. Travellers seldom ventured across the deadly, parching wastes to reach the city, as often warding away by the lethal storms that wracked its bone-dust dunes as by the dark stories that had sprung up around the place. Yet some were brave or foolish enough to stray within the borders of the cursed city, and those fortunate few who returned brought back priceless treasures and forbidden knowledge, as well as rumours of haunted mirrors, nightmarish illusions and other strange tales. Avaricious eyes were soon drawn to Shadeshire, for the realms are filled with desperate souls who would gladly risk damnation in search of power. Worshippers of foul gods and bands of savage, war-loving orrorks fought bloody skirmishes at the city gates, and rat-like skaven skittered through the shadows, scrabbling for relics and treasures to take back to their filth-strewn lairs.

The ruins of Shadeshire became a subject of particular interest to the God-King, Sigmar, whose elite champions, the Stormcast Eternals, were deployed in a great crusade against the forces of the Chaos Gods – primordial entities who sought to despoil the Mortal Realms. His champions had suffered greatly during the long war, and though each was effectively immortal, the mysterious process of Reforging that the fallen went through upon death had taken a worrying toll. Every time a warrior was remade they lost a part of themselves, gradually shedding the vestiges of their humanity, becoming emotionless and uncompromising. The changes wrought by the Reforging process manifested themselves in myriad unsettling ways, and those Stormhosts who had seen constant battle were particularly afflicted. Long had the God-King known of the rumours surrounding lost Shadeshire, where once the souls of the dead had been preserved in time. If shadeglass could perform such miracles, might it not also be of use in his quest to salve the trauma that ran rife through his armies? Seeking to learn more regarding the properties of this mysterious substance and the truth of the lost city, the God-King sent forth his agents into the cursed city. These warriors and scholars could not imagine the nightmare they would find.



Over the long centuries, many of the Katophranes had followed their citizens into despair, driven mad by the futility of their task. Those former masters of the city who retain some semblance of sanity have taken to employing the unfortunate adventurers and warriors who have been transported to the Mirrored City, offering them the secrets of escaping Shadeshire and ending the Lord of Death's curse. Many of the Katophranes are unconcerned by the nature or honour of those they ally with, requiring only that they help them escape their hellish existence. In recent seasons, as the realms are stricken by war and disaster once more, the number of unfortunates stumbling through shadowy portals into the Mirrored City has increased tenfold.

Some of those now trapped in Shadeshire are noble souls, determined to end the curse and deny their fate. Others are savage brutes, for whom an endless cycle of violence is its own reward. There are avaricious looters, frenzied barbarians and sages whose desire for knowledge has led them down dark paths. These disparate souls will clash together as each attempts to escape damnation, and the haunted streets of Shadeshire will run red with blood.

# THE NIGHTVAULT OPENS


It began with a rumble that swiftly grew to a deafening roar. Pale, despairing eyes turned to the roiling skies above Shadespire, a sickly-green maelstrom streaked with boiling energy and shrieking tempests. The forlorn populace had suffered all manner of torments during their incarceration within this nightmarish place, but they had never seen such a cataclysmic event. All knew at once that something momentous and terrifyingly powerful had struck the city-between-realms. The ground shook and broke apart into grinding teeth of glass. Walls crumbled. Hailstorms of crystal were sent hurtling through the air, propelled by a rushing tempest of magic. Entire sections of the Mirrored City collapsed in a refractive avalanche, torn apart by erupting geysers of spirit energy. Gigantic skulls of living flame lit the streets, engulfing anything in their path. And in the gloomy depths of the city, in the underground laboratories of the ancient Katophranes and the dank, lightless

catacombs beneath, ethereal shapes crawled their way into the city from the aetheric void.

The same deity that had cursed Shadespire to its grim fate worked this destruction. In his search for unquestioned dominance of all things, Nagash had unleashed the horror of the Shyish necroquake – a profane ritual designed to gain control over the Realm of Death and swell the power of amethyst magic in all corners of the Mortal Realms. Yet at the final culmination of this spell, the powers of Chaos had corrupted Nagash's great work. The necroquake did indeed unleash a tidal wave of necromantic energy, but it also threw the metaphysical laws of magic into disarray. Spells and incantations lingered long after their energy should have dissipated, hungrily devouring the brittle matter of reality. Raging storms of ectoplasmic energy tore across the realms, tearing down cities and incinerating thousands.

Even the Mirrored City, hidden in the penumbral domain between Ulgu and Hysh, was not safe from this turmoil. Magic had breached the city's enchanted walls and pierced the layers of obfuscation that had kept Shadespire as little more than a whispered tale of dread and horror for so many years. Across the realms, the eyes of mages, visionaries and avaricious beings were drawn to this strange prison of illusions and madness, and the countless mysteries and treasures that it concealed. One by one, disparate beings began to claw their way through breaches in the skin of reality, emerging into Shadespire. In turn, the desperate souls already trapped within its borders began to see flickers of the outside world bleeding through Shadespire's veil of illusory magic – images of distant cities and far-flung lands, almost tangible yet always agonisingly out of reach.

The God-King Sigmar's initial forays into the ruins of Shadespire had met with disaster. The Hammers of Sigmar, first amongst the God-King's grand Stormhosts, had lost many warriors during an ambush by Chaos-worshipping raiders, and as they battled through the time-worn remnants of the city, more had disappeared seemingly into thin air. The



Stormhost's commanders reported back to Azyrheim that a curse lay over Shadespire, a malicious enchantment that was spiriting away those who entered its borders.

To unbind this enchantment Sigmar dispatched an elite force of Stormcast Eternals from his secretive Sacrosanct Chambers, arcane champions who brought with them the power of the celestial storm. Led by the veteran Knight-Incantor Averon Stormsire and well-versed in the ways of fell magic, these scholars identified the loci of the curse that had claimed Shadespire – cursed gateways and malevolent, haunted artefacts crafted from corrupted shadeglass that dragged the unwary into a hidden realm of torment and madness. Realising that the only way to end this ancient evil was to enter the Mirrored City, Sigmar's agents willingly stepped through one of these dark portals, determined to see the God-King's will done or die in the attempt.

Nagash, already filled with cold fury at the corruption of his great ritual and the disruption of his perfectly ordered plans, was further incensed to discover trespassers straying into his domain, seeking to disrupt his prison. Such bold transgression required a fitting punishment. Reaching his dominating will into the Mirrored City, Nagash located a bitter aura of hatred and self-pity emanating from the lowest levels of the city. There lay a sprawling, subterranean dungeon – the Nightvault.

During the height of the city's power, the Katophranes had locked away those who had sought to subvert or disrupt their search for knowledge – rivals, thieves and would-be conquerors. Over the years, the dungeons were filled with thousands of these dissidents, and the Nightvault slowly expanded. Additional levels were constructed deep below the earth, lightless catacombs patrolled by the Katophranes' soul-powered automatons. There were unsettling rumours regarding what went on in those deep, dark places. Some whispered that the Katophranes were using their prisoners as subjects in strange rituals and experiments, attempting to master the transferral and manipulation of a mortal's soul essence. At the time of the city's fall, none could say how many unfortunate beings occupied the dungeon's many lightless cells. These rivals had been broken and

tormented at the hands of their gaolers over the course of many years, the most infamous of their number entombed within shadeglass prison chambers so that they would suffer for eternity. These wretched souls still lingered, and the Great Necromancer saw in them the perfect tools to wrest back control of Shadespire.

Nagash broke open the chains and enchantments that bound these shackled spirits, though he had no intention of granting them freedom. They would find no peace at the God of Death's hand. Instead, he shaped the Nightvault's bitter and hateful denizens to better suit his needs, giving them forms of spectral matter, and weapons to freeze the hearts of their victims. These spirits were then granted the freedom to stalk the shadow-shrouded streets of Shadespire, yet Nagash ensured that they retained a memory of their long agony, leaving them haunted by the pains of injuries and tortures long past. Thus did the Great Necromancer ensure the wretched creatures' hatred and jealousy of the living would never fade. Order would be restored in the Mirrored City, at any cost.

This vengeful spirit army commenced the cleansing of any outsiders foolish enough to stray within the city's borders. All intruders would be dragged down to the Nightvault and imprisoned for their insolent crimes. The spectral dead delighted in the chance to inflict the same torment they had suffered upon the living, and the streets of Shadespire soon echoed to the sounds of terrified screams and cruel, mocking laughter.

# WARBANDS OF SHADESPIRE

Over the centuries Shadespire has trapped many adventurers within its illusory borders. Some are noble and intrepid souls who seek to end the dark enchantment that lies over the city, while others are avaricious looters or blood-crazed cultists. All are pursued by agents of Nagash's will, who seek to restore order to the Mirrored City.



## Stormsire's Cursebreakers

The battle-mages of the Sacrosanct Chamber are masters of storm magic, able to summon the cleansing power of the heavenly tempest to their fingertips with a mere gesture. Knight-Incantor Averon Stormsire was chosen personally by the God-King Sigmar to investigate the curse of Shadespire, for the irascible mage's knowledge of unbinding and banishment is extraordinarily comprehensive. Stormsire has long studied the negative effects of the reforging process, and his grim demeanour has only grown more intense as the troubling implications become clearer. At first, Stormsire considered the legend of Shadespire merely another distraction, another dead end that would lead only to frustration and failure. Yet upon examining the power of the curse that binds the city, and studying slivers of haunted shadeglass, a faint glimmer of hope has been rekindled in his heart. Alongside his two loyal companions, Rastus and Ammis, Stormsire walks the halls of the Mirrored City, searching for answers and a way to free Shadespire from the Great Necromancer's dark enchantment. Any who come between this formidable trio and their goal are eradicated with crackling bolts of lightning, or swept aside with fulminating blasts of energy.

## Thorns of the Briar Queen

The Briar Queen was once a death mage of formidable power, a great enemy of Shadespire whose undead armies breached the city walls and threatened to tear down all that the Katophranes had built. Only after unthinkable bloodshed was the Briar Queen defeated, captured and sentenced to an eternity of imprisonment and torment in the Nightvault, far beneath the city streets. Years passed, and this agonising existence slowly drove the Briar Queen to madness. Trapped for centuries in a cell of obsidian shadeglass, she was consumed by misery and despair, yet an ember of hatred for those who had condemned her to this fate still lingered. She was the perfect tool for Nagash to unleash upon those who dared to trespass within the Mirrored City. The Great Necromancer dragged her screaming essence from her crystal tomb and fashioned her inchoate malice into the dread form of a banshee, with her former mastery of necromantic magic still intact. Varclav the Cruel is the Briar Queen's majordomo, an infamously sadistic gheist who was formerly the high-warden of the Nightvault until he himself was imprisoned for a string of vile murders. Nagash's final gift to the Briar Queen was an army of malicious spirits with which to see his will done. Greatest of their number is the Ever-hanged, the spectral echo of a serial murderer, around whose neck still hangs the gallows-rope that ended his reign of terror.

