

# SIGMAR'S BLOOD™



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# SIGMAR'S BLOOD

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# INTRODUCTION

The Vampire Manfred von Carstein has plunged Sylvania into endless night, casting a powerful spell of darkness as he prepares to usher in an age of undeath. The Cult of Sigmar moves to stop him, led by the Grand Theogonist himself, Volkmar the Grim. Yet they may already be too late...

*Warhammer: Sigmar's Blood* is split into the following chapters:

## THE DYING LIGHT

A gathering darkness is consuming Sylvania. Volkmar's army answers the call to arms in this introduction to the campaign.

## THE MIDNIGHT HUNT

Mannfred's Necromancer ally is hunted by the crusade's vanguard, and battle erupts as the dead of Sylvania rise.

## THE PARLEY OF BLADES

The armies of the Empire plunge further south. Mannfred himself confronts Volkmar, and the war begins in earnest.

## THE HIDDEN NECROPOLIS

The location of Mannfred's secret weapon has been unearthed. Can the White Wizards of Templehof destroy it in time?

## THE BATTLE OF THE BARROWS

The crusade draws to its gory end outside Castle Sternieste as the Lords of Light and the Living Darkness mass for war.

## THE ARMIES ASSEMBLED

The glorious Citadel miniatures that feature in this book, painted by Games Workshop's famous 'Eavy Metal team.





# THE DYING LIGHT

Late in the year 2522, troubling rumours were rife across Sylvania. Every last hamlet and village had its own dark tales; livestock had been found mangled, babies had been stolen from their cots, and dead men shambled across the moors in hungry packs. The holy symbols adorning each ramshackle temple had been stolen and buried beyond mortal sight, the only sign of their theft a few smudges of grave-dirt on the flagstones. The local peasantry hung witchbane above their doors and made the signs of Sigmar and Morr, fearing the worst was yet to come. Yet not even the most ardent doomsayer suspected how far Sylvania would be plunged into darkness.

## THE SHADOW OF UNDEATH

The men and women of Stirland have long been superstitious, and for good reason, for their land is truly cursed. Though the Vampire Wars are a distant memory, the malignance of the realm's ancient masters, the von Carsteins, lingers on.

The folk of the eastern Empire are well used to signs of evil within their lands. Dark Magic seeps through the wilderness, gathering in invisible pools from the heart of Stirland to the shoulders of the Worlds Edge Mountains. Unless the death god Morr is invoked and the correct rituals observed, these baleful energies will wake the dead wherever they lie.

## THE LEGIONS BENEATH

It is the Stirlanders' way, when a good friend or close relative dies, to stuff the gullet of the corpse with garlic, crow's feet, and sprigs of hawthorn and bloodwort. Copper coins are pressed hard into its eye sockets as offerings to Morr and the cadaver is buried face-down in a deep, dark grave. With the dead protected in this way, the necromantic fiends that plague the Old World are kept from harvesting their grisly crop.

Despite these precautions, in darkest Sylvania, the walking dead are a far more common sight than roadwardens or agents of the Imperial crown. The vampiric lords that lurk in the tumbledown castles of that land have had millennia to perfect their arts, and eternity teaches patience above all else.

In truth, raising the dead in Sylvania is a relatively simple business. The very land is saturated with Dark Magic, and for every corpse consecrated in the proper fashion, there are ten that stir uneasily in unmarked graves. Even a simple cantrip can cause the earth underfoot to shiver and moan. When Morrslieb hangs low, armies of long-dead corpses spontaneously claw their way to the surface and writhe out from the loam. Gathered by their masters into tightly packed mobs of dead flesh, they set upon the living, each horde led by the bloodthirsty kin of the first Vampires to stalk the world.





## THE GREAT DARKNESS

As 2522 drew to a close, a thick pall of shadow fell over Sylvania. It was a gloom so profound that even the midday sun struggled to illuminate the land for long. The strange manifestation abruptly ceased to exist along every border of the land; a traveller could go from bright sunlight to oppressive murk in a single step. Within Sylvania's borders, the sun's rays would not shine. Only a hazy unlight marked the difference between night and day. The phenomenon was magical, beyond any doubt. The province's wary inhabitants suspected, with the conviction of bitter experience, that the Lords of Undeath were to blame. The Vampire Counts are legendary figures, and the tales tell of a darkness that follows them wherever they roam. Yet to steal the very sunlight from an entire province and damn it to a lingering death by starvation and disease; that was a feat of prodigious power indeed. Even so, with every passing week, the light faded a little more, and the hopes of Sylvania faded with it.

The most superstitious of the Empire's populace whispered that the force behind the darkness swathing Sylvania was none other than Mannfred von Carstein, most cunning and magically adept of all his bloodsucking kin. Many of those that espoused this belief were derided by their fellows as paranoid doomsayers. The folklore of the common people told that Mannfred met his demise at Hel Fenn centuries ago, driven into the mud by the Elector Count of Stirland, and that the von Carstein dynasty was destroyed with him. Yet the spectre of the Vampire Counts lingered long, and not all who suspected Mannfred's return were without influence.

## CHALLENGES AND OATHS

Two years previously, Grand Theogonist Volkmar had despatched one of his most trusted men, the resourceful Witch Hunter Gunther Stahlberg, to investigate rumours of Mannfred von Carstein's re-emergence at Castle Drakenhof. Volkmar's agent had made good speed, setting off for Sylvania without delay. He had not been heard from since. Volkmar was keen to investigate in force, but with the war in the north raging harder than ever, Karl Franz was loath to divert military assets on the basis of hearsay and rumour.

The Emperor's reticence ended abruptly during that year's Conclave of State, a yearly gathering of the finest political minds in the Empire. Assembled in the Imperial Palace, the Elector Counts had haggled over petty border disputes long into the night, a huge map of the nation spread out before them. The vellum chart had been covered in the red ink of proposed amendments. Volkmar was on the brink of losing his patience when the moonlight filtering in from above was disturbed by a ragged shadow flitting across the map.

Suddenly, the stained glass roof of the Grand Atrium came crashing down, its bladed shards impaling many attendants and nearly decapitating several Electors. A bloodless cadaver thudded down onto the part of the map depicting Sylvania. Volkmar recoiled as recognition struck. It was the haggard corpse of Stahlberg. An ornate scroll was stuffed into the Witch Hunter's mouth, sealed with the bat-winged sigil of the von Carsteins. Whilst the Elector Counts scabbled for their weapons, Volkmar snatched out the scroll and broke the seal. Written in elegant but dated quillwork was a declaration



of secession for Sylvania, signed by Mannfred von Carstein himself. As Karl Franz restored order around him, Volkmar read the letter out loud. It detailed the count's seizure of the realm he saw as his birthright, being the sole heir to Vlad von Carstein, and outlined his legitimate claim to the Imperial throne. Underneath the veneer of civility, contempt dripped from the missive's every phrase. 'How could the great leaders of the Empire protect its borders', the letter asked, 'when they were barely aware of what was taking place under their noses?'

A dark suspicion flared in Volkmar's mind. He quickly commanded his Arch Lectors to take a detachment of Reiksguard down to investigate the nearby Temple Vaults. They found the chambers ransacked, the veteran guards torn to pieces by assailants of incredible strength. Potent artefacts lay scattered in the cobwebbed corners as if they were little more than scrap. The only item that could not be found was the fabled Crown of Sorcery, a cursed heirloom that once adorned the brow of the Great Necromancer, Nagash. Not only had Mannfred cursed Sylvania, but his agents had stolen one of the most valuable artefacts from the Temple Vaults even as the Electors debated in the state rooms above. Volkmar's rage was incandescent. In a voice like Sigmar's own, he swore a great oath – he would slay Mannfred von Carstein and recover the Crown of Sorcery, or die in the attempt.

There remained at least one agent active in Sylvania, a man named Alberich von Korden, who had long claimed that Mannfred was still a threat. Von Korden was recalled to Altdorf immediately, his beliefs vindicated. The hunt was on.





# Sylvania

## Vale of Darkness

## The Broken Spine

# Averland

Tower of Melkhior

Heath Cairn

Cripple town

Former site of Mordheim

Vale of Dead Trees

Sage's Ruin

Fool's Rest

Hunger Wood

Cairn Circle

Helsee

Grim Moor

Uflheim

Falls of Despair

Castle Templehof

The Ruins of Vanhaldenschlosse

Red Cairn

Fort Oberstyre

Templehof

Grim Wood

Konigstein Tower

Deihstein

Vargravia

Castle Sternieste

Naubonum

Unterwold

Vale of Vain Hope

Arfeit

Licheburg

Morr's Heath

Vance

Swartzhafen

Drakenhof

Castle Drakenhof

Nulheim

Spider Haunts

Araknos

Haunted Hills

Crowtop

Ghoul Wood

The Unclean Wood

N. Aver Reach

Derelict Temple

Vassel

Vladis

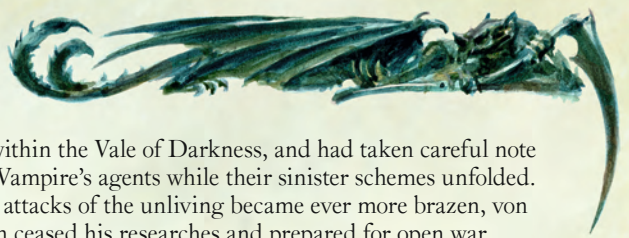
Kleiberstorf

Corpse Run

Forsaken Forest

Oakenhammer





## THE HUNTERS HUNTED

As the Great Darkness brought Sylvania to its knees, the Witch Hunters of Sylvania were hunted in their turn. Packs of ravening beasts dogged each hunter's steps at every hour of the day or night, driving them to the edge of distraction. Pallid troglodytes skulked in the shadows on the periphery of vision, filling the night with their half-sane gibbering as they waited for their quarry to let his guard down.

As strong as they were, the Witch Hunters were only human. One by one they succumbed to exhaustion. They slept fitfully in taverns and roadside inns, only to be slain in their beds, their half-eaten remains a brutal shock awaiting the innkeepers the next morning. The last of their brethren to survive was the ever-suspicious von Korden, a man whose merciless conviction had seen criminals and innocents alike burnt at the stake. Von Korden had long believed that Mannfred was acting in secret

from within the Vale of Darkness, and had taken careful note of the Vampire's agents while their sinister schemes unfolded. As the attacks of the unliving became ever more brazen, von Korden ceased his researches and prepared for open war.

As soon as Volkmar's summons reached von Korden's watch at Konigstein, the Witch Hunter left his men to their vigil and headed northward to the River Stir. There, he marshalled the last of his gold and bought passage on a sturdy trade barge headed to the capital of Altdorf. His intent was to report directly to the Grand Theogonist, informing him of the various perils that threatened the east of the Empire and acting as a guide on the resultant expedition. Von Korden spent the long days within the barge cooped up with quill and candle, writing down everything he knew about Sylvania. With von Korden's help, Volkmar's crusade would plunge deep into Sylvania and strike right at its dark heart.

## A TREATISE ON THE VALE OF DARKNESS

*Penned by Alberich von Korden. For the eyes of His Eminence, the Grand Theogonist Volkmar, only.*

### THE BROKEN SPINE

*The peaks of the Broken Spine are but foothills in comparison to the Worlds Edge Mountains, but they form no less a barrier to evil. Without them, the eldritch winds that blow through Sylvania would carry armies of the dead further into Stirland, the Moot, perhaps even across Aver Reach. As it is, the fell winds are contained by this hinterland, and many powerful Undead with them.*

### HUNGER WOOD

*Hunger Wood is the most reviled of all the forests in Sylvania. Even the most hardened of my men refuse to pass beneath its boughs. Foolhardy bounty hunters and ignorant mercenaries enter every year, however, searching for wyrdstone-scattered ruins and other treasures. Thus far, only one has managed to return. His company were lost in the wood and forced to eat and drink of one another's flesh in order to survive. Eventually, the ghoulish denizens of the forest claimed the rest of the company for their own. I hold a special revulsion for cannibalism, and am in no hurry to become that which I hunt, or to see that grisly fate befall any others. I would strongly advise avoiding the evil truths of Hunger Wood at all costs.*

### HELSEE

*Ice-cold and greasy to the touch, the waters of the lake known as Helsee are as black as a hangman's heart. The fork in the river mid-Stir offers a direct route to the northern shore of Helsee, and hence to the mouth of the Vale of Darkness itself, without needing to risk open battle against the unliving. Furthermore, the river fork is unquestionably the fastest route from Altdorf to the vale. The lake's waters are poisonous and contact with them is best avoided. Amongst the bones strewn around its shores are the remains of many betentacled terrors and the carcasses of beaked blubber-things that I cannot accurately describe.*

### GRIM MOOR

*It was within the cloying bogs and stinking quagmires of Grim Moor that Konrad the Bloody made his last stand and finally fell. Here, he took battle against the armies of Man and Dwarf alike, commanding great skeletal legions raised from the moor's many ancient barrows and cairns. Justice prevailed: the beast was eventually brought to ground and put to the stake. Today, the peat of this realm is still thick with bones. The sane man detours west, through Uflheim.*

### THE FALLS OF DESPAIR

*Follow the rivers that feed Helsee to their source, and you will find the Falls of Despair. Here it is as if the land itself is wounded, for it is not water that cascades from the peaks, but tainted, blackish blood. A few weeks hence, the clouding mist at the base of these falls infected the mind of my bannerhand, Jensen. It drove him into a murderous dream-rage before cruelly returning his sanity so he could see the ruin he had wrought. I had to execute him on the spot; more's the pity.*

### UFLHEIM

*Though its people are wart-nosed heathens and its innkeeps are dull oafs, Uflheim is an island of safety in a sea of threat. Its palisade was built to repel the bestial tribes of the Great Forest, but it works just as well against the walking dead. For the price of a few pfennigs and a pretty speech, the townspeople will give up their beds.*

### FORT OBERSTYRE

*Travellers of the western road should learn the history of Fort Oberstyre. Sacked by Konrad and his Vampire knight allies, the fortress was heavily rebuilt and garrisoned by the beast's eventual slayer, Count Helmar of Stirland. That garrison was slain in turn by Mannfred's foul magicks. In a display of callous expediency, von Carstein summoned the spirits slain long ago by Konrad and set them upon their would-be replacements.*

### KONIGSTEIN TOWER

*Named after a long-forgotten king, Konigstein has sunk under the weight of the ages and is little more than a set of abandoned ruins. It is here that the Necromancer Ghorst dwells; a death-pet of Mannfred himself, I am convinced of it. Spare me a cannon with which to knock on his door, and I shall prove it beyond all doubt.*

### CASTLES STERNIESTE AND DRAKENHOF

*My lord will have noticed I am directing his attention towards Castle Sternieste rather than Drakenhof. I believe that not only is von Carstein active in Sylvania, but also that he is central to its curse. The very fact that cloaked agents and ornate coaches converge upon Castle Sternieste with increasing frequency should be enough to raise suspicions, but I have personally witnessed a pale lord on its walls. With your help, sire, the Vampire will burn before year's end.*







## THE MIDNIGHT HUNT

*Volkmar the Grim has rallied his most holy warriors and sailed down the River Reik with a sacred vow on his lips. His destination is the troubled realm of Sylbania, home to terrors beyond imagining, and lair of the infamous Count Manfred, an undying fiend who must be destroyed at all costs.*

*Heading south, Volkmar bade his men find the Vampire and burn his body to ash. By tracking down and interrogating the count's lieutenants and cat's paws, the crusaders could find their way right to the von Carstein's door. The Witch Hunter von Korden is the first to locate his quarry; a Necromancer thrall of Manfred's known as Ghorst. As von Korden and his men push deeper into the grave-strewn wilderness, the dead stagger through the mists to meet them...*





# DARK BEGINNINGS

With the Emperor's blessing, Volkmar wasted no time in gathering an escort of iron-willed warriors to his side. Only those with a fervent belief in the gods of the Empire could be expected to face the horrors of Sylvania and live.

## THE CRUSADE MARCHES OUT

It was not long before the Grand Theogonist and his most senior Arch Lector, Kaslain, had mustered a cadre of the Sigmarite Cult's most pious devotees ready for the crusade into Sylvania. However, though Emperor Karl Franz gave full blessing to Volkmar's crusade, he knew he could not afford for the Imperial Army of Altdorf to bolster the Grand Theogonist's budding crusade.

For the Emperor himself to enter Sylvania at the head of a grand army would announce his intent loud and clear to the would-be masters of that realm. Such an act would likely send Mannfred von Carstein further into hiding rather than bring him out into the open, for the villain was known to be as cunning as a fiend. Furthermore, though the officer class of the Empire would never admit it, only a small force could be spared from the Altdorf barracks.

The Empire was beset on all sides, and the war against the Chaos-worshippers of the north ground ever onward with no sign of resolution in sight. Instead the Emperor sent word to the Kriegsmarshal of Talabecland, a powerful province that bordered troubled Stirland, requesting that a detachment of his army met Volkmar's crusade in secret upon the River Reik.

The Kriegsmarshal remembered the dramatic events of the Conclave of State well. He complied as best he could with Karl Franz's request that only those with true steel in their souls should be sent to Volkmar's side. The force he selected was small but powerful, numbering state troops, artillerymen, and knights amongst its number. It included devotees of the goddess Myrmidia as well as Sigmar, but all were strong of faith. Though the army seemed disparate at first glance, they were united by a burning desire to slay the minions of darkness or die trying.



Altdorf

## SIGMAR'S SONS

*Amongst the crusaders sent to reinforce Volkmar were Sigmar's Sons, veteran warriors and merciless killers to a man. Each of them had originally served in the Red Masquers, an eighty-strong regiment that had fought alongside Volkmar less than a year ago against the Chaos-worshippers of the North.*

*Whilst on campaign against the many barbarian tribes, the Grand Theogonist had been so impressed by the Red Masquers' repeated refusal to retreat in the face of the baying hordes that he gave them his official commendation, renaming them Sigmar's Sons in honour of their heroic bravery. Since that day, it has been their tradition for each of their number to have the hammer of Sigmar tattooed upon his chest in recognition of Volkmar's accolade. Some of them go so far as to have their entire bodies tattooed with different scenes from Sigmar's life, believing that such dedication will lend them strength when they need it most: in the heat of battle.*

*Though Sigmar's Sons boast that they are as skilled in battle as any knight of the Empire – and have proved it on more than one occasion – it is faith that is their most potent weapon against evil. When battle is joined, the righteous anger that seethes in their hearts drives them deep into enemy ranks, swords hacking and stabbing without pity.*

*When Karl Franz sent for aid from Talabecland, the barracks that contained Sigmar's Sons was the Kriegsmarshal's first port of call. There, he hand-picked the best of their number to join the crusade, reasoning that Volkmar would need a cadre of men he could trust in the tumultuous days ahead.*



## ALBERICH VON KORDEN

*Von Korden is feared as well as respected in settlements across the Vale of Darkness. He was originally assigned to prosecute deviants within the walls of Altdorf, and spent the first decade of his career hunting and executing traitors to the Empire that lurked in the capital itself. In this, he succeeded mightily, culling corrupt street folk and perverted aristocrats alike in his quest to burn the taint of Chaos from the bosom of the Empire. He made many powerful enemies, and it was soon whispered that he was so steeped in blood that he had lost the ability to tell innocent from guilty. There was more truth in the rumours than the Cult of Sigmar cared to admit.*

*Von Korden was only saved from disgrace by a reassignment to Sylvania by Emperor Karl Franz himself. Since then, he has worked tirelessly against the evil denizens of that land for years. Von Korden now has loyal bodies of men throughout the Vale – after shooting the Templehof Vargheist through the eye with a silver bullet and hauling its corpse into the town's bonfire, the Witch Hunter has gained plenty of supporters. He has truly thrived in Sylvania, for the delineation between good and evil is far more distinct there than in the courts of the Empire. He has three confirmed Vampire kills to his name and has taken their heads as trophies to prove his skill, claiming that he will add Manfred's own skull to the tally before the year is out. It is this bloody determination that has won von Korden allies from common roadwardens to the White Order of Templehof – a trio of eccentric wizards based to the east of the Vale who see the Witch Hunter as a powerful force for good, and have rewarded him with a magical ring that can drive back the creatures of darkness.*



## INTO THE DARKNESS

Back in Altdorf, Volkmar and his men made their way to the docks on the banks of the River Reik. There, his warriors boarded the great armoured barge *Luitpold III*, a cannon-toting steam leviathan large enough to accommodate not only Volkmar's War Altar but also an entire army in its cavernous holds. That night, Volkmar's warriors journeyed down the Stir in silence, each man lost in his own prayers. Silhouetted in the moonlight upon the prow of the barge was the Witch Hunter von Korden, the shadow of a smile upon his lips.

The crusade passed along the Stir as it wound through the Drakwald Forest. The sheer size of the armoured barge conveying Volkmar's men deterred the bestial tribes that haunted the forest from attacking. Each day, von Korden commanded the *Luitpold's* coalsmen to pour ever more fuel into the ship's furnaces until the river air was choked with fumes. The barge made all haste, stopping only to resupply at Kemperbad as it wound towards the Talabecland border.

When Volkmar's progress reached the rendezvous point at Leitzigerford, it was an effort of will not show his anger and disappointment. The army mustered by the state of Talabecland numbered fewer than fifty men. Times were hard, it was true, and the Beastmen of the forests were a constant danger. Yet for Talabheim to spare such a small contingent did not bode well for the crusade's success. Nonetheless, the sight of his old comrades, the swordsmen of the Sigmar's Sons, raised Volkmar's spirits a little. The *Luitpold* forged on.

As the border of Sylvania appeared on the horizon, von Korden made his way to the barge's prow once more. If anything, the curse affecting the province had gained strength. It was as if a curtain of night had been drawn across the skies. Volkmar joined the Witch Hunter at the prow, silently shaking his head in dismay at the sight. The crew muttered and shuffled behind them. The captain of the *Luitpold* would take the crusaders as far as the shores of Helsee, but no further. The only way for the crusade to continue onward was by foot.

## THE SILVER BULLETS

*What the handgunners known as the Silver Bullets lack in discipline, they make up for in accuracy. These sharpshooters maintain that they fire silver-plated shot with every volley, but in truth, each of their number is given only a single silver bullet from their foul-mouthed Marksman-at-arms, Curser Bredt,*

*upon their induction into the ranks. Just as much a talisman as a weapon, each Handgunner would only use his silver bullet if no other option were present. The men of Bredt's unit believe that whilst their good luck charms are safe, they too are protected from whatever Sylvania's darkness can throw at them.*



## A GRUESOME WELCOME

By the grim half-light of the Sylvanian day, the crusade made ready for the long march into the Vale of Darkness. Their arrival had not gone unnoticed. As the troops tightened their bootstraps and the strongest of Sigmar's Sons unlimbered the War Altar from the *Luitpold's* hold, the monstrous bones that lay scattered in the shallows began to shiver and shake. Fist-sized vertebrae rolled together to form spines, and talons reattached to massive claws.

Animated by nameless forces, the skeletal guardians of the lake drizzled brackish water as they pulled themselves upright. The monsters advanced through the shallows with surreal slowness, plodding towards the shocked soldiery. The Grand Theogonist was already splashing through the waters of the lake towards the beasts, von Korden at his side. The Witch Hunter blasted the three-eyed skull of the nearest monster with two pinpoint bullets from his silver-chased pistols. Volkmar shouted a war-prayer to Sigmar and plunged a glowing fist into the shallows. Golden light bled out, suffusing the waters around him. It coiled around the legs of the monstrous sentinels, undoing the baleful magics that gave the creatures life. One by one, the skeletal monsters collapsed into the water.

Energised by their victory, the crusaders marched from the shores of Helsee with their heads held high. They gave Grim Moor and the standing stones of the Cairn Circle a wide

berth as they made their way south-west. The crusaders reached the palisade wall of Uflheim by nightfall, or so they believed, for the difference between night and day was becoming increasingly difficult to discern.

Uflheim's peasants were relieved to see a military presence of any kind arrive in their town, let alone one led by the Grand Theogonist himself. Amidst much bowing and scraping, the people of the township fed and watered the crusaders, and their earlier victory was celebrated well.



As the skies began to lighten, Volkmar himself kicked his men from their slumbers, much to the sore-headed shock of those who had drunk too much the previous night. He ordered the crusade to split into two, the better to avoid detection, and to hunt down Manfred's agents more quickly. Volkmar led his own escort to Fort Oberstyre, whilst von Korden departed as quickly as possible for Konigstein Tower. It was a plan that suited the Witch Hunter well, for he had long suspected that Konigstein harboured an old enemy of his; the Necromancer Ghorst.



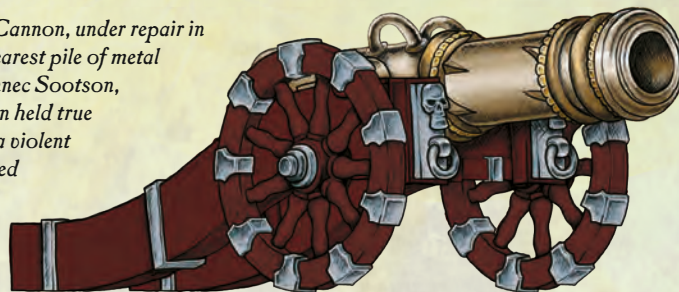
*The Crusaders United*

## THE HAMMER OF THE WITCHES

*The mighty Fort Oberstyre once had four complete cannon batteries, mounted upon its walls at great expense by the Elector Count of Stirland. Today, most of them lie silent. Even the most determined engineer will think twice about salvage operations when he sees the murderous spectres that flit and moan through the castle's walls. Yet one of its cannons serves the Empire to this day.*

*The Imperial cannon known as the Hammer of the Witches was one of the few recovered from Fort Oberstyre before it was abandoned to its ghosts. The Great Cannon earned its name during the Gorstanford Fire of 2502, that infamous year when a young von Korden hunted down and tried a notorious witch known only as the Grey Hag. Tied to a stake in the town square, the witch was sentenced to be burned alive. The fires beneath her were lit by von Korden's own torch, but to the horror of the throng that had assembled to watch the execution, the cursed woman did not burn. Instead she cackled louder and louder, the crackling fires beneath her echoing her laughter. As the shrieks reached a crescendo, the flames leapt out like living things, igniting the dry thatch of the buildings around the periphery of the square. Within minutes, Gorstanford burned, its people fleeing in panic. The Grey Hag remained untouched, laughing hysterically in the centre of the inferno.*

*The disaster was only contained when an Imperial Great Cannon, under repair in the town's smithy, was hastily primed, stuffed with the nearest pile of metal (a bucket of horseshoes), and fired. The blacksmith, Bennec Sootson, claims that Sigmar was with him that day, for the cannon held true and the improvised grapeshot blasted the witch apart in a violent explosion of gore. Though the cannon was later seconded to Talabecland's grand army, during the Beast Hunt of 2520, the blacksmith Sootson still forms part of the cannon's crew, and he has claimed the wretched lives of many a witch and warlock since his conscription into the ranks.*





## THE PATHS DIVERGE

Where many dignitaries of the Sigmarite Cult were content to whisper and plot for advantage in the sanctums of the Aلدorf temples, the Grand Theogonist has always been dedicated heart and soul to the overthrow of the dark powers. Von Korden had already seen first-hand that Volkmar readily risked his life in battle, and had nothing but respect for him as a result. However, rumour had it the old man's conviction could sometimes be his worst enemy. In the Witch Hunter's eyes, it would take more than blind faith to win this fight.

Von Korden knew as well as any general that the Empire must use every weapon available if it was to defeat the hordes of evil. He hoped to make good use of the Deathkneel Watch still standing at the base of Konigstein Tower and signal for aid from his allies – the canny Witch Hunter had garrisoned it less than a week ago for just such a purpose. If Volkmar knew about von Korden's belief that the Sigmarite crusade could not achieve its mission unaided, he would like as not excommunicate the Witch Hunter then and there. As the Grand Theogonist was heading to Fort Oberstyre, however, he need never know his ally was seeking reinforcements.

To escort von Korden on his journey, Volkmar had sent not only two units of state troops, but also the famous Knights of the Blazing Sun and – as per the Witch Hunter's request – an artillery piece with which to break open Konigstein Tower if necessary. Von Korden's fingers itched in anticipation of the fight to come. The Necromancer Ghorst was almost certainly an acolyte of Mannfred's – killing him and ransacking his lair would not only yield clues as to the dread count's whereabouts, but also settle an old debt in the process.

## THE KNIGHTS OF THE BLAZING SUN

*Amongst the most famous of all the Empire's Knightly Orders, the Knights of the Blazing Sun are a power unto themselves. Their order was founded long centuries ago during the crusades against Araby, though its fortunes were irrevocably changed at the Battle of Magritta. It was there that a statue of the war goddess Myrmidia crumbled and fell from atop her grand temple, crushing the Emir of the Arabyan army and turning the tide of the battle as a result.*


*Since that day, the Knights of the Blazing Sun have been fierce devotees of Myrmidia, even going so far as to establish an impressive temple to her in Talabheim. Unlike the rest of the Empire crusade that journeyed into Sylvania, they were not selected by the Grand Theogonist on the basis of their faith in Sigmar. Instead, they themselves requested to join the ranks of the crusade, their preceptor, Lupio Blaze, swearing their lives to Volkmar's defence. The Grand Theogonist initially refused the Knightly Order's aid, but such was their passion and determination that he relented at the last moment and accepted their request as the crusade was boarding the Luitpold III.*

*The motives of the Knights of the Blazing Sun remain shrouded. That they have true belief in a deity of the Empire – albeit a relative newcomer to the pantheon – is beyond doubt. Though he keeps his own counsel on the subject, Volkmar believes that it is the rumours of a growing darkness that are responsible for the worshippers of Myrmidia joining his crusade – the goddess takes the summer sun as one of her symbols, after all. The order's strange faith could yet be a useful weapon against the Undead, and perhaps even prove equal to the fiery zeal of the Sigmarites themselves.*





# THE FIRST CLASH



Von Korden and his men reached Konigstein Tower well after nightfall. On the crest of the hill, a ramshackle ruin loomed through the mist, ghostly balefire glimmering in the empty sockets of its windows. The Witch Hunter could feel the evil of the place on his skin. The tracts of land that surrounded it, strewn with headstones and shattered statuary, boasted only open graves that gaped toward the night sky. Nearby, the ancient tower, which von Korden had garrisoned to monitor the township in his stead, stood tall, but there were no signs of life within.

As von Korden grew closer, he could see that the watch's windows had been smashed open, and the brass sentinel at its top hung dejected and inert. The Witch Hunter spat into the dirt. The men he had left here had likely fallen to Ghorst's minions, and they had failed even to send a warning from the watch's signal mechanism. Irritably, von Korden ordered for his men to spread out into a battle line and unlimber the cannon called the Hammer of the Witches by its crew. 'There are Undead here', he muttered to his men, 'sure as those graves are empty.'

The pregnant silence was broken by a sharp shout of alarm from one of the Silver Bullets. In the process of forming up, one of the men had put his foot through the rotten wood of an empty coffin. Nervous laughter and disorder echoed from their ranks as the clumsy fool pulled himself upright, his half-joking apologies echoing uncannily loud in the mist.

Eyes blazing, von Korden stomped towards the gunmen. He pulled up short, sniffing the air. A low moaning was coming from the ramshackle tower up ahead. With the slowness of a dream, the bone-white cadavers that had once populated the graveyard stalked through the mist towards them. Degenerate cannibals slunk in their wake like dogs hungry for a scrap of meat. A lonely howl sounded, frighteningly close, and a chorus of mournful wails joined it as slack-skinned monsters that had once been wolves padded out of the mist. Cresting the hill came Ghorst himself, riding hunched upon his grisly carriage, the lonely toll of its bell an invitation for the intruders to join the dead. Von Korden cocked his pistols; there was killing to be done.

## THE NECROMANCER GHORST

*Originally the youngest of five strong brothers from the village of Templehof, Ghorst was a farrier and groom just like his father.*

*His love of danger and the open road was well known, and he would take any excuse to deliver messages to Ufheim in the west or Vassel in the south. One day, he returned from his adventures to find his brothers and father dead in their beds, taken by the Plague of Blue Roses. Fungus-bruises covered their bodies, and its spores were thick in the air. Ghorst could not accept the loss. At first, he tried to contract the plague himself by embracing his lost brothers, but it would not take him. Eventually, he plunged himself into the study of the black arts, hoping to return his brothers to life.*

*Word of Ghorst's studies reached the peasantry and, in due course, the ears of von Korden. Escaping the Witch Hunter's wrath by hiding amongst the corpses of a nearby plague pit, Ghorst loaded the bodies of his dead relatives onto a mouldering carriage under cover of darkness. He lashed it to a pair of famished oxen and fled deep into nearby Vargravia.*

*It was in that forsaken realm that the wanderer encountered Manfred von Carstein. The count saw a powerful madness growing in Ghorst's eyes. Instead of killing him for his presumption in trespassing, Manfred began to teach Ghorst the secrets of necromancy, even going so far as to gift him an unholy tome of magic. It is no longer a desperate adventurer that answers to the name Helman Ghorst, just as it is no longer oxen that draw his carriage along the dirt tracks of Syluania. Instead, his bone-ridged cart is pulled through the night by the four selfsame siblings he 'rescued' from his village, each once-handsome farrier restored to a mockery of life and forced to stumble along at the head of their brother's unliving host.*







## THE PARLEY OF BLADES

*Whilst von Korden matches his wits against the sinister Ghorst, Volkmar marches further into the Vale of Darkness in an open challenge to Manfred – meet them in battle, or die like a dog in the shadows. Soon, the living dead rise up against the trespassers, but the Vampire's minions are swiftly despatched by the force of the Grand Theogonist's faith.*

*Having forced the Necromancer Ghorst to abandon his stranglehold upon Konigstein, the Witch Hunter von Korden and his faithful soldiers are reinforced by Volkmar's crusade as a running battle unfolds upon the open road. With the heroes united, victory is soon ensured, and the Empire crusade marches stronger than ever. However, matters come to a head outside Swartzhafen, where the Grand Theogonist and Manfred von Carstein meet upon the field of battle for the first time.*



Vale of Dead  
Trees

# CRUSADE ASCENDANT

News of Volkmar's arrival spread far and wide, but thus far, Mannfred's allies had proved unable to keep the Sigmarites from their rampage through the vale. It was not long before Mannfred decided to take an active hand in the crusade's demise.

## THE ROAD TO OBERSTYRE

To march alongside Volkmar at the head of his army was to witness a man possessed. The burly old man practically crackled with pent-up energy as he rode through the vale, bellowing out commands and slamming his fists together in anticipation of the battles to come. His voice rang out in the silence. Let von Korden have the villages and hamlets to himself; the Sigmarite elite would banish the ghosts of Fort Oberstyre, then head eastwards to Deihstein. Anything that got in their way would burn.

In the rutted earth of the Grand Theogonist's wake came the plate-clad figure of Volkmar's trusted aide, Kaslain. The Arch Lector was surrounded by an escort of bare-footed and wild-eyed fanatics; zealots that accompanied the War Altar wherever it went. Volkmar nodded in approval as more and more of the strange flock joined them from the ramshackle farms and

run-down hovels at the sides of the road. Lost souls or not, if the rumours about the ethereal hosts in Fort Oberstyre were true, their faith in the warrior god Sigmar would prove more useful than mere steel.

The crusade came to Fort Oberstyre in the last hours of what passed for Sylvanian daylight. Looming high on the stony crag above, the fortress stared down at them from hundreds of arrow-slits and murder-holes. Trails of thick red liquid seeped from each aperture like tears of gore. Volkmar had a suspicion they were all that remained of the fortress' previous victims.

High above, spires dotted with grisly gibbets and iron maidens reached into the gloom. The crusaders did not slow, or pass comment, for their faith was strong. Instead, they marched up the sharp stones of the fortress' causeway towards Oberstyre's titanic gate.



The Crusaders United

Volkmar's Crusade

The Faithful Few

## ARCH LECTOR KASLAIN

*Each Grand Theogonist traditionally has two Arch Lectors under his command; tough and astute men who are as at home in the Electoral Halls of the Empire's great cities as they are on the battlefield. Arch Lector Kaslain is no exception. When asked if his preference is for civic politics or open war, he invariably chooses the latter, where cracking an enemy's head open and spilling his brains on the ground is seen as a perfectly acceptable way to settle a dispute.*

*Kaslain is a tall man and physically strong – mighty enough to wield his symbol of office, the Reikhammer, as its creator intended. The Reikhammer is the brother-weapon to the famed Mace of Helsturm; an heirloom of the cult that is currently in the possession of Kaslain's opposite number, Arch Lector Aglim. Forged by the very first Grand Theogonist, Johann Helsturm, the two magically blessed artefacts have been passed down from generation to generation ever since. In these times of strife, it is rare for either of these great weapons to stay unbloodied for long.*

*An Arch Lector must be strong of mind as well as in body. Kaslain is as loyal a supporter as Volkmar could ever wish for, and his level-headed council has many times saved the Grand Theogonist from teaching impudent Imperial courtiers a lesson with his fists. It is Kaslain's fervent belief in the divine might of Sigmar that makes him such a formidable weapon against the darkness. When his battle rage is upon him, Kaslain exudes a wrath that manifests as an aura of blazing white light, burning away the shrouding shadows that hide his foes from sight.*





# The Great Disciple

To the common man, Volkmar the Grim is an exemplar of the Sigmarite Cult, a noble patriarch blessed by his warrior god and held in awe by soldier and priest alike. Certainly, the deference of those who flock around him reinforces this impression. His stern visage, physical bulk and bombastic character form a bull of a man, a force of indomitable faith who lends limitless strength to the warriors he leads into battle.



Only Volkmar's Arch Lectors know the truth. Behind closed doors, the Theogonist's shoulders slump as he lets the gruelling years of his office take their toll. His body is scarred and burnt in a hundred places, and his bones have been broken and healed once too often, for he has battled long and hard against the Chaos-worshippers of the North.

Many prominent politicians believe that the stubborn old priest is a nuisance and an impediment to the schemes of wiser men, and gossips and gainsayers blacken his reputation in Altdorf and beyond. Yet Volkmar is a man of deeds, not words, and prefers to let his actions speak for themselves.

Volkmar's supporters are mainly to be found amongst the rank and file of the Empire. His unflinching bravery and commitment has won him the admiration and respect of much of the Imperial army, who would follow the old man into the jaws of the netherworld if he asked it of them. To the common people, Volkmar is a hero cast in the mould of the ancient kings. He is the spiritual successor of the Heldenhammer himself, held in awe as a living legend by all those of Sigmarite creed. Some of his most fanatical supporters whisper that perhaps, long ago, Sigmar had an illegitimate child, and that Volkmar is the last scion of that bloodline – a rumour the Sigmarite Cult does little to dispel. Regardless of the truth, it cannot be denied that Volkmar has an aura of divine power about him, a power that is magnified by the artefacts the Sigmarite Cult has bestowed upon him.

When Volkmar rides to battle, he does so mounted upon the War Altar of Sigmar, a towering carriage of steel and Drakwald oak. Adorned with prayer-papers, reliquaries and devotions, the Altar is a mobile temple to the Empire's warrior god. Mounted upon its pulpit is the Horn of Sigismund, a Dwarf-forged artefact that echoes the wacry of the legendary Emperor Sigismund himself when sounded in battle. Rearing above Volkmar is the Golden Griffon, icon of Magnus the Pious and source of a great mystical power that Volkmar can use to banish Undead and Daemons alike. Yet as spectacular as the Grand Theogonist is in the full panoply of war, it is his wisdom that Emperor Karl Franz values the most.

Every night, whilst lesser men sleep, the Grand Theogonist lights a torch and ventures into the secret vaults beneath the Imperial Palace. Each alcove and corridor is lined with the

Emperor's collection of forbidden tomes. There, Volkmar searches for scraps of knowledge that will help him win his long war against the fell powers of the world, for he has long maintained that it cannot be done by force of arms alone.

Though the priest has confided only in his closest advisors, Volkmar has been greatly disturbed by his findings thus far – they include a prophecy of a great battle between good and evil that will see the world destroyed in a cataclysm of magical fire. But that is not all his researches have uncovered. Two years ago, the Grand Theogonist began to discern signs that the von Carstein dynasty was not as extinct as the Imperial Palace's minstrels liked to tell. His suspicions were proved correct at the Conclave of State; the dramatic appearance of Witch Hunter Stahlberg's corpse galvanised the Grand Theogonist into action and sparked a flame that can only be quenched in blood. It was clear that Sigmar's light was needed not only in the frozen wastes of the North, but in the East, saving Sylvania from the terrors of undeath.

Within days of Manfred revealing his intent to secede from the Empire, Volkmar had marshalled an army of the faithful. His intent was to slay the Vampire, reclaim the Crown of Sorcery, and bring Sylvania back from beneath its pall of malign darkness, into the Imperial fold, before it was too late. In Volkmar's eyes, a true son of Sigmar would do no less.





# THE CURSED FORTRESS



- The Crusaders United
- Volkmar's Crusade
- The Faithful Few

As the crusade approached the gate of Fort Oberstyre, luminescent ghosts began to circle the spires above. They threatened terrible deaths in shrieking voices as the War Altar was hauled across the gatehouse's mouldering drawbridge.

Volkmar paid them no heed. He gestured impatiently for Kaslain to approach the gate. In response, the armoured priest bowed once and unslung a great relic from his back – the Reikhammer; an ancient weapon forged in the dawn of the Empire. The Arch Lector swung the glowing hammer in a few practice arcs before bringing it round with a roar of effort, two cometary streams of light trailing behind it. The weapon's broad metal head slammed hard into the metre-thick Sylvanian oak of the gate, blasting the gates to splinters with a deafening boom. A curtain of dust and dried blood cascaded from the walls, the zealots below coughing and cheering in equal measure. Volkmar gave no more than a curt nod; he had expected nothing less. Ordering his War Altar forwards, he passed through the gate even before the debris of the shattered wood had settled.

The night that the crusaders entered Fort Oberstyre's walls was long and fraught. A Grand Exorcism is not undertaken lightly, and the ghosts that Mannfred had bound to the fortress shrieked and screamed until the intruders began to doubt their sanity. Yet Volkmar's self-belief was infectious. The grizzled old priest strode through the fortress' passageways and corridors like a conquering king. The sheer intensity of his faith burned the writhing shadows from every corner, and blows from his blessed warhammer banished those spirits foolish enough to emerge from the dripping walls.

The tattered zealots accompanying him were as mere candles next to Volkmar's blazing bonfire of belief, but they had faith enough. They scoured broods of creeping degenerates from Oberstyre's cellars, their religious fervour and devotion driving them to fight as hard in the pitch-black vaults as in the light of day.

By the time morning arrived, not a single evil soul dwelt within the fortress walls. Oberstyre's centuries-old curse had finally been lifted.

## THE TATTERSOULS

*Clad in little more than sackcloth and rope, the brethren of zealots known as the Tattersouls march after the Grand Theonist wherever he goes – whether he likes it or not.*

*Every Warrior Priest of Sigmar has at some stage become afflicted with a band of such strange companions, shrieking maniacs and booming doomsayers traipsing in his wake as he manfully attempts to go about his business. The Tattersouls can be counted amongst the oddest group of all. Their founder, the self-proclaimed prophet Gerhardt the Worm, was originally one of Volkmar's companions in the war against the Everchosen in the far north. Now, there is little of his original personality left to him. It is as if his religious mania is a living thing, and highly contagious.*

*Whilst the Tattersouls stamp and shudder in their devotions to Sigmar, lashing themselves into a state of religious ecstasy with their barbed flails, passers-by tear at their clothing and rip out their hair in handfuls. The onlookers are set aflame by the aura of faith, joining the throng's frenzied dance as they take up the rags and whips of those whose bodies have proven too weak to contain the faith within. Some come to their senses at night's end and return home to their loved ones, muddy and bleeding, with monotonous plainsong ringing in their ears. Others cast off their former lives forever, caught up in the demented crusade of the Tattersouls until death. Their voices mingle in prayer to the warrior god of the Empire, some strong and confident, others broken and pained. All are fervent in their belief that the end is nigh, and it can only be stopped by the ultimate sacrifice of the Empire so that a new order of humanity may rise from the ashes.*





# The Gravelord of Sylvania

Mannfred von Carstein is the eldest and most powerful of a hidden aristocracy that once held the entire Empire in its grasp. If a scholar were to dig deep enough into the lore of the Vampire Wars, he would conclude that it is no accident that Mannfred was the last von Carstein to survive; he is the most cunning of his number, and no stranger to treachery.

Mannfred's bloodfather, the infamous Count Vlad von Carstein, met his final death outside the walls of Altdorf. He was slain by the combination of a long drop, a twelve-foot wooden stake, and the falling body of Grand Theogonist Wilhelm III. Mannfred was one of five surviving claimants to Vlad's title. One by one, the brothers in darkness met their own grisly ends – at the blades of the Empire soldiery; impaled by the stakes of Witch Hunters; even cut to pieces by their own rivals. There are rumours amongst the Vampires of Sylvania that Mannfred's influence can be traced to each event, just as it is rumoured that he could have prevented the theft of the Carstein Ring that kept his bloodfather Vlad safe from true death. The exact details have been buried by time, and Mannfred is in no hurry to dig them up.

Whilst his brothers in darkness squabbled over temporal power, Mannfred travelled south. His travels took him through the Nehekharan deserts to the breathtaking ruins of Lahmia. There, he pried the ancient secrets of his kind from the lands, even learning the practices of the Nehekharan mortuary cults from the walls of pyramidal tombs in the process. Eventually, his quest for knowledge led him to Nagashizzar, the citadel of the Great Necromancer. There, he made a discovery so profound it changed the course of history.

Mannfred returned from his self-imposed exile more powerful than ever, but the Empire was a prize not easily won. After his defeat at the hands of an alliance of Men and Dwarfs during the Battle of Hel Fenn, the Vampire sank into the shadows to lick his wounds. There he waited, as patient as a spider in the dark, biding his time until the short-lived mortals of the Empire had forgotten about him and the truth of the von Carstein dynasty had faded into myth.



Almost four hundred years have passed since the alliance of Men and Dwarfs ended the Vampire Wars. With every decade spent in the shadows, Mannfred has learned more about the curse of undeath and the energies that sustain it, slowly pulling together the pieces necessary to realise his ultimate ambition. It is a grim quest indeed – to bestow undeath to the entire world; transforming it into a global necropolis where every living thing is reduced to a mindless automaton under the command of one of a chosen few.



Mannfred's vision begins with the secession of Sylvania from the Empire, a journey that is already well underway. Using every scrap of magical power at his disposal, he has enacted a ritual unearthed from one of the nine fabled Books of Nagash to bring about a Great Darkness. It is the first step in his plan to become the immortal lord of his own bleak empire, a realm he believes is rightfully his, beyond contest.

The von Carsteins have long had a claim to the Imperial throne. Vlad was a Count of Stirland for many long years, and had vast political power in his prime. Mannfred, as the last remaining scion of Vlad, sees it as his right to take Sylvania for himself. Yet the theft of that province from the Empire is merely the first layer of his diabolical plan, a mask that hides his true goal from mortal sight until it is too late for the living to unite against it.

Mannfred's potent ritual of darkness has caused the defenders of the light to respond in force, just as the Vampire knew it would. The army that marches through Sylvania's reaches has proved capable indeed, slaying all before it with hammer and cannon. Little do the proud soldiers of the Empire know the peril they are in, nor the magnitude of the part they play in the vampiric mastermind's grand plan.




Four hundred years of scheming are slowly reaching fruition, and Mannfred intends to be there to witness the results.





# THE LONG MARCH



-  *The Crusaders United*
-  *Volkmar's Crusade*
-  *The Faithful Few*

Though a great victory of faith had been won, the Grand Theonist was little closer to finding his quarry. As darkness thinned on the third day, the crusade headed out once more, following the great western road towards the ruins of Konigstein. They passed a great many ox carts, mud sleds and mule wagons heading in the opposite direction, the warty peasants that led each ragged procession looking up with haunted expressions as the War Altar churned past. Refugees, thought Volkmar, fleeing for the borders before Mannfred's curse took over completely. He could not find it in his heart to blame them, for even the tough roadside vegetation was rotting. The land itself was dying.

As the crusade neared the township of Deihstein, the distant clash of swords spurred them to hurry forwards. They splashed on through the mud as the fatigue of the long march fell away, replaced by the urgency of battle. Cresting the Deihstein Ridge, the Grand Theonist saw a chaotic battle unfolding between a caravan of Strigany horse nomads and the mud-spattered soldiers of von Korden's contingent. In the distance, a Corpse Cart lurched away south, trailing a scattered mass of the dead behind it – the Necromancer Ghorst, his escape from the Witch Hunter's men ensured by the horse-nomads' attack. The Strigany, children of a people rumoured to be in the service of the von Carsteins for generations, moved in until they had von Korden and his men surrounded.

Thundering down the hill, Volkmar's War Altar ploughed into a trio of brightly-painted cloth wagons that blocked the road, bowling them over and trampling several Strigany sharpshooters in the process. Moments later, a host of tattered Sigmarites poured from the wooded ridge above the road and bodily flung themselves upon the horse archers that skulked on the road below. Von Korden's men redoubled their attack, and the nerve of the Strigany broke. They fled south, leaving their wounded in the dirt.

Within the hour, von Korden approached the War Altar as it was levered back onto the road. The Witch Hunter was coated in blood up to the elbows, and a vicious gleam danced in his eyes. His 'questioning' of the Strigany had yielded many truths. According to their captive, the creature the Strigany called the Pale

Count was indeed Mannfred von Carstein. The Vampire did not dwell to the east of the Vale of Darkness after all, but in the south, holed up in Swartzhafen. There were other creatures there too – a trio of 'wing-devils' of whom the Strigany were deathly afraid.

Wounds bandaged and nerves bolstered, the crusaders marched south. They passed by the temple-town of Arfeit and the good night's sleep it represented without complaint. If Mannfred was truly as close as Swartzhafen, and if they



could make it there before what was left of the light faded, they had a chance to banish the Vampire's curse before Sylvania was lost to the darkness entirely.

They made good speed, but by the time the spires of Swartzhafen took shape in the darkness, the pitch black shadows were thickening. Within the growing gloom, terrible things could be heard. Then suddenly, a soul-chilling sight came into view. There, ranged across a field of mists dotted with the headstones of Swartzhafen's deceased, was a massed army of the dead. It stood completely, unnervingly still; even the troglodyte ghouls-things at its flank were as motionless as the memorial statues dotted about the township's outskirts. At the army's centre was a heavily-muscled figure clad in the bat-winged armour of the von Carsteins, a cloak of blood-red mist billowing from his shoulders. Monstrous winged shapes circled around the observatory tower of the ramshackle manse behind him.

The figure crooked a pale claw, mockingly inviting Volkmar to advance for a parley – an echo of an old aristocratic practice that made Volkmar's skin crawl. 'There will be a parley all right', said Volkmar. 'A parley of blades, and of fire!'



## THE DEVILS OF SWARTZHAFEN

*The winged horrors known to the peasantry of Sylbana as the Devils of Swartzhafen are not, in fact, a breed of beast unto their own right. Instead, they are devolved Vampires, captured by the most powerful of their number and twisted by Dark Magic into a form that better echoes the foulness in their souls.*

*The Devils of Swartzhafen were once handsome sons of the von Carstein dynasty, each sired by one of Mannfred's brothers-in-darkness. Though young, this coterie made for a significant part of the von Carstein power base. Where one vampiric whelp might be put in his place easily enough, three of their kind united proved a threat even to the likes of Konrad the Bloody. So it was that the Carstein Devils, as these young bloods called themselves, rode out the turbulent times of old.*

*Mannfred barely survived the Vampire Wars. By the time he had recovered from his defeat at Hel Fenn, the Carstein Devils had spread their influence across the vale. The count felt that his presumptuous nephews needed to learn their place. Tracking them down during the hours of daylight, he bound each one into his coffin using a Nehekharan mortuary rite. For long years, they lay trapped in the caverns below Castle Swartzhafen, their forms slowly distorted by the warpstone-tainted water swilling around their sarcophagi. The beasts that Mannfred eventually released from the coffins were physically horrific and had no trace of intellect. Now, the Devils of Swartzhafen haunt the night at Mannfred's behest, falling like vast hunting-bats on his enemies and ripping them to bloody rags as their master looks on in amusement.*







## THE HIDDEN NECROPOLIS

*Mannfred's plan to claim Syllvania as a realm of undeath is in danger of being shattered by the faithful crusaders marching upon his lands. He has personally intervened in order to lead them further from his hidden secret weapon – a dread artefact that is powering the magic of Mannfred's curse upon Syllvania. He gleaned the fell ritual from no less a source than the Eighth Book of Nagash.*

*Hidden deep in Vargravia, beyond the sight of mortal men, the reliquary that contains Mannfred's prized possession is guarded by a host of the most powerful spectres to haunt Syllvania. Only the mad or the foolish would risk their souls by entering Vargravia's borders, but desperate times call for desperate measures, and the eastern side of the Vale of Darkness boasts some unlikely heroes of its own...*





# THE LORDS OF LIGHT



◀◀ *The White Wizards of Templehof*

**Whilst Manfred uses himself as bait to lead the Sigmarite crusade away from his secret weapon at the heart of Sylvania, a cabal of Light Wizards seeks to summon aid from their own kind – and in the process, uncover the true source of the curse.**

Von Korden's message, sent from the brass sentinel in the ruins of Konigstein, had reached its target. The magic that imbues the great signal-skeletons of Imperial watch houses is weak, especially in Sylvania, where most of them have fallen into disrepair. Still, even the faintest trace of etheric movement can be perceived by those with the second sight. The night the Witch Hunter's signal for aid appeared in the night sky, a trio of strange wizards, stationed in the town of Templehof on the far side of the vale's great horseshoe of peaks, saw a glimmer of witch-light from the mountains on the horizon.

The Templehof order's prime magus, Jovi Sunscryer, had always been obsessed with the channelling of light. He ordered his most powerful telescope arrays brought to the roof of his collegium tower. Before the hour was out, the glimmering signal was quickly revealed to be distinct sigils and symbols sketched in the air.

Wizards take any excuse to solve a puzzle, especially wizards of the Light Order, where truth and learning are counted as just as vital as air and water. Before the night was out, the tower's signals had been deciphered and interpreted, word for word. It said that Manfred was active and extremely dangerous, and the Sigmarite Cult was here in force to kill him. Without help, it likely marched to its death. Aid was needed, and fast.

Sunscryer recognised von Korden's personal sigil at the end of the message, a broad circle of fire that represented the conical pyres on which the Witch Hunter immolated the guilty. The Light Wizard had suspected this day would come since the Great Darkness had descended upon the province, and was greatly relieved that he was not the only one fighting against the curse, for his attempts to dispel the gloom with counter-rituals and Light magic had proved ineffective.



## THE LIGHT ORDER

*Of all the Colleges of Magic, the Light Order is perhaps the most peculiar. Because the Wind of Magic they channel is so fickle, they harness the energies of the wind Hysh using cabals of trained acolytes that combine their powers in careful rituals. When the arcane zephyrs that empower their skills are channelled correctly, the wizards of the Light Order can manifest their magic as pillars of blinding white fire or lances of pure energy that can blast unnatural creatures into a different plane of existence.*

*When a cabal of wizards from the Light Order took up residence in Templehof, the people of the township were suspicious to the point of hostility. But the wizards were generous with their coin and were grudgingly allowed to stay, provided they kept themselves hidden away from 'proper folk'.*

*Since an incendiary demonstration of the cabal's talents during the Ghoul Raids of 2521, the townspeople have taken the Light Order to their flea-bitten bosoms, calling them 'the White Wizards' and, at suppertime, bringing bowls of hare and turnip stew to their manse atop the crag.*

*Officially, the Light Order established a rural collegium in Sylvania because theirs is the College of Magic best suited to banishing the Undead. It is a fact they have proven dozens of times since the Great Darkness fell. Only the township's Burgermeister, Vancel von Templehof, suspects an ulterior motive; his town is but a few days south of the desolation of Mordheim, and if the bounty hunters of the vale are to be believed, the streets of that doomed city still hide shards of a strange crystal that wizardly types value more than gold.*





Sunscryer was convinced that he could summon as much help as possible using signals of his own, relaying von Korden's message to Altdorf's Colleges of Magic using Hysh, the Wind of Light. If the news of Sylvania's plight reached the ears of the Supreme Patriarch, Balthasar Gelt, perhaps there was hope for the bedraggled province yet.

The pride and joy of the collegium's cabal was a Luminark of impressive size, painstakingly hand-built, from wheel to lens, by Jovi Sunscryer as a young man. Though the contraption was an engine of war, it could easily be used as a signalling device. The White Wizards raced to the carriage house at the rear of the collegium, old Jovi arriving first despite his age. Gabbling in their order's incomprehensible jargon, they hauled the Luminark from its vault, pulling off dust sheets and retuning lens alignments even as their horses pulled the contraption up the spiralling cliff.

Hours of careful incantation later, the Luminark channelled the Wind of Hysh through its strangely-tinted lenses, and a stuttering beam of light shone out. Its intermittent beacon was interpretable by other wizards as a message of great import, whilst appearing to be nothing more than a flicker of distant lightning to others. Yet despite their best efforts, the beam of light and its message did not get far. From their vantage point, high up on Templehof Crag, the Light Order saw that their message had coursed no further than a few miles before it was consumed altogether by the Great Darkness.

### STIRLAND'S REVENGE

*The vast majority of Stirlanders that were once brave enough to dwell in the hinterlands of Sylvania have packed up their meagre possessions and fled for safer pastures. However, there are those who still fight tooth and nail for the territory they see as rightfully theirs – having eked out a life from one of the most dangerous and hateful corners of the Empire, they are loath to abandon it.*

*Foremost amongst these are the vigilantes that call themselves Stirland's Revenge. These unshaven and foul-smelling warriors are a loose brotherhood of bitter and determined men who are very rarely sober and almost always spoiling for a fight. All have lost their homes, families or loved ones to the curse of undeath that assails Sylvania.*

*Even to call this group growling of ne'er-do-wells a Free Company would be a kindness, for their military cohesion is as bad as their personal hygiene. Yet their determination makes them fierce fighters to a man. Roaming the east of the Vale of Darkness, they hunt down and slay every shambling corpse and clacking skeleton they can find, stopping only to plunder the empty inns and markets that once buzzed with peasant life.*

*With nothing left to lose, the men of Stirland's Revenge are hell-bent on vengeance, even if it costs them what's left of their miserable lives.*

### JOVI SUNSCRYER

*The most experienced of the White Wizards is Jovi Sunscryer, an eccentric scholar who is never happier than when his bald pate gleams in the glow of natural light. Needless to say, the omnipresent darkness that plagues Sylbana has spurred him to take up arms in defence of his one true love – sunshine.*

*Sunscryer took his initial posting to Sylvania with typical good humour. For him, the Undead hold a gruesome fascination.*

*The wizard has been known to delay a walking corpse's destruction purely to see in which direction it will lurch.*

*Furthermore, the nearby ruins of Mordheim have allowed Sunscryer to further his experiments with a substance of his own devising, which he has named wyrdglass. The scholar long ago lost all his body hair to his incendiary experiments with this potent crystal, but his research continues apace.*

*Since a journey to the ruined cities of Nehekhara he made as a young man, Sunscryer has been fascinated with the mechanics of light, magical or otherwise. He has perfected the art of crafting lenses to an unparalleled degree, and can channel the Wind of Hysh so accurately that it is said he can burn a single mosquito from a swarm.*

*Sunscryer built the Templehof Luminark from the ground up, though the contraption was so large that in order for his acolytes to get it out of his workshop, it had to be taken apart and rebuilt in the courtyard. Behind his eccentricity lies purpose – during his researches in the Land of the Dead, Sunscryer uncovered a trail of bloodless corpses that suggested the menace from the Vampires was anything but over.*





Jovi Sunscryer suspected that the counter-magic was no accident. Mannfred had worked hard to cut Sylvania off from the rest of the Empire, and his mastery of the Winds of Magic was the product of centuries of study that a mortal man could not hope to match.

The Light Wizards conferred long into the night. The message must be sent, regardless of the cost, or the heroes of the Sigmarite Cult would be lost – a blow from which the Empire would not recover. More powerful lenses were needed. Scouring his memory, Sunscryer recalled an astromancer's observatory cresting one of the hills in the haunted realm of Vargravìa. It had long ago fallen into disuse, but Sunscryer knew that it once held a potent lens array. If they could reach that abandoned manse, and channel the last beams of Sylvania's waning sunlight through its lenses and into the Luminark, they had a chance of bolstering the device long enough to deliver the message.

None of the scholars wanted to discuss what they were all thinking: that there was very little chance of them surviving in Vargravìa for long enough to make a difference. As determined as ever, they began their preparations.

## HAUNTED VARGRAVIA

No sane mortal has ever strayed into the unquiet necropolis known as Vargravìa. Hidden in the mountains southwest of Templehof, it is so ancient that its timeworn monuments predate the time of Sigmar; perhaps even the Age of Man. Some say that every man, woman and child alive could find a gravestone there with their name on it, others that the stargazing mage that once lived there was compelled to bury himself alive. Flickering ghost-lights dance about its borders, coalescing into spectres that stare with hungry malice whenever a traveller strays close.

It was Vargravìa's fell reputation, twinned with the power of the deathless horrors that haunt it, that drew Mannfred von Carstein to use it as his hidden power base. The spirits of the dead hold no fear for the Vampire Counts, for they can command lesser creatures of the night just as a man commands a guardian beast. Knowing that the folk of Sylvania avoid Vargravìa at all costs, von Carstein hid his most potent weapon at its heart and bound the ghosts of that realm to it. Any who cross its borders find themselves assailed by spirits that cannot be harmed by sword or hammer, but whose claws are cold enough to steal a mortal life away.

### WHISPERING NELL

*Across Sylbana, sleep-deprived parents tell of wailing women who shriek the souls of noisy children into their graves. Yet the tale of Vargravìa's most famous guardian, known to the vale's grave robbers as Whispering Nell, is even more disturbing.*

*The name 'Nell' is actually a bastardisation of Countess Emmanuelle von Templehof, once cousin of Konrad the Bloody and ruler of Castle Templehof. Long ago, Konrad gave her an ancient grimoire hailing from Nehekharà, confiding to her that he was unschooled in matters necromantic. What he did not mention was that the book came with a price. The Dwarfs of Zhufbar had long hunted the grimoire with the intent of destroying it, for their legends told that it could rob the light from the sky forever.*

*When they besieged Castle Templehof in force, Emmanuelle sent a legion of the dead against them. The book's spells of darkness ensured the siege was a grinding war of attrition. Before the next moon rose, the countess had the blood of over a thousand clansmen on her hands. The Dwarfs called her the Whispering Death, for whenever her hissing tones called a Dwarf by name from the darkness, he would slump to the ground, stone dead. Driven to desperation, the Dwarf throng stormed the castle and slew Emmanuelle in her coffin, though it cost them dearly. Her name is inscribed in the Book of Grudges to this day.*

*Over recent decades, the warding runes the Dwarfs put in place to keep Emmanuelle's spirit silent have gone missing. Rumour has it she was last seen on the outskirts of Vargravìa, beckoning those travellers who pass close by to come even closer. As yet, none have been stupid enough to do so.*





## A NIGHT AT THE DRUNKEN GOAT

It would be a grave understatement to say that Jovi Sunscryer's acolytes in the Templehof cabal were apprehensive about searching Vargravia for a half-remembered observatory. Yet the elderly wizard's boundless enthusiasm eventually motivated his pupils enough to pack up their scant possessions and make ready for the open road.

In their hearts, neither Neftep nor Khalep truly wanted to wait until the sunlight disappeared altogether before fighting back against the darkness. The soup bowls outside their manse had lain unwashed and empty for days, much to their disappointment, and signs of life from the township were becoming ever fewer. If they must travel to the haunted realm of Vargravia, the acolytes muttered, they would rather do it whilst there was still some semblance of sunlight left.

Less than a day after their signal had failed to penetrate the Sylvanian gloom, the three wizards hung on to the Templehof Luminark as it shivered and clanked its way along the muddy roads that led south into the vale. As they clattered across the cobbles of the town square, not so much as a single urchin had come to watch them pass. Even the roads were deserted. Though none of them wanted to admit the fact, it looked as if Sylvania was already dead.

His face set in an uncharacteristically grim expression, Jovi Sunscryer whipped the Luminark's horses onward, his eyes fixed on the mountains in the middle distance. They must at least try to reverse this curse, he said; the forces of light could not allow evil to win without putting up a fight.

The low spirits of the cabal were raised a little by the sight of a large inn on the side of the road. The Drunken Goat: a drinking hole beloved of roadwardens and highwaymen alike as a haven for the living when the dead went a-roaming. It seemed that the innkeep, Bors Ratsnatcher, had left his lanterns burning before leaving for pastures new – almost every window had a golden light glimmering behind it.

Pushing open the door to the inn, the White Wizards were confronted by a thicket of mismatched blades. A crossbow string thrummed, its bolt embedding itself in the doorjamb inches from Sunscryer's bald skull. Another tense moment



passed before the inn's occupants roared in jubilation – the strange visitors were every bit as living as they were.

The cabal was yanked inside and foaming tankards of amber ale were pressed into their shivering hands. The inn was packed to capacity with rowdy patrons; all that was left of the townships east of the vale. Before the night's revelries were done, many slurred promises and sombre oaths were sworn between patron and scholar alike. The people of Sylvania – those who were left, at least – were in accord. They would strike back at the forces of evil that plagued their homes.

## THE BOOKS OF NAGASH

*When they are certain the Witch Hunters are not listening, wizards and other scholars of arcane lore speak in hushed tones of the Nine Black Books of Nagash. Several of these books have passed into legend; others are jealously hidden away by the Lords of Undeath, or kept in magical vaults by esoteric guardians. The exact number of these infamous books that remain is uncertain, but rumours persist of their circulation amongst the aristocracy of the night. Each tome is penned on human flesh and illuminated with Nehekharan blood, and each contains ritual curses powerful enough to overthrow an empire, should the reader will it. It was the power of one of these books that allowed Count Vlad von Carstein to raise an entire province of worm-eaten corpses with which to assail the Empire during the Vampire Wars.*

*Another of these blasphemous books, known as the Eighth, fell into the possession of Manfred when his ghoulish agents broke the rune-wards surrounding Castle Templehof. Venturing deep inside the castle's vaults, he stole the grimoire from a secret compartment under the ash-strewn coffin of Countess Emmanuelle, her outraged hissing bothering him not in the least. It is this foul tome that has allowed Manfred to bring about the Great Darkness that is slowly sapping the light and life from every living thing in Sylvaonia. Sustained by the fell power at the heart of Vargravia, the Eighth is vital to Manfred's master plan. Whilst the province is swathed in gloom by the vile spells that haunt its pages, the magics of lesser mages are swallowed up, extinguished like guttering candles by a sleeting storm of negative energy.*





# INTO THE DARKNESS



◀◀ *The White Wizards of Templehof*



Morning was hard to discern the next day; a thinning of the darkness that was an insult to the dawn. The White Wizards arose to find at least half of their new ale-forged friends had thought better of the promises they made the previous night and disappeared without a trace. A hard-bitten few were still present; perhaps two dozen in all, chewing sullenly on hard salted meat and dousing their hangovers with the dregs of ale that were left in the Goat's cellars. Calling themselves Stirland's Revenge, they hefted the fallen tavern sign they had 'rescued' onto the bar. They each made their mark upon it as a sign of commitment, gesturing for the White Wizards to do the same. Sunscryer nodded sombrely and signed his name with a flourish, his acolytes following suit. Less than an hour later, the cabal renewed the journey towards Vargravia, their militia escort ranging ahead of them as an advance guard.

Not a soul was seen as the strange alliance made its way along the rough roads of the vale and into the mountains. Before the day was out, the limestone peaks of Vargravia were looming up ahead. Each was eroded by the passage of the aeons; the only details that could be perceived were the tomb-holes that honeycombed each peak and the time-gnawed gravestones of a civilisation long forgotten. Greenish ghost-lights danced on the corners of the expedition's vision. Fearing the worst, Sunscryer ordered the Luminark's lenses to be slid into their war setting. Guided by his gestures, his acolytes began Solheim's Rite of Channelling.

Whilst the wizards intoned the cadences of their ritual with their eyes rolled back and heads tilted to the skies, cadaverous ghosts slid into being not thirty yards from their militia escort. They moved as if underwater, trailing ectoplasm across the featureless graves behind them as they reached out for the intruders with blackened claws. The Stirland militiamen hacked and slashed with all their brawny strength, but their weapons just passed through the apparitions. In turn, the spirits reached into the chests of their foes and closed their cold talons around their hearts, stilling them forever. More spectres were floating up from the ground, thronging around the intruders and cutting off their retreat.

Suddenly, the Luminark began to shake violently. The surviving militia, well briefed by their wizard allies, covered their eyes and dropped to their knees. A moment later, a blast of pure magical light seared out of the arcane machine's lenses. Laughing in joy, Sunscryer grabbed the control levers and swung the device round in a great circle, burning away the

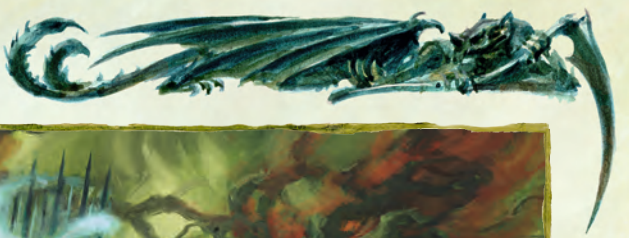
moaning apparitions that surrounded the militia without singeing so much as a single greasy hair from his allies' heads. The Light Wizard's acolytes clapped politely as the militia got to their feet, murmuring in shocked approval.

It was a sight repeated several times as the expedition forged into the depths of Vargravia. Fearsome as they were, none of the ghosts protecting the realm's borders could stand before the might of the Templehof Luminark.

As the explorers pushed further into the necropolis, the sense of a lurking evil became so thick they could almost taste it. The ground beneath their feet writhed with a confusion of thick black veins that numbed the flesh of those nearby, even through the leather of a boot. His fear mounting steadily, Jovi Sunscryer was on the verge of ordering the retreat when the telltale silhouette of an ancient observatory rose through the gloom. It was the only man-made structure they had seen that had not been reduced to ruin by the passing of the centuries. Lurking in the courtyard behind it was a strange construction of pitted iron and bone, a thing of such pure malice it hurt to even look in its direction. On a lectern at the strange contraption's front sat a grimoire that crackled with tendrils of magical power. An unholy reliquary, thought Sunscryer, and an extremely powerful one at that, judging by the ghostly riders and wailing waifs that surrounded it. Their anguished cries jarred the wizard's soul like splinters of glass driven into soft flesh. Whatever was inside that blackened construct was so evil it tortured even those who had given their lives to guard it.

The Templehof expedition had reached its destination – and in the process, strayed upon the dark heart of the malaise that was afflicting the province. If the reliquary could be destroyed, the White Wizards would strike a great blow against the forces of undeath. If not, at least a message could still be sent of its whereabouts by using the giant lens of the observatory, and other men would take up the fight in their stead. The source of Manfred von Carstein's stranglehold upon Sylvania had been uncovered at last.





## THE CLAW OF NAGASH

*Long ago, the desert civilisation of Nehekara was blighted by a war between the living and the dead. As the High Priest Nagash sought to yoke that ancient nation with the powers of undeath he had unearthed, the golden armies of the Priest Kings, united under King Alcadizaar, sought to defy him. Nagash became more and more monstrous as the Dark Magic he studied took its toll on his body and soul, enlisting the newly-risen Vampires born from a corruption of his black arts as the generals of his armies.*

*A decade of war raged between the two great forces until Nagash broke the stalemate by unleashing a terrible plague that polluted the deserts and caused millions of deaths. Alcadizaar was quickly defeated and brought in chains to Nagashizzar. Just as the Great Necromancer was poised to harness the magics of his nine books and transform the world into a global necropolis, Alcadizaar was freed by mysterious rat-like allies. Fighting his way to Nagash's throne room, he cut the Great Necromancer down, severing his hand in the process. The fiend's power was undone, and his ritual boiled out of control, its energies resurrecting the mummified monarchs buried in every city and tomb of that desert realm.*

*As for the disembodied hand of Nagash, legend has it that it crawled from the throne room like some grotesque gigantic spider. The dark artefact has cropped up in the stories of bards and minstrels over the centuries, but few truly suspect it still exists. Only Manfred and his most trusted allies know that the great claw is very much a reality, and still contains a great measure of Nagash's power. Held in an enormous ironbone reliquary, it is sequestered in the timeworn mausoleums of Vargravia, where mortals fear to tread.*







## THE BATTLE OF THE BARROWS

*Just as Volkmar's crusaders are about to be broken by the Undead defending Swartzhafen, an unearthly scream echoes across the vale from Vargravia. Manfred turns suddenly at the sound and flees, rank upon rank of deathless soldiers collapsing in his wake.*

*The shocked crusaders waste no time – Volkmar is anxious to press whatever strange advantage he has won. Fortune is with him, for on the western road, they are reinforced by some of Karl Franz's finest men, the Drakwald Riders, and a strange contraption sent to them by the Emperor himself.*

*Upon running Manfred to ground in his lair at Castle Sternieste, the crusaders find the Drakwald Riders are not the only opponents of the darkness hot on Manfred's trail – the White Wizards of Templehof are close behind. Battle is joined once more in the shadow of Castle Sternieste, but unbeknownst to Volkmar, Manfred has some powerful reinforcements of his own...*



# A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

The crusade closes in on Mannfred once more, hoping to end his cursed existence once and for all at Castle Sternieste. With the Vampire trapped against the walls of his own castle, victory seems near, but Mannfred has one last ploy...

Whilst the White Wizards ventured into Vargravia to the east of the vale, Volkmar's crusaders had driven deep into Mannfred's battle line. The Empire troops fought like lions, but the minions that Mannfred summoned to his side were practically endless. Volkmar's anger saw him plunge onwards into the throng of corpses, his War Altar crushing more and more of the unliving beneath its wheels until it was mired in a cloying mortar of mud and disembodied limbs. Outside Swartzhafen's barrier of fences, the flanks of the unliving army closed like the jaws of a beast upon the crusade's ranks. The War Altar was cut off from the rest of the army, unable to move forwards or even roll backward, due to so much corpse-mulch gumming its wheels. Mannfred cantered forwards until he was just out of the Grand Theogonist's reach. His silent smile was a stark contrast to Volkmar's raging rhetoric as the old man hurled abuse from his lectern.

Suddenly, a distant scream came from the other side of the vale; a sound so terrifyingly intense it could not have come from any mortal throat. Mannfred growled in frustration, wheeling his skeletal steed around and thundering off into the night. The trio of winged devils slaved to his will dropped their prey and sped off after their master. The rest of the Undead army seemed to sag in disappointment as Mannfred's iron control dissipated. One by one, the vile things faded back into the mists or fell apart in showers of maggotty flesh.

A strained shout of victory echoed from the crusaders' battle line as they cut the last of the unliving army down. Many of the wounded slumped to the earth to tend their injuries, but Volkmar would not rest for a moment. Bellowing his orders, the old man sent Kaslain and von Korden to round up the survivors. Time was of the essence if the realm was to be saved.





# The Drakwald Riders

The cavalry contingent known as the Drakwald Riders are famous for their thunderous charges. Two summers ago, they famously broke the flank of Waaagh! Blackaxe by charging across a hidden ford, their warhorses and demigryphs riding down mob after mob of greenskins until a full half of the enemy army collapsed in disarray.

At the head of the Drakwald Riders are the Royal Altdorf Gryphites, amongst the finest of the Order's inner circle of cavalymen. At their inception, these demigryph-riding veterans numbered over a dozen, but since the scouring of the Beastmen tribes from the Drakwald Road, their numbers have been sorely reduced. When Karl Franz received von Korden's plea for reinforcements, the Gryphites numbered only three – yet he bade them join whatever remnants of Volkmar's crusade still lived. Despite their low numbers, the vicious mounts and long lances of these knights give them a distinct advantage over the Undead that plague Sylvania's countryside.

Alongside the Gryphites, the Drakwald Riders also boasted a detachment of Karl Franz's Reiksguard, a proud order of warriors who have a long and storied history. Masters of the long-hafted lance, each of these plate-armoured knights trains extensively in tilt and tournament before committing to the battlefield. It is often bandied about in the Altdorf stables that each member of the Reiksguard can hit a playing card's ace at full gallop, though their sullen rivals mutter that this impressive reputation is as much bought with Imperial gold as it is earned on the field of battle.



## THE SUNMAKER

Whilst Karl Franz dwelt on the disastrous curse afflicting Sylvania, he recalled the experiments of the scatterbrained Talabheim alchemist Jurgen Bugelstrauss. The last contraption that Bugelstrauss ever made was nicknamed the Sunmaker, for it fired specialist phosphoric rockets that burned with a blinding brilliance. By attaching silken canopies to these projectiles in order to slow their descent, Bugelstrauss had lit up the night sky above the Talabec for hours at a time. Karl Franz and his diplomatic escort had been able to see the other side of the river as clear as day, even in the dead of night.

Unfortunately, the alchemist had met a grisly end a week later in an incident involving a barrel of gunpowder, a twelve-foot length of Cathayan bamboo, and a badly castrated boar. His experiments were sealed away in the Talabheim dockhouses the day after his funeral, a deafeningly memorable occasion that culminated in the firing of no fewer than six Helstorm rocket batteries and three dozen counts of indeliberate arson.

In response to von Korden's request for aid, Karl Franz sent word for the Sunmaker and its original crew to be relocated and sent south along the Old Dwarf Road as soon as possible. He commanded the Drakwald Riders to meet the artillerymen en route and escort them into the Vale of Darkness with all haste. To undo the most ancient magics, Karl Franz had told them, one must sometimes use the cutting edge of science. The knights nodded dutifully, but whether the Sunmaker would work at the critical moment remained to be seen.



Mannfred, enraged beyond measure that his secret Vargravian lair had been disturbed just as his prize was within his reach, galloped at breakneck pace through the rain towards the eastern side of the vale. He could not afford to lose his powerful artefact, but neither could he risk Volkmar's escape. Though his Undead steed could pass through the night without a trace, Mannfred made sure to leave a clear trail of hoofprints that even the most addle-headed tracker could follow. As he rode, the Vampire Count summoned the servant spirits that guarded his unholy reliquary. One by one, they drifted to the foothills around Castle Sternieste, a rolling landscape covered in the barrows of long-dead kings. It was no accident that Mannfred had headed there, for a legion of powerful Undead slumbered beneath the loam. Mannfred intended to call the Claw of Nagash to his side outside Castle Sternieste and, in the process, lure Volkmar to the last battle he would ever see.

As Volkmar's men force-marched down the road toward Sternieste, a shout of surprise came from the rearmost ranks. The royal colours of Karl Franz had been sighted less than two miles behind them. Heading towards them at full canter were two units of the Emperor's finest knights, the armoured flanks of their warhorses and demigryphs glinting in the gloom. The rearmost knights rode in formation around a strange contraption of wheels, hammers and

long-barrelled cylinders – a Helstorm Rocket Battery. Against all hope, the Witch Hunter's message had reached Altdorf, and the Emperor had reinforced them with troops from the Drakwald. Though Karl Franz could not spare an entire army, those he had sent were fast enough to reach the Grand Theogonist before it was too late.

The Empire army that rode into the foothills was battered but more determined than ever. Each man was prepared to lay down his life in order to ensure the final death of their quarry. Volkmar, his fury now simmered down to a cold rage, had quickly assimilated the approaching cavalry into his battle plan. The crusade's foot soldiers would hold the Undead in place whilst the Grand Theogonist occupied Mannfred long enough for the cavalry to deliver the final blow.

As the mists that surrounded Sternieste thinned, shadows crept from the barrows with the chink of ancient armour. Volkmar's brow furrowed; the arrival of yet more Undead did not bode well. Suddenly, a beam of light swept through the darkness, reminding the Grand Theogonist of a lantern-house guiding fishermen to shore. Volkmar hefted his hammer, squinting over his lectern. Sure enough, the lenses of a Luminark flickered in the distance. The corners of the old man's mouth raised in a rare and almost imperceptible smile. The battle for Sylvania was not over yet.



### THE FORGOTTEN LEGION

*The barrows and cairns that dot the wilderness of Sylvania are the last remnants of an age of barbarism that was old when Sigmar himself was young. It was the fashion of those times to bury the dead in their full panoply of war, so that the departed might meet the afterlife sword in hand and head held high. Little did they know how literally their wishes would come true under the reign of the von Carsteins. The lintels of these resting places were engraved with runes that keep their occupants safe in the slumber of death, but in recent times, these sigils have been defaced to such an extent that even a full moon can summon the warriors within from their tombs.*

*Across Sylvania, the vast majority of these burial sites lie empty; their one-time occupants forced to lend their armoured might to the roaming hordes of the dead. The skeletal warriors that form the Forgotten Legion, however, are a notable exception. In life, they were the honour guard of Verek the Blade, first castellan of Sternieste and battle chieftain of the original Sternsmen. In death, they are bound by magical oath to defend the castle grounds against any who would attempt to conquer them. Neither Verek nor his warrior tribesmen can leave the fortress' shadow whilst it still stands. As Mannfred knows full well, the Forgotten Legion will rise up against any who near the ancient keep with hostile intent in their heart – something that Volkmar and his crusaders have in abundance.*





# THE BLEAK FATE OF SYLVANIA

Since the surviving crusaders returned to their home cities, the Battle of the Barrows has been portrayed as a glorious last charge. In reality, it was a desperate struggle that saw dozens trampled into the mud and scores slain by rusted blades.

The crusaders, knowing in their hearts that this was the last chance they had to save Sylvania from eternal darkness, charged headlong into the ranks of the Undead, smashing ribcages and impaling torsos in a storm of violence. Mannfred had anticipated their all-or-nothing approach and prepared accordingly. Placing rank upon rank of freshly-risen corpses at the front of his battle line, he allowed the bullish charges of the Empire troops to slay hundreds of his corpse-puppets, expending their feverish momentum upon vassals that could be summoned back to unlife with a single phrase. Volkmar's oratory inspired his men, but even he was mortal, and his warhammer became heavier in his hands with each kill.

Only once the crusaders' sword-strokes were as laboured as those of the corpses they fought did Mannfred commit his reserves. From the barrows on either side of the Empire battle line came heavily armoured wights and ancient kings, their weapons scything through the ranks of the exhausted Empire soldiery with horrible ease. Worse still, the dead crusaders jerked back to life to assail their comrades, the faces

of brothers-in-arms twisted into rictus grins as they clawed at the eyes of their living counterparts. The Empire battle line wavered, a single push away from collapsing altogether.

It was then that a great golden light poured out across the battlefield, and the ground itself erupted in sporadic bursts as far as the eye could see. This time, it was not the restless dead that emerged but the stolen holy symbols that Mannfred's agents had buried months ago in desecrated soil. Gold-plated hammers of Sigmar, silver wolf-totems of Ulric, even brass sun symbols of Myrmidia hung suspended above the battlefield. The Luminark's coded call for aid had reached Patriarch Balthasar Gelt himself, and the master of metal-shifting had cast a great ritual to aid his allies. The effects had manifested at the critical moment, and the captured symbols were freed.

It worked spectacularly. Wherever the light of the holy symbols shone out, the Undead shrivelled away, collapsing back into the dirt as a jumble of scorched bones. The crusaders gave a great shout of disbelief and joy, their tiredness washed away as they fell on those few Undead left standing, hacking them to pieces or banishing them with their freshly ignited faith. In an instant, the tide had turned completely, and the battlefield was cluttered with piles of broken bones. When the mists of battle had cleared, however, there was no sign of Volkmar...

*Volkmar's head was pounding fit to burst. He could feel the cold of castle stone under his cheek, and the din of the battlefield had receded to a distant murmur far below. He was inside a circular chamber, lit by fitful candlelight. The scent of blood was thick in his nostrils.*

*Ranged around the chamber's perimeter were pillar-thick candles that spluttered pink fat as if disgusted by his presence. Volkmar flinched as a giant clawed foot stepped into his line of view. A pair of Vargheists paced just out of his reach, clicking to each other as they took care to step over something engraved on the floor. One of those cursed beasts had dealt him the head wound that had seen him fall. He reached for his warhammer, but was unsurprised to find it gone. Watch and wait, old man, he told himself; wait for the time to strike.*

*Volkmar looked down to see gilded grooves that formed a rough outline of Sylvania upon the chamber's floor. They glowed a little too bright, hurting his eyes. He got to his knees and struggled blearily to focus, blood dripping from his earlobes onto the sodden shoulders of his robes. He dared not reach up to investigate his head wound, just in case he felt something soft and spongy beneath his fingertips.*

*The walls around him were ranged with shackled figures; some lost in a daze, some beaten to the point of unconsciousness. Amongst them was a white-robed healer of Shallya, a bearded brute bearing the mark of Ulric upon his forehead, and a pallid devotee of Morr so badly whipped that he stood knock-kneed in a pool of his own blood. Fellow priests, thought Volkmar. The Myrmidian knight Lupio Blaze, who Volkmar had thought lost early in the battle, was shackled opposite an Elf maiden so regal that she was stunning even under a mask of blood and dust. A broken tiara hung from her*

*tangled tresses, a phoenix symbol emblazoned upon it. Between each of the eight captives were lecterns wrought in the shape of Daemons' claws, giant grimoires bound to several of their number with gilded chains. A few feet away from Volkmar the Crown of Sorcery sat on a cushion of human skin, its priceless jewels winking at him in the candlelight. The Grand Theogonist's aching mind struggled to make sense of his surroundings. Suspicions stalked him like thieves in an alley. To amass such an assemblage of dignitaries and artefacts was the work of months – years even. But to what end?*

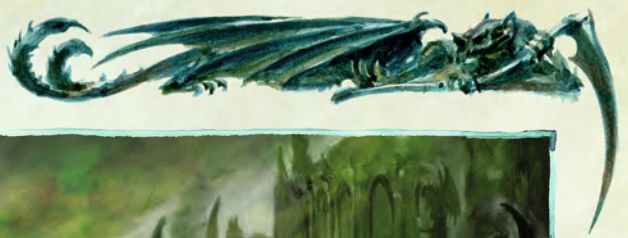
*For a second, all the candles in the chamber guttered at once, and a moment later Volkmar felt a hard metal boot pressing down hard on the nape of his neck, forcing him to lie flat.*

*'Ah, look there on the ground,' said a voice from behind him, cultured under the sneering Sylvanian accent. 'The great Volkmar, high priest of the Heldenhammer, writhing like a maggot. They say that the blood of Sigmar runs in your veins, my friend. And who knows, perhaps they are right.'*

*Mannfred von Carstein, thought Volkmar. His cheek pressed against the flagstones, the old priest saw one of the Vargheists fall upon the captives ranged around the wall of the chamber, ripping open their wrists one by one with its pointed teeth. Blood pattered onto the flagstones, finding its way into the gilded grooves set into the floor.*

*Volkmar cleared his mind of pain and thought of the warrior god Sigmar; he who banished the dark father of the Vampires when the Empire was young. He felt his bones knit as a golden energy flowed through him, and heaved his shoulders upward, dislodging the*





armoured boot that held him prone. An explosion of pain blossomed behind his eyes as a claw dug into his head wound and lifted him up by the skull. Agony flared through every nerve as a pallid, leering face swam in the Grand Theogonist's blurring vision. Even through the black pain burning his mind, he balled his fist and punched Mannfred hard in the mouth. He felt fangs break under his knuckles.

'Now now,' said Mannfred, spitting a tooth onto the floor and smiling crimson in the candlelight. 'It's too late for such primitive nonsense, I'm afraid. Too late for you, and too late for the Empire.'

A fell wind raced through the arrow-slits of the chamber, snuffing out the candle flames. An instant later, Volkmar felt his tendons freeze and his mind grow numb. As the elements raged above, the night sky filling the chamber's open roof was eclipsed by a howling tempest of ghosts that bore a black cage of ironbone towards him. The Vargheists howled in worshipful glee, raising their arms in supplication.

'The blood of Sigmar,' the von Carstein said, his tone full of malice as Volkmar gazed upward. 'The last ingredient I need to claim the realm that is rightfully mine.' The Vampire grinned in his peripheral vision, and Volkmar tore his eyes from the reliquary above. 'Great works can be achieved with the life essence of true believers,' said Mannfred. 'Sylvania will become a realm where faith has no power, and your precious holy symbols are little more than trinkets. All because the blood of the faithful has been turned against them.'

Volkmar felt his arms being seized and pinned by his sides, and a wrist flared with pain as Mannfred opened it with his sharp nails. Eyes glinting, the Vampire squeezed his forearm just above the cuts,

forcing the wound to open like a wet mouth. Blood drizzled down Volkmar's limp fingers, and he watched in mounting horror as it mingled with that of the holy men and women until the gold of the cartograph ran scarlet throughout.

The Grand Theogonist fought to stay conscious as he was lifted from his feet. He felt himself carried to the edge of the chamber before being slammed bodily against one of the arches that formed the tower's windows. In the far distance, around the mountains that ringed the vale, he could see an unhealthy crimson light that echoed the blood-filled borders cut into the flagstones below. Beneath the light he could just make out explosive eruptions of movement. A great wall of bone was bursting up from the ground wherever the magical perimeter touched the ground.

'No!' shouted Volkmar, struggling for breath as Sylvania was transformed into a fortress of the dead before his eyes, 'You can't... Sigmar damn you, I'll kill you first!'

He felt a familiar light building within him, and pushed the Vampire away with a surge of strength, channelling the raw power of his faith into one last great blast of defiance.

Nothing happened.

'Too late,' said Mannfred once more, his voice as cold as death's own claws, 'No mortal can defy my will.'

The last thing Volkmar saw before the blackness took him were broken fangs lunging for his throat.







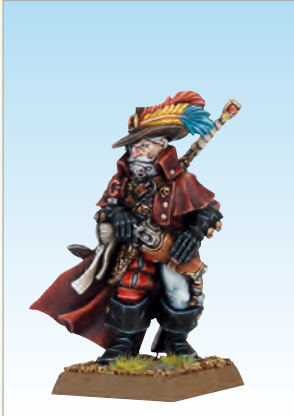
## THE ARMIES ASSEMBLED

*This section showcases the Citadel miniatures around which this campaign revolves, from Volkmar the Grim himself to the noble warriors of the Royal Altdorf Gryphites; from Manfred von Carstein to the hordes of shambling minions that follow in his wake.*





*The Faithful Few were the first of the crusading troops to venture into the Vale of Darkness. It was their actions at Konigstein that saw the Drakwald Riders reinforce the crusade days later.*



*Witch Hunter von Korden*



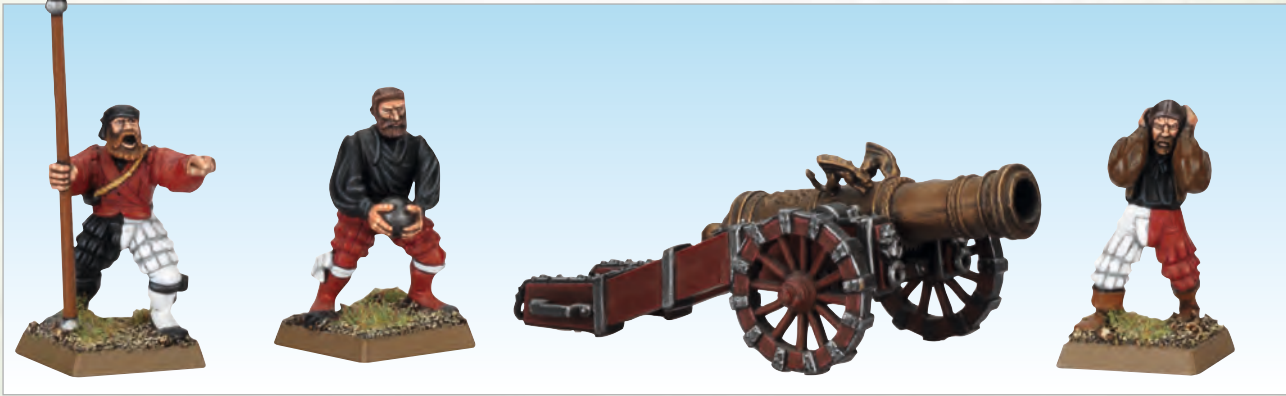
*Sigmar's Sons were the mainstay of von Korden's exploration.*



*The Silver Bullets are highly superstitious, but deadly accurate shots.*



*Knight of the Blazing Sun*



*The Hammer of the Witches, an Imperial Great Cannon that von Korden used to smash the Undead to smithereens*





*The Necromancer Ghorst surveys the battlefield, mounted atop a grisly carriage pulled by his resurrected brothers.*



*The Konigstein Stalkers, a host of Skeleton Warriors bound to Ghorst's will*



*The Doom Wolf of the Direpack*



*The Feasters in the Dusk are cannibalistic Crypt Ghouls possessed of a ravenous hunger.*





*Volkmar's Crusade was a small force of disparate warriors and religious zealots united by faith.*



*The Tattersouls, an unruly throng of Flagellants that followed Volkmar's every step through the vale*

*Arch Lector Kaslain*



*Grand Theogonist Volkmar is a nigh-unstoppable force when mounted atop the War Altar of Sigmar.*

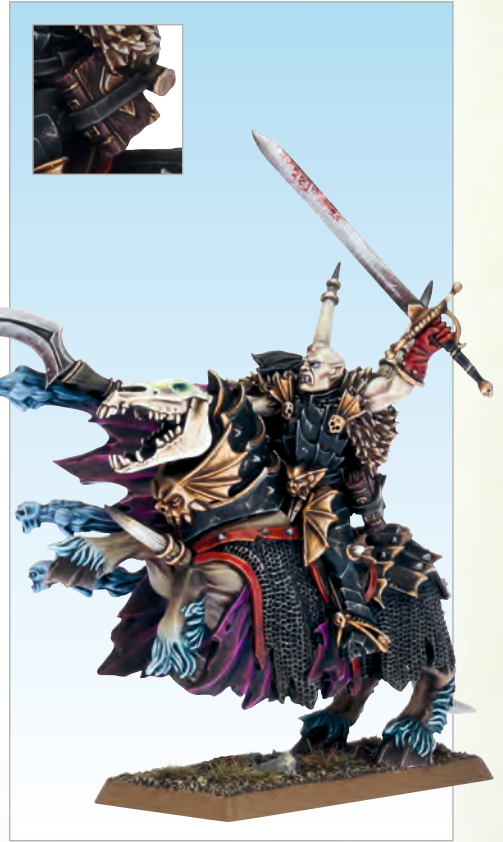




*The ambitions of Manfred von Carstein encompassed nothing less than detaching Sylvania from the Empire entirely and using it as a power base from which to enslave the Old World.*



*The Vargheists known as the Devils of Swartzhafen were lesser Vampires under the thrall of their von Carstein master.*



*The would-be ruler of Sylvania, Manfred von Carstein*



*The Tithe is a shambling host of the newly dead.*





*The Temple of Luminark was constructed for one reason alone – banishing the Undead from Sylvania wherever they are found.*



*Stirland's Revenge, a group of grizzled vigilantes determined to wreak vengeance for their losses*

*The White Wizards of Templehof are a force to be reckoned with.*



*Jovi Sunscryer*

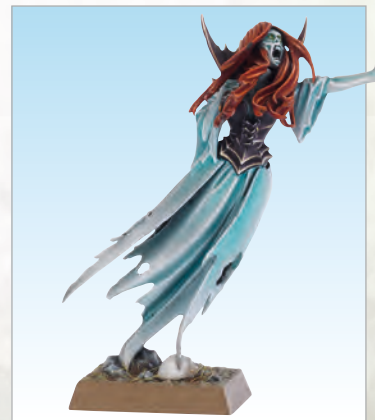




*Hexwraith*



*Vhostus of the Black Scythe*



*Whispering Nell*



*The Claw of Nagash, most potent of all the Old World's Mortis Engines*





*The Alt Dorf Gryphites, fearsome vanguard of the Drakwald Riders*



*The most vaunted of all the Empire's Knightly Orders, the Reiksguard can turn the tide of battle with a single charge.*





*Verek the Blade, Wight King*



*The Sternsmen, an honour guard of Skeleton Warriors armed with spears and shields*



*The Sternsmen bear rusted shields emblazoned with the iconography of their ancient warrior tribe.*



*The Black Knights bound to guard Castle Sternmieste, known as Verek's Reavers, are sinister foes indeed.*



