

The background of the cover is a dark, moody illustration in shades of blue and teal. It depicts a chaotic battle scene with various fantasy creatures and warriors. In the upper left, a large, dark, winged creature, possibly a dragon or a giant bat, looms over the scene. Below it, a unicorn-like creature with a single horn is engaged in combat. In the center, a winged figure, perhaps a demon or a fallen angel, is shown in a dynamic pose. The lower half of the image is filled with the silhouettes and forms of many soldiers and monsters, creating a sense of a large-scale conflict. The overall atmosphere is dark and intense, typical of the Warhammer universe.

WARHAMMER

AGE OF SIGMAR

BROKEN REALMS

THICKER
THAN WATER

THICKER THAN WATER

Watch, Sythus.

He does so. His Akhelian mother has ordered it, so Sythus Nemmetar – scion of the Ionrach – stares from the window of their coral manor out into the open abyss.

He is not sure he wants to. The Nemmetar family's stronghold stands towards the edge of Priom city, overlooking the kelp fields where the Namarti labour. As a result, he has an unobscured view of the wild Allopexes tearing through the half-souled thralls just beyond the walls. Sythus's keen eyes, attuned to the ocean's lightless gloom, can pick out where the water is being darkened by gore jetting from broken bodies.

'I thought—' Sythus pauses as his mother glances at him. He is not really paying attention to the Namarti, and he knows that their suffering is not the point. Sythus cares only for the Allopexes. Something in their bewitching, single-minded frenzy speaks to him. As a band of Akhelians led by an Embailor priest move to corral the beasts, he swallows, searching for words.

'You thought they were our creatures,' his mother finishes. Then, she does something so unexpected it will stay with him even over centuries of blood and brine. His mother kneels and rests a hand on his shoulder. Instantly, the Idoneth child wants to recoil. But she does not relent, and so neither shall he.

'They are our creatures only so long as our will remains paramount,' his mother says. Sythus listens, even as he watches the Embailor's arm being ripped away in a sudden snapping flurry. 'Falter, and they become predators like any other. Remember that. In their hearts, they are only predators.'

Sythus—

—opens his eyes. He grimaces.

He grimaces often now. It has been that way since a Khainite murder-maiden carved off half his face at Hagg Nar. This campaign along Aqshy's Charrwind Coast, in which they now fight alongside that bloodthirsty order to silence townships once bound to Anvilgard, has not improved his mood. But High King Voltornos has commanded it, and so his strong right hand will see it done.

Huntmaster Nemmetar had still been recovering from a blow dealt by Morathi herself when the alliance had been struck. He would, unsurprisingly therefore, have argued against joining with the Murder God's daughters. Yet the Idoneth played their part in the fall of Anvilgard, and when the God-King's hammer descends, it may strike against them too. To ensure that no word of their treachery – *call it what it is, all things considered* – reaches Azyr, he will go to any length.

They have slaughtered four Sigmarite settlements now to that end. This is the fifth. Seated atop his Deepmare steed, Nemmetar watches the last defenders try to rally. The human soldiers can barely move amidst the crashing ethersea, while the aelves are as packs of maddened Fangmoras. The Daughters take their time to purge every street, screaming war-oaths around their vile cauldron. The statue atop that wheeled altar has already been subtly altered, its features made more reminiscent of the reborn Morathi-Khaine. Nemmetar sees it. He wonders if the Khainites do.

His own Bloodsurf Hunt, at least, fights with customary efficiency. The death they deal is quick if not clean, for the Allopexes that his elite Akhelians ride are always kept ravenous. But Nemmetar knows that it is not cruelty that motivates his bound beasts. They hunt because they know nothing else, and in them, he sees kindred spirits. The huntmaster nods as a shoal of Allopex riders passes, before dismounting and dropping to the slick flagstones of the town square.

With a near sub-vocal murmur, Nemmetar bids his Deepmare slay as it wishes. His last mount was killed in the vaults of Morathi's citadel, but he knows this creature will return when he summons it; there has yet to be a beast he cannot break. He marches through the water and gore pooling at his feet towards the town's conclave chamber. The cool, echoing darkness is a welcome reprieve from the clamour outside. But that is not why he has come.

The sweet aroma given off by Charrwind flora burning in nearby braziers is near overpowering, but he remains focused on the figure at the heart of the chamber. Pristine white robes sway over glittering armour and a sunmetal blade. The aelf remains perfectly poised as he watches Nemmetar enter, head inclining in a nod.

‘Huntmaster.’

‘You know me.’

‘We fought the daemons together at Tor Glimris,’ the Lumineth blademaker replies. Disdain threatens to overwhelm Nemmetar’s cool demeanour. That such alliances between the Mage God’s estranged children do occur does not mean that he likes to acknowledge it. ‘You knew I was here?’ the Lumineth continues.

‘The Soulscryers confided their suspicions in me as we approached. Kin should deal with kin. And you have no room to chide. We know your kind’s game, inveigling yourself with these *villeth* and tugging at their puppet-strings while wearing the mask of the advisor.’

‘So classically Idoneth a statement. Blind to all nuance outside your own desperate selfishness. Unity has its uses, or at least it did until you shattered those bonds. What do you think will happen now our enemies see civilisation’s defenders at each other’s throats? Do you think the Dark Powers will spare you more than the Thunderer will? Or is your plan to hide, as always, and position Morathi’s zealots in the onslaught’s path before they do the same to you?’

Nemmetar does not acknowledge such lecturing. He draws his falchion, raising it in quick salute. The Lumineth responds, and the two aelves hurl themselves at one another.

What follows is not a drawn-out affair. The Lumineth is swift, and his greatsword opens a score of wounds across the Idoneth’s pale flesh. But Nemmetar’s soul is that of the predator. *Rip. Tear. Feast.* Seeing the most minute of openings, Nemmetar breaks the exchange of blades to lash out. The Lumineth staggers as his sword clatters to the ground, severed hands still gripping the handle. Dropping to his knees, he readies himself and gives the nod. Nemmetar’s sword rises.

‘Stop.’

And despite everything, Nemmetar does so. Wrathful humours surge once more as he turns to face the intruder. Nyrithia, his counterpart in the Khainite coven, strides into the chamber alongside her entourage as if she were the Shadow Queen herself. Blood coats her body and drips from her knives in bright crimson trails. Smirking, Nyrithia shakes her head before glancing at the Lumineth.

‘Temper, Nemmetar. Remember our terms. We are permitted to choose the finest sacrifice for Morathi-Khaine, and right now, that is this shining son.’ She almost spits at the mutilated aelf, features creasing in viperous glee. Before he realises it, Nemmetar’s grip tightens around his falchion.

‘His soul—’

‘Careful,’ Nyrithia turns whipcord fast, sciansá blade levelled. Her taunting cadence does not match the murder dancing in her eyes. For a moment, Nemmetar wants to release the shameful fury roiling within, to cleave and rend until the chill of the ocean depths suffuses him once more. The Hag Queen continues, nonetheless.

‘Think, huntmaster. If we fight, our warriors fight. If our warriors fight, our people fight. And if they fight, the goddess and your High King fight again. Those were not Voltornos’ orders now, were they?’

They were not.

‘Good,’ Nyrithia nods as the tension slowly drains, her entourage hauling the Lumineth out towards the waiting altars. ‘Had we fallen out, I would hate to ruin the other half of that handsome face.’ She laughs, just as she did while slicing into him at Hagg Nar. For a moment, their gazes lock, and Nemmetar cannot help but think of the empty black eyes of a wild Alloplex. Then Nyrithia looks away, and all he has are memories of blood in the water and a mother’s warning.

‘Come, huntmaster. We have four more settlements to attend to, and I feel we are finally starting to understand one another.’

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