

The logo for Warhammer Age of Sigmar, featuring the word "WARHAMMER" in large, gold, serif letters with a blue, textured background. Below it, "AGE OF SIGMAR" is written in smaller, gold, serif letters. The entire logo is framed by a gold, spiked border that resembles a sword hilt or a banner.

**WARHAMMER**  
AGE OF SIGMAR

BROKEN REALMS

The background is a dark, textured blue-grey color. It features faint, embossed illustrations of various creatures and scenes from the Warhammer universe, including a dragon-like creature on the left and a figure on the right.

MARKED FOR DEATH

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Laglo's place was loud, the Bugmansson's draught in her tankard was rich and strong, and Admiral Imoda Barrasdottr was some distance from sobriety. A pint or ten helped these days, with the memories. The conversation droned on around her.

'Everything's spun about,' Admiral Ruftsson was saying, grinding the heel of one palm into an empty eye socket. 'The sky-lanes in flames. Seven of the Zilfin council dead, and the *Sunderer* destroyed. Two seats on the Geldraad to those wazocks from Barak-Mhornar.'

'In strife, there is opportunity,' said Admiral Brulf, wagging a gloved finger. 'The aether-streams are settling at last, and Barak-Zilfin's already claimed more than her fair share. We've gained a seat at the high table ourselves, don't forget.'

Ruftsson grunted, seemingly annoyed at this reminder that not all was disastrous. Imoda watched him reach into a pocket of his flight suit and retrieve his aethermatic eye-piece, jamming it into place. It whirred and clicked before fixing on her.

'Of course, there's some that's made their fortune out of all this,' Ruftsson said. 'Like the good Admiral Imoda here. I hear tell the Council's granted you the lease of two brand-new Frigates, fresh from the dockyard. Up-gunned and swift as a Hyshian zephyr, so it's said. Fortune shines on some more than others, doesn't it?'

The old greybeard could barely hide his envy. Ruftsson was an old hand, a steady sky-dog who could be relied upon to keep his margins stable and his hull filled with aether-gold. But he was never going to rise any further than his current station. He lacked imagination. And *dash*.

Imoda smiled bitterly as she leaned forwards, running a hand through her hair. She was barely half Ruftsson's age, but she had a whiter mane than he, and her face was deeply lined and pallid. This was no natural weathering, but the result of her last voyage – a journey that had taken her damned close to oblivion.

'Talk to me of my good fortune, oh wise one,' she snarled. 'Perhaps you'd say the same of my crew, or those few that survived that flight through the Granthium Mountains, with gheists and *uzkuldrakk* and Grungni alone knows what else at our heels.'

She felt a hand on her shoulder, and turned to see Grutti Fadrunsdottr standing over her. Her first mate wore a familiar look of concern upon her angular face.

'Admiral, the repairs are complete,' Grutti said. 'The *Intaglio* is sky-ready again. Mayhaps you'd like to look her over yourself?'

Imoda favoured Admiral Ruftsson with another sour look. The old greybeard matched her with a glare of his own, while Admiral Brulf simply shook his head and took another swig of fire-ale. This was not the first time Imoda had lost her patience in recent days. She rose abruptly from her chair, sending it skidding backwards across the polished stone floor.

'Aye,' she said. 'Apologies, friends, for my ill temper. I've shares in this establishment. Tell Laglo I said your drinks are on me for the evening. Time for me to retire to my cabin, I think.'

She favoured them with the merest nod and departed, doing her best not to sway as she pushed her way through the heaving mass of patrons, towards the rear exit of the tavern. Grutti followed close behind, her concern as grating as it was silent. The first mate's prosthetic right leg clicked maddeningly as she walked, every sound causing Imoda to flinch. After spending the necessary shares to repair the battered *Intaglio*, there had been little left to pay for a proper aethermatic limb to replace the one Grutti had lost on that nightmarish journey beneath the Granthium range, where the Ironclad's crew had found the risen dead crawling in their multitudes and a gaping maw of utter nothingness that was growing by the hour. So powerful had been the aura of death that merely approaching it had taken a grievous toll upon Imoda; she recalled the dreadful sensation of her body weakening, her hair falling loose and her breath coming in ragged gasps.

There was something terrible brewing in Chamon, she knew it in her bones. But the Admiral's Council was too busy grasping at newly settled aether-streams to heed her warnings. And what could she do alone?

'Admiral?' said Grutti.

‘I am hale as a harkraken,’ Imoda replied, irritably. ‘Stop your fussing.’

They shoved their way out of the bar, dodging a steady stream of milling labourers and half-cut Arkanauts making the most of their shore leave. Hysh had made its descent some hours back, and the metal walkways were lit with sputtering whaleen-oil lamps that cast spidery shadows along the walls. The air was thick and hot, spiced by the metallic tang of aether-endrins and the aroma of roast lyrgull meat. Everywhere, the cacophony of the Zilfin outer docks: bellowed laughter and song, and the distant piping of the longshore marshals’ whistles, the signal that some troublemaker was about to feel the taste of a billy club.

Before her last voyage, Imoda Barrasdottr would have delighted in such raucous liveliness. Right now she longed for the cool and quiet of her quarters aboard the *Intaglio*, and the comfort of her maps.

‘We’ll take Unggarman’s Bridge,’ she said. It was a slightly longer route, but the great sky-way neatly avoided the hustle and bustle of the sky-port’s outer districts. They could hail down an endrintram and be back aboard the Ironclad without braving any more merry-makers.

In silence they made their way through the labyrinthine streets of Barak-Zilfin, each of them so familiar with its cramped passageways that they could have made the journey blindfolded. As they entered the Square of the Sixth Wind, Imoda paused, frowning. She scanned the plaza, with its gently bubbling lamps and benches of ornately sculpted bronze. No sign of movement. Why, then, had a cold shiver trickled down her back? Her hand fell to the butt of the pistol at her belt; she was wearing a simple duster of whaleen-hide rather than her war suit, but that did not mean she was unarmed.

‘Admiral?’ said Grutti, eyes furrowed in alarm. She had good reason to be confused. There were scant few cutpurses or back-alley blades that dared ply their trade in Barak-Zilfin, where the law of the Code was enforced with vigorous enthusiasm.

‘Someone follows us,’ whispered Imoda. ‘Be ready with your scattergun, I can—’

Before she could finish the sentence, she felt a rush of wind past her face, as if a crossbow bolt had whipped through the air. There was a blur of black and silver, and Grutti Fadrundotr fell away reeling, her lifeblood splattered across the cobbles.

‘Grutti!’ roared the Admiral, and in the blink of an eye her pistol was in hand and spitting aether-shot. She fired from the hip, tracking the thing’s movement as it turned and leapt impossibly high. It was too fast. Unnaturally fast.

As it landed, Imoda caught the vague impression of a tall, thin human male, his hair a cascading wave of silver and eyes as red as the new dawn. Then he was coming right at her, a needle-thin dagger poised to open her throat. Dropping her pistol, she somehow caught hold of the creature’s thin, pale forearm. The dagger-tip scraped across the collar of her duster. She was looking into the thing’s face now, the fish-white flesh of a corpse, spattered with her crewmate’s blood. The eyes, crimson and feral. As she fought in vain to keep the slender blade from opening her throat, her attacker opened his thin mouth in a mocking smile, revealing a pair of yellowed fangs. The foul corpse-reek of his breath brought her right back to the mountains, and the horrors concealed below.

‘Did you think that death would not find you here?’ it rasped. ‘Nowhere is beyond the Blood Queen’s influence. Nefereta’s reach spans the realms entire.’

‘Then... she should have come for me herself.’

Imoda brought a knee up into the vampire’s belly, and followed it with a headbutt. The assassin barely staggered. He simply chortled – a high-pitched, childish sound that chilled her to the bones. With a single twist of his skinny frame, he sent her spinning to the floor. She crashed down hard, and he straddled her, the point of his blade tickling her eyeball.

‘You were marked for death as soon as you laid eyes upon my mistress’s work,’ he whispered. ‘She demands that you suffer for your interference. I shall make this very, very slow.’

The knife scraped across Imoda’s eyeball, and she roared in agony.

The vampire gasped, a wet, rattling sound. Through a haze of pain, Imoda saw its chest glow white-hot, then burst as a blindingly bright crystal sword punched through bone.

‘Self-indulgence is such a dangerous trait,’ said a soft voice, beautifully melodic and utterly composed. ‘You should have just killed her.’

The vampire snarled, somehow still trying to rise with a smoking hole in its chest. Imoda, her left eye a ball of white-hot pain, scabbled on the floor and found her pistol. Her fingers closed around its comforting metal grip.

She pressed it between the vampire's fangs and fired. Its skull exploded in a shower of viscera. The headless body toppled aside, revealing a tall, graceful warrior, wielding a sword made of sunlight. An aelf, but not like any she had seen before. His armour gleamed a blinding silver, and he wore a soaring back-banner fashioned in the shape of a sun; such a needlessly elaborate adornment that Imoda might have scoffed, had not she marked the aelf's pose and assured manner – his steely gaze and the way he carried that blade, like it was an extension of his arm. This was a warrior born.

'It would have paid to keep the creature alive, Ellathor,' came another voice, higher in pitch than that of the sword-wielder, but carrying the same note of supreme confidence – as well a tinge of reproach. 'It might have told us many interesting things, were we to properly encourage it.'

It belonged to another aelf, who was crouched low over the body of poor Grutti. This one was as striking as her kin, clad in robes of azure and carrying a staff whose crystal head glowed with the same blinding radiance as her kinsman's sword.

'Direct your irritation to this one,' said the warrior, nodding at Imoda. 'She was the one that blew its head off.'

'Grutti,' gasped Imoda, wincing as she dragged herself to her feet. She could feel the piercing burn of a broken rib. What was left of her eye was trickling down her face. She hauled herself over to where her First Mate lay, crumpled and bleeding on the cobbles.

'Your friend might live,' said the female aelf, with stark indifference. 'I thought such a blow must surely kill her, but you duardin are a resolute breed. Shall I take your gratitude for our timely rescue as implied?'

'Take it and stow it anywhere you wish, aelf,' Imoda snapped. 'Had you intervened sooner I'd not be short one eye, and my first mate wouldn't be lying in her own blood. Who are you, anyway?'

'My name is Ellania, and this is my brother, Ellathor. We have heard the rumours of your voyage to the Granthium Mountains, and the things that you witnessed there. You will tell us your tale. Leave nothing out. I do not exaggerate when I say that millions of lives depend upon it.'

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