

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 set within a gold, ornate frame with pointed ends.

WARHAMMER
AGE OF SIGMAR

BROKEN REALMS

A dark, atmospheric illustration in shades of brown and black. It depicts a chaotic battle scene with various creatures and warriors. In the center, a dragon-like creature with wings is engaged in combat. To the left, a unicorn-like creature is visible. The overall scene is filled with the silhouettes and forms of soldiers, monsters, and magical beings, creating a sense of intense conflict and dark fantasy.

TO CAST A
LONG SHADOW

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From the arched window of her quarters, Morathi-Khaine looked out across the urban sprawl of Har Kuron with a strange mixture of elation and despair. The newest addition to her hard-won empire, the city had been called Anvilgard not so long ago. It had a different ruler then, before she had become... renewed. Now the city was hers, an annex to the Helleflux in Ulgu and a powerbase in the strategically vital hearthlands of the Great Parch.

By the blood of the Crone, how she hated it.

At the edges of the port-city below, yellow-green swirls of defoliant mist curled into the surrounding jungle, vaguely tentacular as they fringed the black-brown body of the port city. Their chemical stink, mingled with the wilted vegetation they were designed to fight and the sulphurous vapours of the Charrwind Coast, made for a scent not unlike piles of refuse left to rot in the sun. Before her apotheosis, each gut-churning whiff had made her skin itch, pricked at the corners of her eyes and made her even more irritable than she usually found herself in the company of fools. Such mortal concerns were long behind her, but it offended her sense of propriety nonetheless. A poor lair for a goddess, Har Kuron, but a powerful statement, and for now, it would suffice. Mingled screams reached her, carried on the evening air. At least the place was never boring.

She turned away from the window, her serpent-haired shadow spreading long upon the alabaster wall. It shifted and writhed of its own accord, but did not disturb her; that was far from unusual when her Shadow Queen form was torpid. Only when the nest of snakes twisted into a great metallic crown, the shadow lengthening and becoming that of a slender, impossibly tall male with oil-black eyes, did her stance shift.

'I wondered when you would pluck up the courage to visit your mother,' she said.

'My, how you've grown,' came the hollow-voiced reply, the slash of a smile opening in the kingly shadow on the wall. 'My congratulations.'

'They make a welcome change from your contempt,' said Morathi-Khaine. She looked away to mask her seething emotions, pouring herself a goblet of spiced blood from a flesh-warm decanter of fireglass. 'Things will be changing in Ulgu as well as Aqshy, scion of mine.'

'And still, even with your long-sought divinity, you cling to mortal habits.'

'One must take pleasures where one can find them, in these times of turmoil.'

'No doubt your bedchamber has seen its fair share of turmoil of late.'

Morathi-Khaine slashed a long-nailed finger in the air, and one of the kingly shadow's fingers dropped away, greying to nothingness. The sneer of the shade's mouth turned to an angry snarl, its eyes flaring into tongues of white fire.

'The time in which you can speak to me in such a manner is over,' said Morathi, sipping from her goblet. 'Be glad it is only your finger I take as punishment.'

'There will be a heavy price,' said the figure, affecting nonchalance, 'for this outrage, and for your latest presumptions.' The king-shade shifted to become a thing of blades, purple fire burning at their tips. 'How do you think the Barbarian will react to your blatant coup?'

'He will do nothing more than thunder and grind his teeth, reticent to jeopardise one of the few alliances he has left,' replied Morathi-Khaine. 'Immortality has taught Sigmar Unberogen some measure of perspective, and he has his victory over Nagash, even if it is by proxy.' She shrugged, bare shoulders pale in the moonlight. 'Even with the Nadirite curse receding, he knows full well that for every city he builds, another will fall. At least Anvilgard fell to one who will ensure it still stands.'

'Delusion,' said the shade. 'His kind burns hot when the anger has them in its teeth, for like us, they recognise the power in it.' A tempest of shadow grew formed around the apparition's bladed scalp, miniature towers toppling in flashes of light beneath. 'They cannot put it aside without sage counsel, and who counsels the god of storms? Even now, in his precious Gladitorium, his dullard

legions practise warcraft against simulacra cast in your daughters' image.'

'Who would know of it better than you, the king of voyeurs?'

'Your lecture of punishment,' said the shade, shaking its extravagantly crowned head as its bladed incarnation took the aspect of a king once more. 'You talk of justice, of consequence, when your own lust for power has endangered everything we fought for! The Dark Prince thrashes against his chains, and his essence, somehow, bleeds free.' The silhouette jabbed a finger at her, a drop of pitch-black blood running down the wall from its wounded hand. 'A direct result of your ambition. You risk the worst of catastrophes purely to sate your own selfish desire.'

Morathi-Khaine walked close, smeared the shadeblood on her own fingertip, and put it to her lips. 'As ever, the ends justify the means.'

There was a knock at the chamber's door, quiet but distinct. Her ambassador to Hammerhal, the elegant Selendti Llyr-Xiss, appeared half-hidden in the vestibule. 'My lady, the rebels—'

'Silence!' shouted Morathi-Khaine, hurling her goblet at the messenger without looking. It struck Selendti full in the chest, and the ambassador recoiled with a terrified hiss. 'Silence,' the goddess said again, her voice quiet and silken this time. 'I am spending time with my son.'

'As fine an appreciation for the arts of rulership as ever,' said the shade-king when they were alone once more. 'Better to be feared than loved.'

'So you do listen, then.'

'If only you hearkened to your own lessons,' said the shadow. 'You cannot keep your allies drunk on the honey of your voice. With the Nehekharan's work undone, Sigmar's gaze will turn to you.'

'I have plans to avert it. Besides, I fear he will have his hands rather full if he seeks order now that dear Alarielle is making her play. Even in Ulgu you must feel the realms shiver with unease.'

'They will be brought to heel. But the Twins have become emboldened by the victory of light over death. The blind one tests my borders as we speak.'

'Vicariously, at least.'

'For now,' said the shade. 'The Hyshians are seekers, always probing, always shining light where it is not wanted. If the Lords of Lumination find a stable path through Cathartia before we are in full control, the shroud will soon tear, and our entire notion of supremacy will be at risk.'

'Teclis is laying the groundwork already. Under his delusions of altruism, he knows it is the only true path.' Morathi-Khaine smiled, but there was no mirth in it.

'He is right. One does not send a child to slay a drake. And not all in the shadow of the Mage God resent the manner of our work.'

The Hyshian sun outside the window pierced the mist for a moment. A beam of sunlight speared down, refracting through the window to form a smaller figure on the wall. It was slender, robed and armoured, with a tall helm in the manner of the Vanari. The shade-king moved his uninjured hand above it, and it danced as if to music.

'The dream is pervasive,' said Malerion. 'In the right light, it turns from black, to grey, to white. And thanks to the swift thinking of my agents in Shyish, I have just the offering I need to open negotiations once more.'

The shade-king held up a giant mask, regal and lambent, framed by bifurcated horns and cast in the image of an Ymetrican longhorn. Glowing dust cascaded from the crumbled realmstone at its neck.

'Ah, my little magpie,' said Morathi-Khaine, looking at the shade-king with genuine affection. 'Even under aeons of cold hatred I can still find the embers of my love for you. But sadly, I must cut this short.'

'I heard,' smirked the shadow. 'The humans are revolting.'

'Don't ever change, my dear,' said the goddess, rolling her eyes as she turned away. She smiled nonetheless, suddenly wistful as her mood lifted once more.

There was killing to be done.

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