

The logo for Warhammer Age of Sigmar, featuring the word "WARHAMMER" in a large, ornate, golden font with a dark blue background, and "AGE OF SIGMAR" in a smaller, simpler font below it. The logo is flanked by golden, spiky elements resembling horns or wings.

WARHAMMER AGE OF SIGMAR

BROKEN REALMS

A detailed illustration of a battle scene from the Warhammer Age of Sigmar universe, rendered in a monochromatic teal color. The scene depicts various creatures and warriors in combat, including a large dragon-like creature on the left, a winged demon in the center, and a warrior on a horse on the right. The background is filled with more figures and structures, creating a sense of a large-scale conflict.

PREMONITIONS

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Another tremor rocked the augurium chamber of the Palace Excelsium, causing a shower of marble and dust to rain from the ceiling. Grand Matriarch Yarga-Sjuhan jumped backwards in time to avoid a fist-sized chunk, which slammed into the tiles, missing her skull by the width of a gnawfly's wing.

'I thought I said I wanted those gargant stone-hurlers bombed into oblivion,' she said. 'Where are the sky battalions?'

Wing Commodore Rangni Drekkarson removed his goggles, revealing twin circles of ruddy skin in a face otherwise stained entirely soot-black. 'They have done as much as they can, Grand Matriarch. We must have set the whole field ablaze, but I've never seen so many greenskins in one place. They just keep coming.'

Yarga-Sjuhan cursed under her breath, and her fingers closed around the jewelled pommel of Warspite. She had not unsheathed the sword in far too long, and her warrior's heart yearned to join her cityfolk atop the great curtain wall of Excelsis, to repel the cursed orruk invaders with blade and gunshot. But that was not her place. Not anymore.

'Get whatever we have left refuelled, rearmed and back in the air,' she snapped. 'Tell the Scarlet Scourge to ram their contraptions down the gargants' throats, if need be. The walls cannot withstand this barrage.'

Drekkarson's eyes were bleary with fatigue after a day and night of constant sorties, but he did not object. He knew the omens as well as she; it was fight or die now. The duardin made the sign of the comet, snapped his heels together and departed. Yarga-Sjuhan doubted she would ever see him again, but she put the thought far from her mind. In war there was no place for sentimentality.

The Grand Matriarch stared at the shimmering floor of the augurium, hoping that something within the dizzying collage of half-formed images would stand out to her. The entirety of the chamber floor was carved from prophecy-infused crystal mined from the Spear of Mallus, forming a stratified map of the City of Secrets and the surrounding coastline. Emanating from the smooth obsidian were minute fragments of augury, projected in visual form; a stretch of wall overwhelmed and stormed by hulking orruk brutes; a gyrocopter squadron spiralling down in flames to smash into the Veins, toppling ramshackle buildings like playing cards. These were disasters yet to come, some of which might be circumvented by bold action.

The augurium offered the city's military commanders a glimpse of forthcoming events, a premonition of the anarchic ebb and flow of combat. Though the hardliner anti-magic thugs of the Nullstone Brotherhood would spit blood if they knew of its presence – and indeed its importance to the city's defences – the ingenious sorcery of this chamber had been instrumental in keeping the enormous greenskin horde at bay. Still, it was not foolproof; it took the combined arcane communion of dozens of Collegiate seers to siphon and interpret such an endless torrent of visions and gleanings, and the work took a grievous toll. Even then, it was not always reliable. If it had been, maybe they would have seen this disaster coming long ago.

One of the clearest images depicted the eastern gate-towers assailed by a churning throng of greenskins, hooded gargants reaching up to pluck hurricanum emplacements and cannon batteries as if they were ripe fruit. This image lasted only a few moments before evaporating into motes of dancing light.

'High Ordinancer,' Yarga-Sjuhan said, turning to the diminutive Dalland Kross, who snapped to attention. 'Turn a half-dozen Helstorm batteries to the eastern gate, and get them sighted in. I want a storm of death to rain down on anything that dares approach our walls.'

Kross nodded, and began bellowing a stream of orders to his adjutants. It was not truly the purview of the Grand Matriarch to be re-organising artillery batteries, but needs must; Prime Commander Fettelin was dead, crushed to paste by a falling cannon, and there was an unspoken agreement that Yarga-Sjuhan – a former General of the Freeguilds herself, and a veteran of a dozen campaigns – was best placed to take over his duties.

'By the God-King, no,' groaned Grandseer Trasmus, who knelt at the centre of the augurium. He was surrounded by a dozen acolytes, all trembling under the strain of deciphering the fragmented readings of the Spear of Mallus into something semi-decipherable. As the Grand Matriarch turned to speak with her foremost interpreter of prophecies, another of the Collegiate

wizards collapsed, drooling blood and twitching spasmodically, and was dragged away by black-robed adjutants.

‘Speak up, Grandseer,’ growled Flavius Murghat, the city’s Orator Magnus. His voice seemed to shake the chamber just as much as the distant thunder of gargant-hurled boulders raining down from beyond the walls. ‘Vague exclamations are of little help to us.’

Trasmus waved his ironoak staff, and a sphere of glittering light coalesced in the air before him. Within the orb of light, the Grand Matriarch could glimpse a grim canvas: a cavorting host of painted men and women spilling through the Westgate, eyes rolling over white as they fell upon the few beleaguered Freeguilders that still held the passage behind a barricade of orruk corpses. Sauntering through the carnage came two strange figures; the first a gilded statue of a being, a flaxen-haired prince with curving horns and joyous, evil eyes; the second, a corpulent mass of flesh atop a lurching palanquin borne aloft by pale-fleshed brutes, blood seeping down his many jowls. Yarga-Sjuhan’s revulsion rose as bile in her throat, and she spat upon the floor as the image petered into nothing.

‘Yet another host descends upon us,’ said Trasmus, his voice little more than a whisper. ‘Skin-revellers and decadent reavers. Many thousands at least.’

A bitter growl of frustration escaped the Grand Matriarch. ‘Sigmar’s blood, is there no end to our misfortune? Filthy ratmen crawling beneath our streets, a continent’s worth of greenskins hammering at our gates, and now a damned heathen cavalcade. How long do we have?’

‘I cannot know for certain, the premonition is unclear. Perhaps several days. Perhaps no more than a matter of hours.’

‘We cannot hold against another army,’ said High Despot Liegermann, his measured, almost bored voice belying the severity of his words. He stared at her through heavy-lidded eyes, apparently ambivalent as to the disaster unfolding around them. Yarga-Sjuhan had always found the man’s unflappable nature strangely infuriating.

‘Grand Matriarch, it may be time to consider our options,’ Liegermann went on. ‘Neither the orruks nor this heathen army can be allowed to lay their hands upon the Spear of Mallus. In the White Reaper’s absence, the decision to enact the Desolus Decree is yours alone.’

‘No!’ snapped Yarga-Sjuhan. ‘Not while my soldiers have bullets left to fire and strength enough to lift a sword. I will not turn our guns upon this city until all hope is lost.’

‘What I showed you was but a fraction of the evils I have foreseen,’ said Trasmus, ‘You cannot imagine what horrors these fiends will unleash upon Excelsis. My sacred duty is to safeguard the Spear of Mallus, and to prevent its secrets from falling into the hands of the unworthy. What dreadful things might the worshippers of ruin accomplish, were they to seize it for themselves?’

‘They will not,’ came a strange, chirping voice. The Grand Matriarch and her advisers turned to see a diminutive creature standing amidst the swirling lights of the augurium, leaning upon a staff of gold. It was a bipedal reptile, less than half the size of Yarga-Sjuhan herself, with a crown of iridescent feathers atop its crest. It stared at her through unblinking yellow eyes.

‘How did this creature enter the Palace Excelsium?’ roared Flavius Mughat. ‘Star-scales have no place on the Conclave. Get it out of here, we have a war to fight.’

Yarga-Sjuhan held up a hand to silence the blustering oaf. She was one of very few beings in this city who had seen the strange lizard-shamans of the Seraphon in battle firsthand, and knew that despite its frail appearance, this creature could immolate the Orator Magnus with a flick of its claws.

‘Your counsel is welcome,’ she said, meeting the skink’s gaze. ‘You believe this heathen host will not reach the city, but my augurs say otherwise. I have glimpsed their visions myself.’

The skink priest cocked its head again. Its reptilian features were hard to read, but the Grand Matriarch thought that she caught a hint of amusement as the creature bared its needle-like teeth.

‘Visions only,’ it said, the words strangely distant and muffled. Yarga-Sjuhan was not sure if the creature was speaking naturally, or if she alone could hear its thoughts echoing in her mind. ‘Ripples cast across the ocean of stars. But only reflections of the true pattern. Not to be trusted.’

The shaman's eyes glowed like blue fire. It began to walk amongst the sculpted map of the Coast of Tusks, reaching out to pluck strands of magic from the augurium, weaving them together into a sphere of blinding white light.

'See,' the lizard-shaman said, and hurled the orb at Yarga-Sjuhan. Its radiance engulfed her. There was a flash of intense pain, and a raft of images came flooding into her mind.

Again, she saw the great host of heathen revellers, but this time they were not forcing their way through the gates of her city; instead, they were encamped amidst a thick and gloomy jungle, surrounded by the slain and mutilated corpses of scaled creatures – a breed of Seraphon, but far larger and more fearsome than the little shaman. Judging by the scores of slain Chaos-worshippers strewn about, they had accounted for many of their foes before succumbing to death. The aftermath of some bloody battle, then. Again, she glimpsed the gilded giant and the bloated glutton, glaring at one another with looks of utmost hatred from across the corpse-strewn clearing. The followers of each heathen lord gathered about their respective master. The sense of tension was palpable.

'What is this?' Yarga-Sjuhan said.

'The pattern restored,' came the lizard-shaman's voice. 'Events reordered to fit the Great Plan, at the cost of many earth-spawns. A necessary sacrifice.'

How or why the killing started, the Grand Matriarch could not say. There were raised voices, shouts and insults, boasts and accusations. A blade was drawn, and thrust into an eye socket. The heathens fell upon one another in a frenzy of violence, stabbing, gouging and tearing. Swaggering, masked warriors danced and swayed through a mass of pale, writhing bodies, opening bellies and throats with graceful swipes of their swords. Crested knights atop strange, lizard-like mounts fought hideous, claw-limbed fiends, while rippling volleys of arrows punched deep into tattooed flesh. Yarga-Sjuhan – no stranger to violence – found her gorge rising at the sheer sadism of it all. The two rival warlords hacked and shoved their way through the melee, desperate to murder one another. Before they met in battle, the visions ceased.

'Grand Matriarch?' Mughat was shouting, directly into her ear at hurricane force. She shoved him away. Her conclave members were staring at her with looks of concern and confusion.

'I am fine,' Yarga-Sjuhan snapped, before turning back to the lizard-shaman. 'The heathens have turned upon one another, then. They will not come to my city?'

'In time. But too late to prevent what is to come.'

Relief flooded through Yarga-Sjuhan, but was quickly extinguished when she recalled the forces already arrayed against her people. One disaster at a time, then – that was the key to military command, in the Grand Matriarch's opinion.

'So we are to be spared the lash of the Dark Prince after all,' she said. 'Just the small matter of a million greenskins to deal with. And a bunch of deranged cultists running amok in the Crystalfall district. And doubtless other disasters, as yet to reveal themselves. What has your master seen of my city's fate, star-scale? Can we survive the night?'

'This, I cannot know. There is a void in the cosmic pattern, all around this place. Even the mightiest Relic Priest cannot penetrate its blackness. We see only blood and fire, and the earth split asunder. Much death to come, warmblood. Much suffering.'

'You will stand with us regardless?' Yarga-Sjuhan asked.

It cocked its head, and studied her for a moment. Then bobbed its head.

'Good,' the Grand Matriarch said, feeling a surge of energy for the first time in what felt like days. 'Summon the entire conclave, and send word to the White Reaper. If Excelsis is to fall, we shall make its end a legend they will sing about in Azyrheim until the stars themselves burn out.'

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