

THE CANNIBALS OF THE CURSED MOUNTAINS

The Vertiginous Peaks are home to debased flesh-eaters and deranged cannibals. They rarely leave their mountain sanctuaries, but they have been known to intervene in the wars of others when the scent of battle proves too tempting. Sam Pearson explains all.





Sam: As I am sure is the case for lots of fellow hobbyists, I often find myself reading through the background sections of a rulebook, a battletome or an issue of *White Dwarf*, when suddenly inspiration strikes, and my mind is filled with all kinds of exciting ideas for battles to be fought on the tabletop. It is one of the joys of our great hobby and is in large due to the fantastic work of our studio scribes and wordsmiths (or background writers, as they are officially known), who spend their time crafting the excellent lore and stories that fill our different books and the hallowed pages of this magazine.

This article is a result of such inspiration. I was reading last month's Broken Realms Flashpoint (penned by the talented Jordan Green) and was immediately drawn to the section on the Cursed Mountains. This is a region of the sacred Avalenoria mountain range in Hysh known as the Vertiginous Peaks. Lying just beyond the domain of the Lumineth Realm-lords, it is haunted by the delusional and cannibalistic Flesh-eater Courts.

What I find interesting about the Vertiginous Peaks is although the Lumineth Realm-lords loathe their ghoulish neighbours, they have found them to be useful of sorts. You see, the Flesh-eater Courts that dwell in these mountains serve as a natural barrier to the threats of Chaos that seek to find a footing in the Realm of Light. For the forces of Chaos, these remote mountains look like the perfect place to establish a stronghold in secret from which to wreak terror across the nearby lands. That is, until they find

themselves beset on all sides by hordes of these deranged creatures and other nasties!

In this article, you'll find two battleplans set in the Cursed Mountains. Each is a narrative battle for two players that involves a third army, the Flesh-eater Courts, controlled by the game. In the first battleplan – Temple of the Myrmidesh – two armies are both searching the ruins of a wasted Slaaneshi temple where a powerful relic is rumoured to lie. As the two forces clash amidst the ruins, the din of furious battle draws more and more of these insane cannibals, and soon the battle becomes a desperate fight for survival for both sides!

In the second battleplan – Hallowed Ground – the Lumineth Realm-lords stand ready to protect their realm from an invading army of Chaos. As the battle commences, a horde of ghouls appears on the northern horizon seeking blood and flesh. In this battle, the cunning general will be able to use the Flesh-eater Courts to their advantage, leaving the enemy to face the brunt of their assault. But it comes with a lot of risks, and either force is just as likely to be overrun.

At the end of the article, you will find the full rules to use the Cannibal Horde in both of these battleplans, or in a battleplan of your creation. In addition to these rules, you'll want the warscrolls for the Flesh-eater Courts units you are using, which are all available for free either in the Azyr app or from the Games Workshop webstore (www.games-workshop.com).



BATTLEPLAN 1

TEMPLE OF THE MYRMIDESH

Located high upon the Vertiginous Peaks lies the ruined Temple of the Myrmidesh. Once a stronghold where decadent and profane rituals dedicated to the Dark God Slaanesh took place, this fell site now harbours nothing but deranged ghouls that stalk the shadows and prey on intruders.

Two armies have been drawn to the temple ruins by rumours that a powerful relic resides within. Whether they intend to destroy the relic or to use it for their own means, neither side can allow the relic to fall into the hands of the enemy. However, as the din of battle draws more and more flesh-eating cannibals into the fray, both sides find themselves fighting for their survival first and foremost!

THE ARMIES

Each player picks an army, and then they roll off. The winner chooses which player is the **invader** and which is the **custodian**.

THE CANNIBAL HORDE

In addition to the two armies is the Cannibal Horde. This army is commanded by the game rather than a player. It uses the rules for Cannibal Hordes (pg 80-81).

The players agree on how many units are in the Cannibal Horde. If you are using Pitched Battle profiles, we recommend the combined points value for the Cannibal Horde should not exceed that of either of the other two armies.

THE BATTLEFIELD

The battle is fought over the ruins of a Slaaneshi temple, high up on a mountain among the Vertiginous Peaks. To represent this, the battlefield should have ruins set up around the centre. The map includes a suggestion for the layout.

OBJECTIVES

Place 3 objectives as shown on the map. The objectives are **relic sites**.

FACTION TERRAIN

Neither army can include any faction terrain that is set up before the battle begins (both armies are far from their domains).

SET-UP

The invader sets up their army first,

wholly within their territory. Then, the custodian sets up their army wholly within their territory.

Once both armies have been set up, the players roll off. The winner chooses 1 unit from the Cannibal Horde and sets it up wholly within 6" of the centre of the battlefield.

THE FIRST TURN

The invader chooses which player takes the first turn in the first battle round.

THE DESCENDING HORDES

While the battle rages, ghoulish howls ring out into the night as more and more of the Flesh-eater Courts' denizens descend upon the battlefield.

At the end of their hero phase, a player can set up 1 unit from the Cannibal Horde on the battlefield. To do so, the player picks 1 of the units not yet on the battlefield and rolls a dice. On a 1-5, the unit must be set up within 6" of a short battlefield edge. On a 6, the unit must be set up within 6" of any battlefield edge.

In both cases, units can be any distance from units in either player's army – be wary of the edge of the battlefield!

SEARCHING THE RUINS

Each army has been tasked to retrieve an ancient relic. However, neither knows of its location and must find it before the enemy does.

At the end of a player's turn, they must search 1 of the relic sites they control to see if the relic is to be found there. To do so, the player picks 1 of the relic sites they control and rolls a dice. On a 1-5, the relic is not found and the relic site is removed from play. On a 6, the relic is found.

During the battle, if 2 relic sites are removed from play, the relic is automatically found at the remaining relic site. Similarly, once the relic is found at a relic site, any other relic sites are immediately removed from play.

THE RELIC

Dangerous chaotic powers reside within the relic still, making it volatile and dangerous to all within its vicinity.

Once the relic has been found, at the end of each player's movement phase, they must roll a dice for each friendly model within 6" of it. On a 1, that model's unit suffers 1 mortal wound. Cannibal Horde units are not affected by this rule.

BATTLE LENGTH

The battle lasts for 5 battle rounds.

GLORIOUS VICTORY

At the end of the battle, the player who controls the relic wins a **major victory** unless their general has been slain, in which case they win a **minor victory**.





BATTLEPLAN 2 HALLOWED GROUND

At the foot of the Vertiginous Peaks, battlelines have been formed. On one side of the valley stands an army of Chaos invaders, threatening to strike deep into the territory before them, sowing terror and death in their wake. On the other side stand the defenders of this realm, the Lumineth Realm-lords. Each of these stoic warriors stands side by side with their kin, ready to pay dearly with their own blood to protect their domain. As the warhorns sound and the two armies advance, the northern horizon darkens. The ghouls of the Hollowmourn Court have arrived, but they hold fealty to none except the Bright Emperor, and they descend upon the battle like carrion crows, hungry for flesh.

THE ARMIES

Each player picks an army, and then they roll off. The winner chooses which player is the **invader** and which is the **defender**.

While the narrative of this battleplan has the invader command a Chaos army and the defender command a Lumineth Realm-lords army, any two armies from the players' collections can be used.

THE CANNIBAL HORDE

In addition to the two armies is the Cannibal Horde. This army is commanded by the game rather than a player. It uses the rules for Cannibal Hordes (pg 80-81).

The players agree on how many units are in the Cannibal Horde. If you are using Pitched Battle profiles, we recommend the combined points value for the Cannibal Horde should not exceed that of either of the other two armies.

THE BATTLEFIELD

The battle is fought at the base of the Vertiginous Peaks. We recommend any buildings or structures are placed in the defender's territory to represent the settled lands they seek to protect, while the invader's territory should be barren or filled with rocky crags.

OBJECTIVES

Place 6 objectives as shown on the map. In this battle, the Cannibal Horde can take control of objectives in the same manner as the players.

FACTION TERRAIN

Only the defender can set up faction

terrain before the battle begins (the invaders are far from their domain).

SET-UP

The invader sets up their army first, wholly within their territory. Then, the defender sets up their army wholly within their territory.

The Court of Hollowmourn Arrives

While the battle rages, ghoulish howls cry out into the night as more and more of the Flesh-eater courts descend upon the battlefield.

At the end of the first battle round, the players roll off. Starting with the winner, the players alternate picking 1 unit from the Cannibal Horde and setting it up on the battlefield until all Cannibal Horde units have been set up. Each time a unit from the Cannibal Horde is set up on the battlefield, it must be set up wholly within 6" of the northern battlefield edge (see map). If there is not enough room for the unit to be set up, it can instead be set up wholly within 6" of any battlefield edge. In both cases, units can be any distance from units in either players' army – be wary of the edge of the battlefield!

BATTLE LENGTH

At the end of the 5th battle round, one player rolls a dice. On a 1-3, the battle ends. On a 4+, the battle ends at the end of the 6th battle round.

GLORIOUS VICTORY

At the end of the battle, if one player controls three or more objectives and neither the other player nor the Cannibal Horde does, that player wins a **major victory**. Otherwise, the player who controls the most objectives wins a **minor victory**. If the players are tied on the number of objectives they control, the invader wins a **minor victory**.



CANNIBAL HORDE RULES

The following rules allow you to battle against ravening hordes of Flesh-eater Courts controlled by the game. These units are referred to collectively as the ‘Cannibal Horde’.

The battleplan will tell you how many units are in the Cannibal Horde. If you are playing against the Cannibal Horde in a battleplan of your own creation, you must choose how many units are in it (with the question being: how many do you dare to face at once?). The quickest method to do this is to total up the Pitched Battle points cost for all the units in the Cannibal Horde and make sure it is approximately the same as that of the other armies in the battle.

ALLEGIANCE ABILITIES

Allegiance abilities are not used for the Cannibal Horde.

BATTLE ROUNDS

At the start of each battle round, one of the players rolls a dice. On a 1-3, the Cannibal Horde takes the first turn, before the players. On a 4+, the Cannibal Horde takes the last turn, after the players. Then, the players determine which of them takes a turn before the other as normal.

THE CANNIBAL HORDE TURN

When it is the Cannibal Horde’s turn, a special turn sequence is used instead of the standard turn sequence, as follows:

- Delusion Phase
- Action Phase
- Combat Phase
- Battleshock Phase

This means that if your units have any abilities that can only be used in an enemy phase not shown in the list above, you cannot use that ability during the Cannibal Horde’s turn.

THE DELUSION PHASE

During the delusion phase, one of the players rolls on the table to the right to determine which delusion is afflicting the Cannibal Horde. The effect stays in play until the start of the Cannibal Horde’s next turn.

THE ACTION PHASE

During the action phase, the players roll off and then, starting with the winner, alternate activating units in the Cannibal Horde, one at a time,

D6 Delusion

- 1 Dark Hunger:** *The smell of blood and flesh sends these deranged cannibals into a maddened frenzy.*

Add 1 to rolls on the Mordant Behaviour Table (to a maximum of 6).

- 2 Impervious to Pain:** *Each of these wretched creatures sees themselves as being donned in gleaming armour that no blow can penetrate.*

Only unmodified wound rolls of 6 are successes for attacks that target a unit in the Cannibal Horde.

- 3 Righteous Reinforcements:** *Sickening howls ring in the air as fresh waves of ghouls enter the fray.*

The players roll off. The winner can set up 1 unit from the Cannibal Horde that has been destroyed. The returned unit must be set up wholly within 6" of the edge of the battlefield.

- 4 Honed Steel:** *Each time they rake their filthy claws across the enemy, these creatures imagine they hold noble longswords and see flashes of exquisite steel.*

Improve the Rend characteristic of melee weapons used by Cannibal Horde units by 1.

- 5 Frenzied Zeal:** *With heightened fervour, the mordants will not let their quarry escape.*

Add 1" to the Move characteristic of Cannibal Horde units. In addition, add 1 to run and charge rolls for Cannibal Horde units.

- 6 Encroaching Insanity:** *The delusions of the Flesh-eater Courts begins to waver and falter. In brief flashes, they catch glimpses of the horrific creatures they truly are ...*

Subtract 1 from rolls on the Mordant Behaviour Table (to a minimum of 1).

until every unit has been activated. To activate a unit, roll a dice and consult the **Mordant Behaviour Table** opposite.

The Mordant Behaviour Table has three columns, each with four results. To determine which column to use, start with the column on the left and check to see if the unit meets the criteria written below the title of the column. If not, move on to the middle column and check again. If the criteria are still not met, move on to the column on the right. Each result on the behaviour table has a corresponding list of actions that the unit will perform. The actions are carried out in the same order as they appear on the behaviour table. Immediately resolve the actions before activating the next unit in the Cannibal Horde.

Many of the actions require the players to determine the closest model or closest unit. If there are ever two or more eligible models or units, the player who picked the unit to activate can decide which is treated as the ‘closest’ for the purpose of that action.

Cannibal Horde units must finish any sort of move as a single group, with all models within 1" horizontally and 6" vertically of at least one other model from their unit.



MORDANT BEHAVIOUR TABLE

D6	In Combat <i>Any models within 3" of any enemy models.</i>	Close <i>Any models more than 3" from but within 12" of any enemy models.</i>	Far <i>All models more than 12" from all enemy models.</i>
1	Gripped by Madness	Gripped by Madness	Gripped by Madness
2-3	Hold	Hold	Hold
4-5	Hold	Charge	Bloodthirsty Advance
6	Feeding Frenzy	Charge	Bloodthirsty Advance

Gripped by Madness

The unit does nothing as it is gripped by its own delusions. In addition, it is not picked to fight in the combat phase this turn.

Hold

The unit does nothing in the action phase of this turn, unless any of the models in the unit are armed with any ranged weapons, in which case each of those models attacks the closest enemy unit with all of its ranged weapons.

Charge

- 1 The unit makes a normal move. Each model from the unit must finish the move as close as possible to the closest enemy unit.
- 2 The unit then attempts to make a charge move towards the closest enemy unit. The first model moved in the unit is the model closest to that enemy unit.
- 3 If the first model moved can finish its charge move within ½" of the closest enemy unit, it moves as close as possible towards the enemy unit and the charge is successful. Otherwise, the charge fails and no models from the unit move.
- 4 If the charge is successful, each model from the unit must finish its charge move as close as possible to the closest enemy unit.

Bloodthirsty Advance

The unit makes a normal move and runs. Each model from the unit must finish the move as close as possible to the closest enemy unit.

Feeding Frenzy

The unit immediately fights. It is picked to fight in the combat phase of this turn, too.

THE COMBAT PHASE

In the combat phase, when it is a player's turn to pick a unit to fight, they can pick an eligible unit from the Cannibal Horde to fight.

Each time a unit from the Cannibal Horde is picked to fight, each model in that unit piles in towards the closest enemy model and attacks that model's unit with all of its melee weapons that are in range.

In the combat phase, all units in the Cannibal Horde that are eligible to fight must be picked to fight. This means that, once a player has run out of friendly units to pick to fight, they must pick an eligible Cannibal Horde unit to fight.

ALLOCATING WOUNDS

When wounds are allocated to a Cannibal Horde unit, the players roll off. The winner picks which model in the unit to allocate the wounds to (following any restrictions that normally apply). When removing models in a Cannibal Horde unit, the players must keep the unit in coherency if possible.

At the end of the turn, if a Cannibal Horde unit is split into two or more groups, no models are removed from that unit. Instead, the next time that unit makes any kind of move, the models must reform into a single group. If they are unable to do so, that unit cannot move.

THE BATTLESHOCK PHASE

Cannibal Horde units do not take battleshock tests.

WARSCROLL ABILITIES

Abilities on the warscrolls of Cannibal Horde units that automatically come into effect are always used (for example, the Trophy Hunter ability found on the Crypt Ghast Courtier warscroll or the Warrior Elite ability on the Crypt Horrors warscroll).

If a rule says you can re-roll a charge roll or a roll that occurs during the attack sequence, do so if the roll would fail after any modifiers are applied.

Cannibal Horde units do not attempt to unbind spells, and command abilities are not used for them.

CANNIBAL HORDE SPECIAL RULES

In addition to the above, Cannibal Horde **ABHORRANTS** and **COURTIERS** have special rules as follows:

Abhorrants: Flesh-eater Courts **ABHORRANTS** each have a unique spell on their warscroll. When an **ABHORRANT** in the Cannibal Horde is picked to activate, it first attempts to cast the spell on its warscroll. **WIZARDS** in the army of the player who did not pick that **ABHORRANT** to activate can attempt to unbind the spell as if it were the hero phase. If the spell is successfully cast, the target of the spell is a friendly Cannibal Horde unit within range that is the closest to any enemy units. **ABHORRANTS** do not attempt to cast any other spells.

Courtiers: Flesh-eater Courts **COURTIERS** each have a Muster ability on their warscroll (for example, the Crypt Infernal Courtier has the Muster Royal Guard ability). When a unit in the Cannibal Horde with a Muster ability is picked to activate, it first uses this ability. The player who picked the unit to activate sets up any returning models following the normal restrictions.



LOST IN SHADOWS

An imprisoned Lord-Veritant is released from his bondage by a mysterious benefactor. In this short story by Nick Horth, the beleaguered warrior finds himself on the run from the Shadow Queen's agents, bearing a message of utmost importance to the survival of the God-King's empire.

Draped in ragged, scavenged hides, every inch of his massive frame caked in mud and dried gore, Keiser Ven Brecht pressed himself against the gnarltree oak and became one with its rough, black bark. Two figures entered the clearing, sliding cautiously through the mist to his left. They carried twin scimitars, and their bald heads were spider-webbed with tattoos.

Even as they drew near, the mist swirled about the two hunters, pulling at the edges of their robes and masking their features so that only their eyes shone in the darkness, like gleaming diamonds. Their blades became grasping talons, and their jaws distended and grew slavering fangs. The very landscape about them began to shift, trees melting into oily smears at the edge of Ven Brecht's vision.

Lies and mistruth. Shut the visions out. Your other senses are not so easily deceived. Remember what has kept you alive these past days.

Ven Brecht gritted his teeth and squeezed his eyes shut. He waited instead until the footfalls of the aelves were close and he could smell the briny tang of their breath. Then he struck. The crude knife he held in one hand lashed out, and he felt it slide neatly between the ribs of one of the corsairs. Ven Brecht grabbed at the leg of the other, seizing hold of the slimy surface of a sharkskin boot and hauling with all his strength. The remaining aelf toppled in the mud, cursing. By then Ven Brecht was already atop him, eyes still closed, pressing his forearm into the corsair's throat and ignoring a white-hot lance of pain in his side as he forced all his weight down. He felt the sickening crunch of a shattered windpipe and at last opened his eyes.

The dead body of a Stormcast Eternal lay beneath him, clad in the black plate of the Anvils of the Heldenhammer. Ven Brecht recognised the corpse, its face twisted in an expression of agonised betrayal. Yulhen, one of his own trusted Paladins, lost during the fall of Anvilgard.

Yuhlen's pale eyes snapped open.

'You failed us, brother,' the dead Stormcast hissed. 'And now we are lost.'

'No!' Ven Brecht roared, squeezing his eyes shut to banish the terrible sight. Rolling free of the dead body, he slumped into a patch of freezing cold rainwater, gasping as the liquid soaked into his skin. He found himself staring into the rippling surface of the puddle.

For once, there was no deception. Ven Brecht saw himself as he truly was, and it was crueller than any illusion. His face was torn and shredded, but it was his eyes that shocked him the most – they were bloodshot and crazed, like those of the wizened street preachers that the Lord-Veritant had once passed on the streets of Lethis without sparing a second thought. Ven Brecht almost laughed. It had been his life's task to separate lies from truth, to see through the mask of sorcery to reveal the essence beneath. Yet, exhausted, damaged and weakened as he was, the cruel wilds of Ulgu had worked their insidious magic upon even him.

This is how swiftly the realms can reduce one to madness. It is a lesson I should never have allowed myself to forget.



How he had ended up so far from Anvilgard and the sweltering coasts of Aqshy, Ven Brecht could not recall. His captivity in the hold of a Scourge ark was little more than a blur, but he knew that the sea-faring aelves knew many secret pathways between the realms.

The stabbing pain in his side worsened. Looking down, Ven Brecht saw that the corsair's blade had punctured his leather drapes, and penetrated his flesh to a finger's depth. Not a grievous wound, but another injury that would wear him down. The Shadow Queen's hunting dogs were as relentless as they were cunning; if he did not find sanctuary soon, his message would never reach the court of the God-King.

Ven Brecht had considered seeking out death, of course, for if he were to perish his spirit would return to Azyr on the celestial storm, and he could deliver his warning to the God-King himself. Yet already the Lord-Veritant had seen Stormcast warriors captured upon the point of death, their lightning essence seized by sorcery or devilish, arcane contraptions. Moreover, Ven Brecht knew better than most the dangers of Reforging, and the havoc it played upon one's memory; not long ago he had suffered the fires of rebirth, and upon awakening had awoken in blind confusion, with but a frail grasp upon his own psyche.

I cannot risk it. Morathi cannot be allowed to triumph. Not after all the death and suffering that she has wrought. Sigmar must be warned. If I do not prevail, then I will have truly failed Yuhlen, and all those who fell at Anvilgard.

That thought gave energy to the Lord-Veritant's aching body, and dragged him back to his feet. He forced himself to stare at the corsair he had slain. Once more he saw the narrow, cruel faces of Scourge sea-reavers. Knowing that more would be close behind, he forced himself to search the dead aelves' leather overcoats, searching for anything that might aid in his escape. He was rifling through a prodigious quantity of skinning blades, trophies and wizened slices of shark meat when the hairs on the back of his neck rose. Ven Brecht turned, scanning his surroundings.

Again he felt the familiar presence; a presence that had followed him ever since he had escaped from his imprisonment at the hands of the Scourge. Indeed, it had not been the Lord-Veritant that had torn open the door of his lightless cell, and ripped his tormentors to bloody shreds. He searched the Ulguan gloom for a glimpse of coal-red eyes, and strained to catch the sound of leathery wings in flight. The wind surged through the clearing, and for a moment it took on the sound of mocking laughter. Something was out there, watching him.

I am being toyed with. Is this Morathi's doing? Perhaps whatever follows me is some fresh Khainite terror, dispatched from Hagg Nar. Am I a pawn in the Shadow Queen's games even now?

The crack of a broken twig woke Ven Brecht from his musings. Instantly obeying instincts honed by his

desperate flight across the Shadowlands, Ven Brecht threw himself flat. Several bolts whipped overhead, some thudding haft-deep into the bark of the tree nearby. Another sank into his thigh, and he felt the woozy rush of poison seeping into his bloodstream. He dragged the barbed head of the bolt free, and sank to his haunches, his own lifeblood gushing through his fingers as he tried to staunch the wound.

'He's here!' came a cry in accented aelven. 'We have him.'

Of course. They spent the lives of their own kind simply to draw me out. I should have seen it.

Through the blurred haze of his vision, Ven Brecht saw the corsairs advance out of the darkness. At least a dozen of them, all wielding heavy repeaters or long skinning blades. Their weapons were levelled steadily at his chest, as they fanned out to cover all angles of retreat. One of the aelves walked up to the kneeling Stormcast. Ven Brecht reached out to seize his leg, but the corsair stepped aside easily and responded with a savage kick that rang Ven Brecht's jaw and knocked him to the ground.

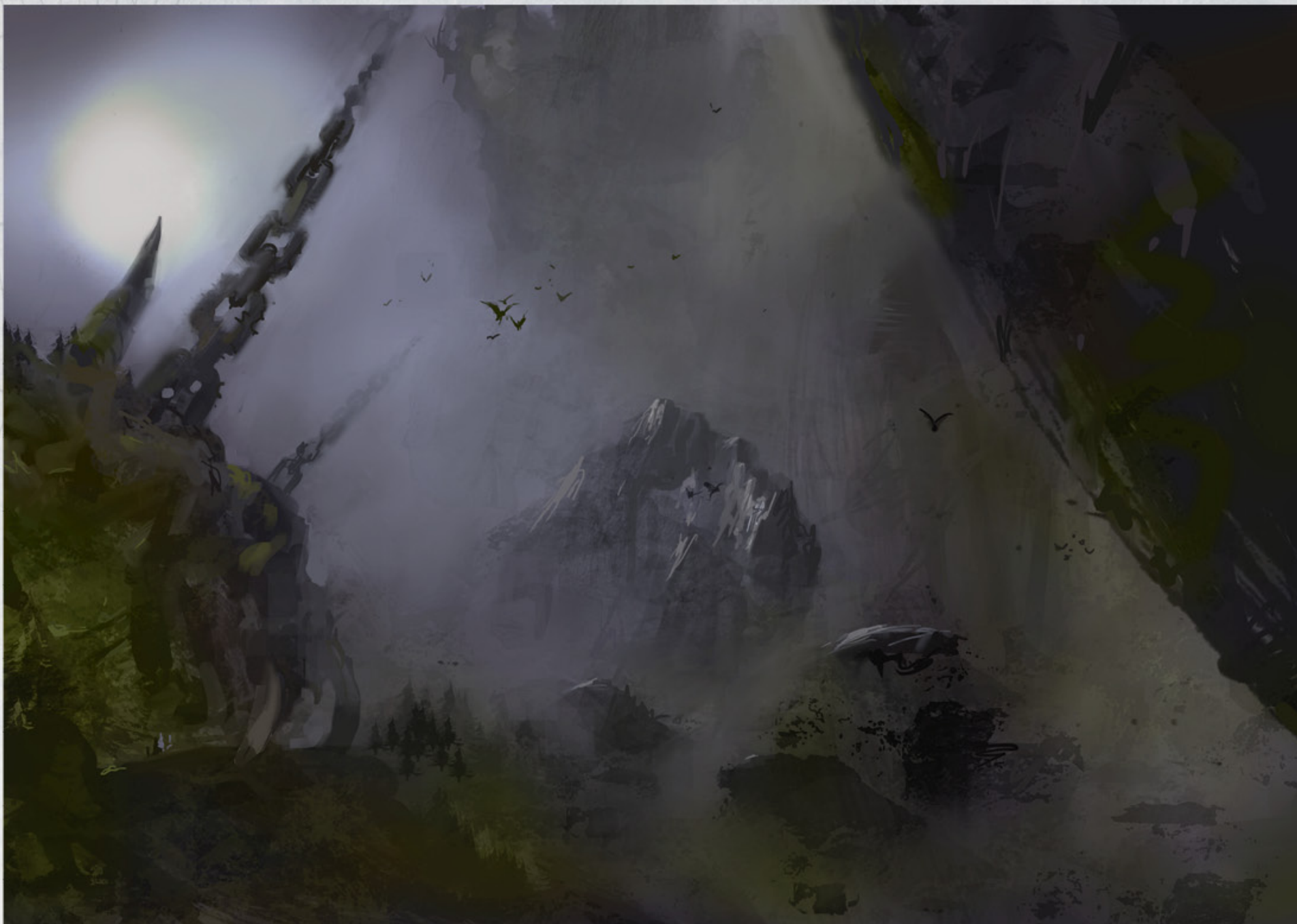
'You've killed a lot of my crew these past few days,' the leader snarled. 'And you've cost me dearly in both time and treasure. The Shadow Queen wants you alive, but she didn't say anything about keeping the skin on your bones. I will flay you slow for all the trouble you've caused me.'

The corsair leader's face was scarred and puckered by burns, his white hair swept up into a topknot. His eyes were as black and pitiless as any monster of the deep ocean. The Lord-Veritant fixed that cruel visage in his mind.

'I have both suffered and inflicted greater agonies than you could ever comprehend, traitor,' he said, his voice calm despite the agony of his injuries. 'And you should not have shown me your face. I will remember it, even beyond death.'

The aelf spat in his face and struck him a vicious blow with the butt of his repeater. Then he gestured his subordinates forward, and they began to roughly bind the Lord-Veritant's arms with lengths of spiked wire that gouged wounds in his wrists. The wind rose once more, howling and whistling through the clearing, shaking the spider-like canopies of the trees. Ven Brecht heard the distant chatter of laughter once more, and as the Scourge corsairs turned their eyes to the shrouded skies above, he realised they had heard it too. Immediately the aelves turned their weapons on the shadows.

Ven Brecht did not see the first corsair's demise. All he heard was a sudden, ragged scream and a flash of movement at the corner of his vision as the aelf was hauled bodily into the darkness. His companions immediately turned and unleashed a hail of bolts, but if they struck anything, the Lord-Veritant could not guess. Another corsair was snatched away; this one's cries continued, high-pitched and terrified, until a ragged, tearing sound abruptly cut them off. Something came tumbling out of the mists to lie



at the feet of the Scourge captain – the aelf's severed head, frozen in an expression of utmost horror.

The rest of the corsairs backed away from the gruesome sight, ignoring Ven Brecht now as they sought their mysterious attackers. Ven Brecht's hands were bound by the length of barbed cord, but he could still move despite his wounded leg. In one motion he rose and shoulder-barged the corsair captain, driving the aelf to the floor. The Scourge hunter reacted with startling grace, turning his fall into a roll and coming up with a cutlass in one hand and his hand-bow in the other. His dark eyes promised murder.

'Damn the witch-queen's desires,' the aelf snarled, levelling his sword at Ven Brecht and lunging forwards.

As the corsair darted back in, Ven Brecht kicked out. His foe danced away from the clumsy blow with contemptuous ease and carved a bloody furrow across his calf. Ven Brecht was staggering backwards, struggling desperately to keep his balance, when the corsair attacked again, cutlass leading and sure to drive straight through the Lord-Veritant's chest. Ven Brecht closed his eyes.

So be it.

The strike never landed. The shadows seized the aelf by the arms, swirling around him like a flock of ravenous corvids. With a sound like tearing cloth, bloody gouges appeared on the corsair's face, across his narrow chest.

The skin peeled from his sword-arm, and blood bubbled from his mouth as he struggled helplessly. Ven Brecht caught the impression of laughing, needle-toothed faces within the shadows, and sharp claws sinking into pale flesh. The corsair's terrified eyes met Ven Brecht's one last time, before he was dragged away by the half-glimpsed killers. As the rest of the Scourge hunters emptied their repeaters blindly into the night, the Lord-Veritant turned and staggered into the woods, each step sending a lance of agony through his pierced thigh.

The shadow-entities pursued, soaring above him on ragged wings. For how long Ven Brecht ran, he could not say, for time meant nothing under the eternal pall of Ulgu. He stumbled over narrow bridges of black stone, fashioned from the weeping faces of tormented souls. He crawled across deserts of misted glass, and waded through gushing rivers of smoke that whispered to him of tragedies yet to come. Always the land itself toyed with him, leading him on maddening circuitous routes, giving way suddenly to sucking pits of nothingness that threatened to swallow him whole. Only the horrors at his back drove him on; he could not evade the shadow-things that laughingly pursued him.

If they sought to kill me, they would have done so many days ago. They are hunting hounds, driving me into the clutches of their master. If not Morathi, then who commands them?

Eventually, Ven Brecht could stagger on no more.

FLASHPOINT: BROKEN REALMS

Exhaustion, poison and injury finally overcame his superhuman constitution, and he slid to the floor. Gazing up, he could see nothing but a canvas of pure blackness. Even Sigendil could not penetrate the murk of the Shadow Realm. Ven Brecht could feel himself slipping in and out of consciousness, the world around him rippling and reforming like the broken surface of a lake. He dreamed again of the fall of Anvilgard, remembering the grasping coils of a great shadow-serpent as it closed about his body. Helpless, he watched his comrades cut down and seized one by one, dragged off to face some bloody fate in the dungeons of a Khainite temple.

Someone or something shook him roughly from his nightmares. He found himself staring up into the face of a Stormcast warrior – a dark-skinned woman, her greying hair shaved close to the scalp and her brow lined with arcane markings. Her armour was a rich burgundy, and she held a golden handaxe in one gauntleted fist. Glancing about, he saw that there were more: three of them, staring down at him with undisguised concern.

‘Lie still, brother,’ said the woman. ‘Your wounds are grave. It’s a wonder you’re still breathing. These injuries should have sent you back to Azyr days ago.’

Another lie. Another deception.

Keiser Ven Brecht’s frustrated rage gave him strength to overcome his exhaustion, and he launched himself at the false Stormcast, slamming his fist into its unarmoured head. The apparition groaned and slumped, and Ven Brecht ripped the axe from its hands. He turned and sent it spinning end over end at the second of the illusory warriors, who was rushing him from the side. It struck the figure in the knee with a sickening crunch, sending him sprawling.

The last of them stood her ground, for some reason refusing to fire even as Ven Brecht lowered his shoulder and charged at her, thinking to banish the haunting illusion with a single, mighty blow. At the last moment she lowered her weapon, and there was a sparkling flash, blinding in the darkness. A sudden, searing pain tore through Ven Brecht’s lower leg, but in his cold rage he ignored it. His shoulder struck the apparition’s chest, and the Lord-Veritant used his weight to bear her to the ground, his hands scrabbling for her throat.

‘Enough falsehoods,’ he growled, as she rained punches into the side of his skull with her free gauntlet. ‘Reveal yourself, spectre. Your deceptions haunt me no longer.’

His foe’s eyes bulged in her skull, and he heard the grinding of her teeth as she strained against his iron grip. But he had no intention of relenting. The Stormcast’s eyes stared into his own, and in them he saw both shock and sorrow. It was then he felt the muzzle of the boltstorm pistol against his temple; all it would take was a press of her finger, and she could have blasted a smoking hole through his skull. He took in her worn burgundy armour, and the ritual markings she proudly wore.

A Celestial Warbringer. Sigmar’s warrior-seers. Why should my delusions take such a form?

‘Let her go!’ came a voice at his back. The two Stormcasts had shaken off their initial shock and spread out to surround the Lord-Veritant, one of them dragging a bloodied leg.

‘Where am I?’ Ven Brecht growled. ‘Tell me now.’

‘On the shores of the Tenebrax Coast,’ gasped the warrior he held. ‘Three leagues from the free city of Mithåvn. You have reached the sanctuary of the God-King, brother. Do not make me shoot. Let us aid you.’

Even now, it could be an illusion. I no longer know if I can trust my own mind. But the shock in this warrior’s eyes, the pity and revulsion – I would swear upon Sigmar that those are all too real.

Ven Brecht released his grip on the Warbringer’s throat. She staggered upright, rubbing at her bruised flesh, pistol still levelled at his face.

‘What has happened to you, brother?’ she said, unable entirely to mask her pity and revulsion.

‘It matters not,’ Ven Brecht said. ‘I am Keiser Ven Brecht, Lord-Veritant of the Anvils of the Heldenhammer, and all that matters is the warning I bring: Sigmar’s empire is in great danger, and your city of Mithåvn above all. Morathi has betrayed us. Anvilgard has fallen.’

As shocked silence descended upon the clearing, Ven Brecht could once again hear the mocking hiss of laughter in the shadows. It carried with it the ring of triumph.

