

The Thousand Thrones

Campaign Overview

A Supplement for Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay



— INTRODUCTION —

This booklet provides additional background to expand The Thousand Thrones campaign for Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay. If you expect to play this campaign in the future, you should stop reading now. Major spoilers are contained within the first few paragraphs of the next page. The campaign book can be purchased from www.fantasyflightgames.com.

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“Those who honour him with blood will be judged by [missing text] their sacrifice. The last thousand souls [illegible] will find [missing text] in his Eternal Kingdom.”

- FRAGMENT FROM W'SORAN'S ORIGINAL GRIMOIRE NECRONIUM

The primary focus of *The Thousand Thrones* book is the Black Witch of Kislev and her plan to subvert a cult of Sigmarites into the service of Chaos. However, the Black Witch is not the only power manipulating events behind the scenes; indeed the witch herself is influenced by forces beyond her understanding. The purpose of this booklet is to examine all the important factions in this sprawling saga.

NAGASH'S KINGDOM OF DEATH

In the shadows, an epic conflict has raged between Nagash and the vampires spawned by his elixir nearly 4,000 years ago. Most modern vampires are not aware of the extent to which the struggle continues in the year 2523. Only Queen Neferata – the oldest and most powerful of all vampires – has understood Nagash's grand plan sufficiently to thwart it over the ages: Immortal Nagash intends to destroy all life and transform the world into a Kingdom of Death.

To accomplish this, Nagash plans to close the Warp Gates permanently and isolate the world from the winds of colour. Then Nagash intends to destroy the Great Vortex on the Isle of the Dead in Ulthuan that siphons excess magic from the world. Vast quantities of trapped magic will stagnate, saturating the land in Dhar and destroying all life. Without mortal souls to honour them, the power of the gods will wane, allowing Nagash to reign supreme. A new civilisation of undead will flourish in his realm of spirits and bones, unhindered by petty conflicts and base, temporal desires. Beautiful things will not suffer the ravages of time.

At least a dozen variants on Nagash's Kingdom of Death have been reported throughout the ages. In some versions, nature spir- its survive alongside the undead, whilst in other versions all plant and animal life is destroyed. The vampires envision a Kingdom of Death where their Blood Curse is lifted altogether, or the mortal

population has been culled to a mere handful that live only to sustain their masters. However, Nagash's Death cult believes that the Great Necromancer's original vision supports no life at all.

The Age of a Thousand Thrones is another false variant of the Kingdom of Death, fabricated in secret by Nagash to control the vampires. The Thousand Thrones prophecies are a complex web of misinformation with details as finely wrought as the enslaving ring once granted to Vashanesh for the same purpose.

IN THE BEGINNING...

Thousands of years ago when Nagash was still mortal, the High Priest of the Mortuary Cult advanced his understanding of necromancy through the tortured confessions of Dark Elf sorcerers. The Dark Elves also revealed the legends of an ancient race they called “the Old Ones”, who supposedly sailed the skies in great galleons and understood the true nature of the Warp Gates.

Nagash knew that the Warp Gates were the source of magic in the world, and that the winds flowed strongest there. Nagash also understood that the winds diminished in power as they traveled further away from the Warp Gates, until they stagnated at the equator and became Dhar. Nehekharu was therefore an ideal place to practice necromancy, and at first, Nagash believed his potential would be limitless. Of course, Nagash soon discovered there were in fact limits to his power, and concluded that his abilities could only increase if the Warp Gates were somehow closed.

CLOSING THE WARP GATES

Nagash recognised that locating the distant Warp Gates would be a monumental task in itself, but that closing the gates would be a problem of a different magnitude. Nagash resumed his torture



of the Dark Elves with new vigour, but the solution was beyond them. The last Druchii sorcerer mocked Nagash with his dying breath, laughing at the idea that Nagash sought knowledge from a race that has been dead for 5,000 years. Undeterred, Nagash began an exhaustive campaign to gather lore on the Warp Gates. Nagash soon discovered that the High Elves traced their earliest ancestry to the time of the Old Ones and began to focus his attention there.

This new line of inquiry led Nagash to the ancient ruins of a city called Athel Tamara. It was in Athel Tamara that Nagash unearthed a cache of carefully hidden astronomical records; ancient Elven star-charts describing something called a “Warp Portal”. Evidently, this mysterious Warp Portal had materialised in the debris of what the primitive human tribes described as “a fiery comet”. The Elven texts explained that this fireball, which the simple tribespeople had mistaken for a comet, was actually an Old One vessel crashing into a mountainside.

The astronomical records situated the Warp Portal in the frozen wastes at the top of the world. Nagash began recruiting long-dead Chaos champions to aid him in navigating the Chaos Wastes. Nagash believes the portal could be a valuable link to closing the Warp Gates, and has resolved to locate it for himself.

ANCIENT SONG OF THE ELVES

Most Elves of the modern era are unaware of the Warp Portal that exists beneath the Crags of Shargun. In fact, the only surviving mention of the sky ship legend is hidden within the verses of an epic song of the Laurelorn Wood Elves. However, this song dates back to the War of the Beard and its language is cryptically symbolic in nature. During the Elven exodus, mystical secrets were often embedded in songs and poems to prevent them falling into enemy hands.

In this particular song, the Old One sky ship is represented as a comet, the mountain as a tree, and the Warp Portal as a lake. The comet imagery has been interpreted by a group of heretical Sigmarites as proof that Sigmar was just one of many incarnations of a great “warrior from the sky” who first appeared in Kislev 5,000 years before the birth of the Empire. False claims about the song’s symbolism are tacitly encouraged by Elven scholars who know the truth behind the sky ship legend. The Elves are wary of attempts to unravel the mystery of their ancient song.

For more on the Elves’ role in *The Thousand Thrones* campaign, see Expansion #2.

SIGMAR AND THE CRUSADE

In the final moments of the epic confrontation between Sigmar Heldenhammer and Nagash, the Great Necromancer foresaw his defeat and cursed the vampires who would not stand with him

to live forever in the shadow of Sigmar’s empire. In fact, Sigmar is directly linked to the Thousand Thrones prophecies in many ways. At one time, Sigmar wore Nagash’s Crown of Sorcery, and there are those who believe that an imprint of the Great Necromancer’s psyche influences the God-king and his champions. Prophecy scholars have looked to astrology, numerology, and genealogy to compare the apotheosis of these two figures and somehow relate them to their personal vision of the Thousand Thrones prophecy.

The Black Witch of Kislev believes she is manipulating the cult of Sigmar to fulfill the conditions of her return. In truth, the Black Witch is an unwitting agent of Nagash, and enacts the Great Necromancer’s plan instead of her own. At present, Nagash’s plan calls for the Black Witch to lure Karl, the crusade, and the vampires to the Warp Portal in Kislev. Karl’s irresistible aura makes him the perfect tool to herd the fractious Sigmarite crusaders northward. Despite Karl’s steadying influence, the crusade remains divided behind two main camps: the Volkmar Traditionalists and the Esmer Progressives. To further complicate crusade politics, the Cult of Morr has taken an interest in Karl because of Sigmar’s connection to the Vampire Prophecies.

For more on Sigmar and the Crusade’s role in *The Thousand Thrones* campaign, see Expansions #3, 4 & 5.

THE LORDS OF CHAOS

Many of Karl’s crusaders believe they are being led north to confront the scattered remnants of Archaon’s forces. None of the Sigmarites are aware of the subterranean Warp Portal that is their true destination. However, the Chaos gods and their demons are very familiar with the Warp Portal, for the tunnels under Shargun are connected to similar portals located in the Chaos Wastes. For millennia, Chaos warbands seeking quick passage into the lands of men have entered this labyrinth by accident and found themselves confronted by enemies serving their rival gods. The resulting battles are always brutal contests from which vanquished souls are quickly dispatched into the Realms of Chaos.

Of all the Chaos gods, Nurgle has taken keenest interest in Karl’s crusade, for the mob travels town to town gaining and shedding parasites like a rotting body; a perfect breeding ground for pestilence. Khorne and Slaanesh observe the crusade patiently, awaiting an opportunity to subvert its followers for their own ends. Only Tzeentch is aware of Nagash’s designs on the Black Witch and his plan to close the northern Warp Gate, and the Great Mutator is determined to thwart it. But the ways of Tzeentch are inscrutable even to the Great Necromancer himself. Whenever an unlikely coincidence alters the crusade’s course, Tzeentch’s hand is not far...

For more on the role of Chaos in *The Thousand Thrones* campaign, see Expansions #3, 4 & 5.

—MAJOR PLAYERS—

The most powerful characters in *The Thousand Thrones* campaign exert their influence from the shadows, or even from beyond the grave.

QUEEN NEFERATA

The Night Queen Neferata is the sole known vampire remaining from the original council of twelve in Lahmia (though Vashanesh's destruction is a matter of dispute). Every vampire in existence has been affected by Neferata's scheming either directly or indirectly.

Queen Neferata witnessed Nagash's betrayal of the vampires and recognises his tactics more easily than younger vampires do. From her palace at Silver Pinnacle in the World's Edge Mountains, Neferata commands a clandestine network of Lahmian vampires spread throughout the Old World and beyond. One of the missions of her network is to gather intelligence on the Vampire Prophecies. With every new piece of information, Neferata increases her influence in a bid to foil Nagash.

Neferata and several other vampires suspect Nagash's fourth return will be staged from Kislev, but the specifics of his return are unknown to anyone but the Great Necromancer himself. However, Neferata is a leader with many agendas, some of which are clever decoys obscuring her actual motives. Scholars of the Vampire Prophecies have made various claims about the Night Queen's true goal, but these claims are often contradictory and are never fully coherent. One should remember that long ago, Neferata worshipped Nagash as a god...

For more on Neferata's role in *The Thousand Thrones* campaign, see Expansion #4.

VASHANESH

After Neferata, Vashanesh was the second greatest ancient to drink the Elixir of Life. Some whisper Vashanesh was a bastard sired by Nagash himself with a concubine of the Khemrian king Lahkashaz. When Vashanesh drank the Elixir and joined the council of twelve vampires in the city of Lahmia as Neferata's consort, he became their leader. When the Vampires were later forced to flee Lahmia for Nagashizzar, Nagash chose Vashanesh to wear the magical ring which enabled the Necromancer to control all vampires. During a crucial battle against King Alcadizaar's forces, Vashanesh nobly choose to forego the ring's protection and sever Nagash's control over the vampires with his death. The ring was not done with Vashanesh however, and brought him back to life again (*NDM*, pg. 75).

Although Vashanesh was last seen in Kislev thousands of years ago, some scholars speculate he returned to the Empire under the guise of Vlad von Carstein, the first vampire count of Sylvania. Whilst there are many who reject such a notion, Vlad has been destroyed several times, only to return using the power of a magical ring much like the one Vashanesh is reputed to possess.

According to most scholars of the Vampire Prophecies, the fated scion of Nagash will be mortal. There are those who believe the scion will be a vampire however. These latter scholars – who call themselves “Vampirological Sciontologists” – insist Vashanesh/Carstein was the descendant of Nagash as identified by the prophecies. Vampirological Sciontologists believe that either Vashanesh remains alive to this day, or that a descendant of Vashanesh will one day fill the role of the fated scion.

For more on Vashanesh's role in *The Thousand Thrones* campaign, see Expansion #5.



THE BLACK WITCH: PUPPET OF NAGASH

The Thousand Thrones campaign offers several options for resolving the final ritual (pg. 244). The background material

presented herein works best with “The Fourth Return of Nagash” option.

WANDERING THE REALM OF DREAMS

The elaborate plots and counter-plots devised by Nagash and his opponents are often disrupted by outside forces. True masters of the ancient game can easily turn these disruptions to their benefit, while the less experienced flounder in their wake. The principal force driving much of The Thousand Thrones campaign is one such neophyte; a Chaos sorceress called the Black Witch.

After being mortally wounded over 200 years ago, the Black Witch lay entombed under the Crags of Shargun in the Troll Country of Kislev. Although the Witch’s body was broken and her unclean soul was rejected from Morr’s realm, the Witch’s mind still burned with a corrupt fire. Over the years, her tormented spirit wandered the Realm of Dreams probing the minds of sleeping scholars, priests, and even ghosts in a desperate bid to discover the secrets which might help her return. But the Witch had to work slowly to avoid the attention of Morr.

The search took many long years as elusive fragments of true insight had to be painstakingly sifted from false visions, and fitted together into a coherent whole. One vital clue came from a priest of Morr who visited the Realm of Dreams on a nightly basis. The priest’s research into the ghosts of Hunger Wood pointed the Black Witch toward the blood rituals of long-lost druidic covens. The druid ghosts, in turn, surrendered knowledge of the blood-mingling rituals of the descendants of the fallen Kingdom of Strigos. With this combined knowledge, the Witch devised a ritual that could restore her soul to a new body. Now, a suitable candidate had to be found and lured to her desolate cavern.

What neither the Black Witch nor any of her sources knew was that their rituals had originated in the dark temples of ancient Lahmia, and that the rituals’ creator was the Great Necromancer himself.

NAGASH’S DECEPTION

Nagash, the creator and scourge of the vampires, has laid a trap so devious that many of its key actors are entirely unaware of their participation. Like the Black Witch, Nagash’s essence is also adrift in the Material Realm and he too needs a new vessel. To this end, Nagash created the soul transfer ritual that would bring about his fourth return. Through his ally the White Moon Goddess, Nagash passed his ritual on to the nature spirits, and they in turn relayed it to the druids and the Strigany. The Strigany interpreted the soul transfer ritual as a precondition for the restoration of Old Strigos

The soul transfer ritual would be difficult to execute however, as it required blood from five vampire lineages. Nagash’s original

plan was to plant the ritual within Strigoi lore as part of a false prophecy that required the presence of five vampire bloodlines to fulfill. Only the Hag of Hunger Wood, formerly the concubine of Ushoran, has even begun to suspect the deception.

A CHANGE OF PLAN

A precondition for Nagash’s Kingdom of Death was that the northern Warp Gate had to be closed. After his third return and subsequent destruction at the hands of Sigmar, Nagash realised the Empire would be a significant obstacle on his march to the northern warp gate. Nagash revised his plan to circumvent the Empire by relocating his resurrection from Old Strigos to the icy realm of Kislev. However, by removing Old Strigos from the plan, Nagash would require a new pawn to perform his soul transfer ritual and muster his vampire army.

THE IDEAL PAWN

When the Black Witch discovered the soul transfer ritual, she became obsessed with Vampirology. From the minds of her sleeping victims, the Witch had learned of the Vampire Prophecies. The prophecies inspired the Black Witch to devise a deception of her own: make the vampires believe their Age of a Thousand Thrones was nigh, and they would come to her. Nagash’s web of false lore had ensnared the ideal pawn.

Nagash’s revised plan is to inhabit the Black Witch’s new physical form at the climax of the soul-transfer ritual, as the body of Karl is taken over. He will then bind the assembled vampires to his will, and lead his new army north to close the Chaos Gate. In the end Nagash will stand alone, there will be no vampire kingdoms, no mortal subjects to serve them, nor any other gods besides the Great Necromancer himself.



THE VAMPIRE BLOODLINES

Following is a brief summary of the parts played by each vampire bloodline in the Age of a Thousand Thrones prophecies.

NECRARCHS

To the Necrarchs, living creatures appear ugly in comparison to the undead, therefore Necrarchs embrace Nagash's Kingdom of Death. The Vampire Prophecies first appeared in the *Grimoire Necronium* scribed by Nagash's most loyal disciple W'Soran as a formula for realising the Kingdom of Death. Unfortunately, the Kingdom of Death as W'Soran (and Nagash) had envisioned it was incompatible with the vampires' most basic need for blood. Nagash was unwilling to share his Elixir of Life and free the other vampires from their Blood Curse. This, coupled with his betrayal in Khemri, made it obvious that the *Grimoire Necronium* would be denounced by other vampires unless it was heavily revised.

Thus began a complex operation by the Necrarchs to obfuscate the intent of W'Soran's seminal work and reframe the Kingdom of Death into a concept more palatable to the vampires. The Necrarchs referred to this new vision as the Age of a Thousand Thrones. The Age of a Thousand Thrones cleverly retains the conditions first outlined by W'Soran, whilst replacing the Kingdom of Death with other beguiling outcomes such as the restoration of Lahmia or Strigos. The revised prophecies also disassociate their outcomes from the supremacy of Nagash, in fact several variants of the prophecies do not even mention the Great Necromancer at all.

Today, W'Soran's original prophecies are largely forgotten except by a few of the oldest vampires. Queen Neferata and the current supreme Necrarch, Zacharias the Everliving, possess the only unmodified copies of W'Soran's original *Grimoire Necronium*.

For more on the Necrarchs' role in *The Thousand Thrones* campaign, see Expansion #2.

STRIGOI

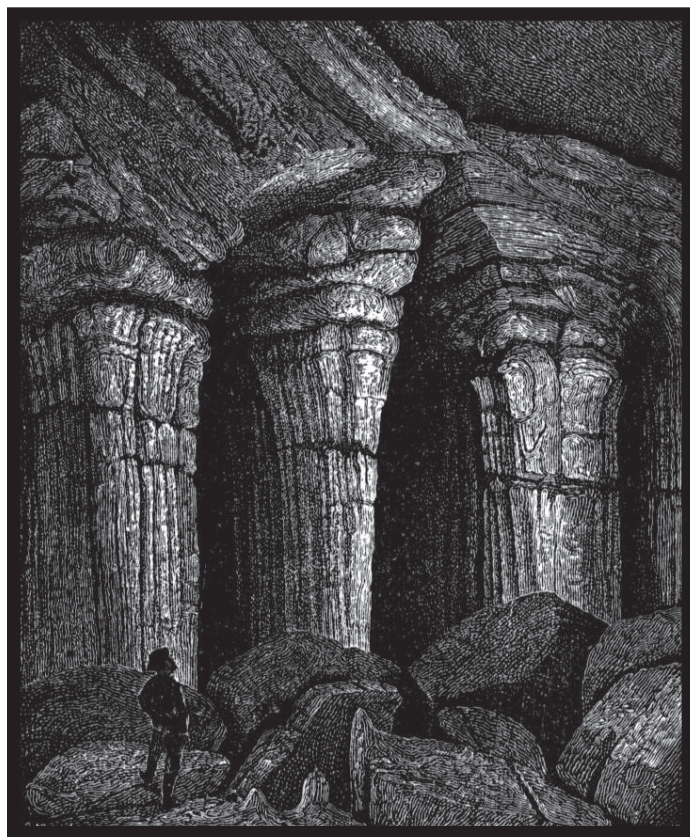
After the *Grimoire Necronium* had been modified, the descendants of Ushoran were easiest to deceive, for their fabled kingdom of Strigos had been founded on misinformation disseminated by Nagash himself. Ushoran was a popular leader in his own right, but he had lacked the cunning of either Neferata or Vashanesh. In addition, he was uneducated in the intricacies of W'Soran's writings. When the Orcs conquered Strigos, they burned the great libraries of Mourkain leaving the Strigoi

vampires with no written records of their heritage. Oral history passed down through later generations of Strigoi but was prone to tampering and manipulation.

It was during Nagash's third return that the Great Necromancer authored a new version of the soul-transfer prophecy. The new variant was liturgically identical to the Strigos prophecies, but relocated the ritual from Old Strigos to Kislev. It is important to note that several variants of both the Strigoi and Kislevite prophecies exist. One Strigoi variant tells of a lone Strigoi who joined Nagash's army and may have bitten Sigmar during the great battle. The new Kislev variant of the ritual also called for a Sigmarite child rather than a Strigoi scion.

Observant readers of *The Thousand Thrones* campaign should notice the conditions for the founding of New Strigos bear close resemblance to the requirements of the Black Witch's soul transfer ritual.

For more on the Strigoi's role in *The Thousand Thrones* campaign, see Expansion #1.



LAHMIANS

Of all the vampires, only Queen Neferata fully comprehends the ancient chess match with Nagash. Neferata's principal playing pieces are her network of Lahmian vampires well placed in mortal society as nobles, scholars, or courtesans. The Lahmians undertake missions ranging from sabotaging the Cult of Sigmar to

planting false scions of Nagash to confound the other bloodlines. The timelines for these complex operations often stretch across centuries to minimise the risk of detection. Each individual mission is sufficiently intricate to bewilder any mortal. Missions can involve several elements: research, espionage, propaganda, commerce and sometimes assassinations are required.

Neferata moves these pieces about the board with purpose and alacrity, although her endgame is impossible to predict. Neferata's grand plan is comparable to an intricate puzzle to which she holds the only reference. Lahmian vampires are each entrusted with but a piece of the whole. The campaign against Nagash is however just one of Neferata and the Lahmians' ongoing concerns. Scholars have also linked the Lahmians with the Dark Lady of Bretonnia, the Ice Queens of Kislev, and many other important personalities throughout the Old World.

For more on the Lahmians' role in *The Thousand Thrones* campaign, see Expansion #4.

VON CARSTEINS

Certain scholars believe the Von Carsteins would have already conquered the Empire if Nagash had not cursed all vampires for abandoning him during his war against Sigmar. The ancestral home of the Von Carsteins, the county of Sylvania, has long been a major focus for prophecy scholars. It was Sylvania where the outcast Strigoi first settled; Sylvania where Nagash launched his campaign against Sigmar; Sylvania where the Von Carsteins established their seat of power.

If Vashanesh is indeed the progenitor of the Von Carstein bloodline, then by extension all Von Carsteins may carry the blood of Nagash. Many believe the Von Carsteins will enjoy a favoured place in the Age of a Thousand Thrones for this reason, and the Von Carstein Blood Kiss is highly coveted by those who anticipate that time. Even vampires of other bloodlines have occasionally claimed to be descended from Vashanesh, though none have been able to prove it.

In truth, little is known of Vashanesh during the 2,000 years between his last sighting in Kislev and the ascendance of Vlad Von Carstein. According to several obscure sources, Vashanesh travelled abroad under many disguises, creating new vampires to expand his sphere of influence. Other sources claim Vashanesh waged a secret war against the Necrarchs, seeking to expose the truth behind the *Grimoire Necronium* and foil Nagash's plan. In the current era however, Vashanesh's name is mostly forgotten and Manfred von Carstein is widely assumed by Vampirological Scientologists to be the fated scion of Nagash.

For more on the Von Carsteins' role in *The Thousand Thrones* campaign, see Expansion #5.

BLOOD DRAGONS

The descendants of Abhorash pay little heed to the Vampire Prophecies. Instead, they are determined to lift the many curses laid upon their kind by Nagash and the Old Gods of Nehekara, just as Abhorash once lifted the Blood Curse by slaying a great dragon and feeding upon its blood. According to Blood Dragon lore, each curse can be lifted by completing a quest. The Blood Dragons' desire to lift the curse of vampirism has, on occasion, been subverted by other vampires and even by Nagash himself. Through lies and subterfuge, Blood Dragons have been lured into undertaking false quests that secretly served the interests of another power.

In Bretonnia, Blood Dragons have been linked with the Dark Lady of Mousillon and the False Grail. Theories of the Dark Lady's true identity differ among prophecy scholars. At times she has been portrayed as a vengeful goddess returned from ancient Nehekara, at others a guardian of Nagash's sacred bloodline. Several scholars even believe the Dark Lady is a Lahmian vampire manipulating the Blood Dragons on Neferata's behalf.

The grail is a constant motif through Blood Dragon lore, regardless of the Dark Lady's presumed identity. The knights of Valach, for example, drink from an obsidian chalice every 50 years at Blood Keep. The Blood Dragon chalice has been linked by prophecy scholars with the vessel from which the original council of twelve vampires received the Elixir of Life.

For more on the Blood Dragons' role in *The Thousand Thrones* campaign, see Expansion #2.

