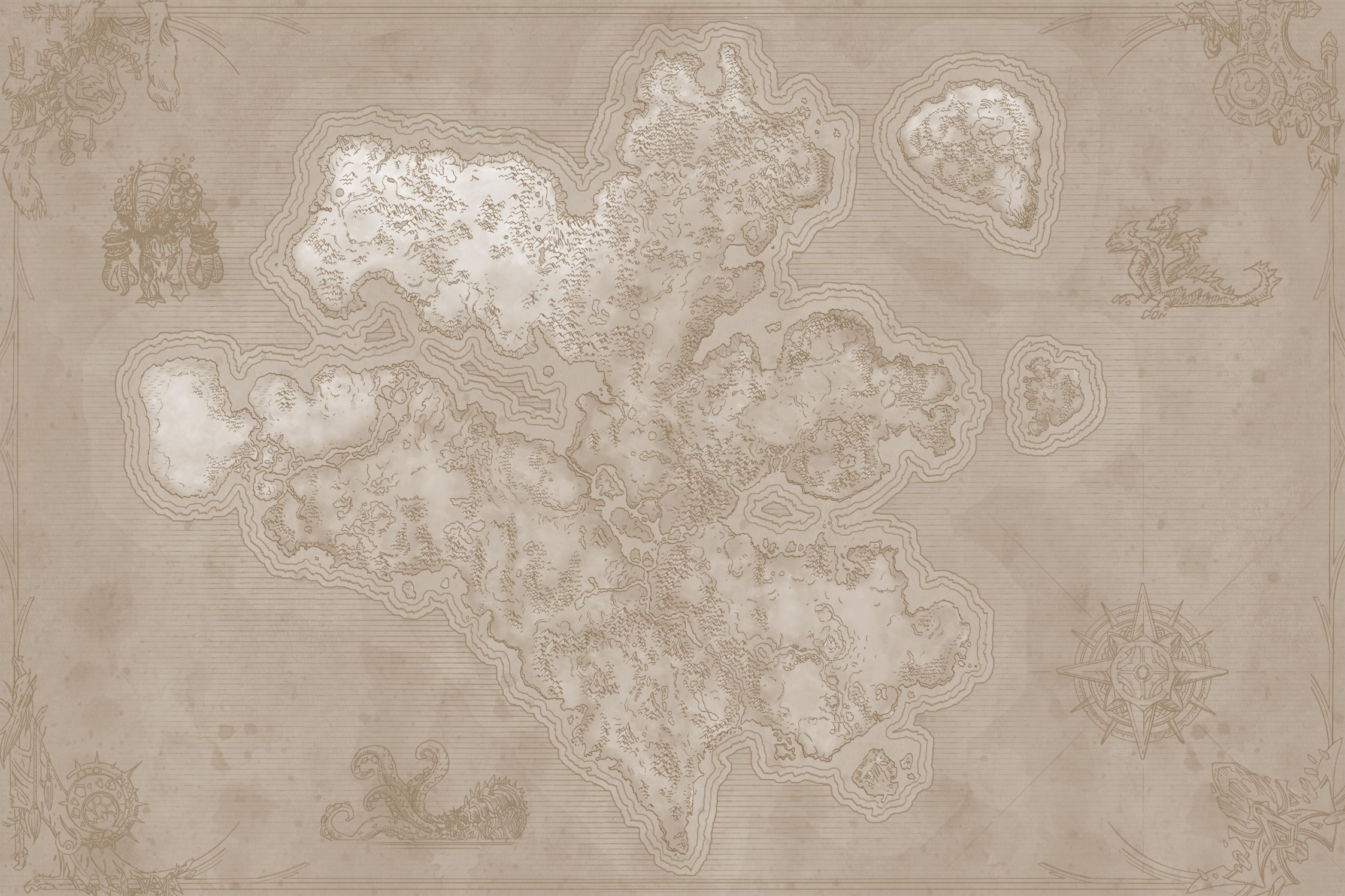


WORLD WARCRAFT

CHRONICLE



VOLUME II





CHRONICLE





CHRONICLE: VOLUME II

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DARK HORSE BOOKS

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World of Warcraft® Chronicle: Volume II

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Published by
Dark Horse Books
A division of Dark Horse Comics, Inc.
10956 SE Main Street
Milwaukie, OR 97222

DarkHorse.com
International Licensing: (503) 905-2377
Comic Shop Locator Service: (888) 266-4226
First Edition: March 2017
Digital ISBN 978-1-63008-730-2



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CONTENTS

PART I THE DOOM OF DRAENOR

Chapter I: Primordial Draenor 10

Chapter II: Children of Stone 36

Chapter III: Rise of the Horde 62

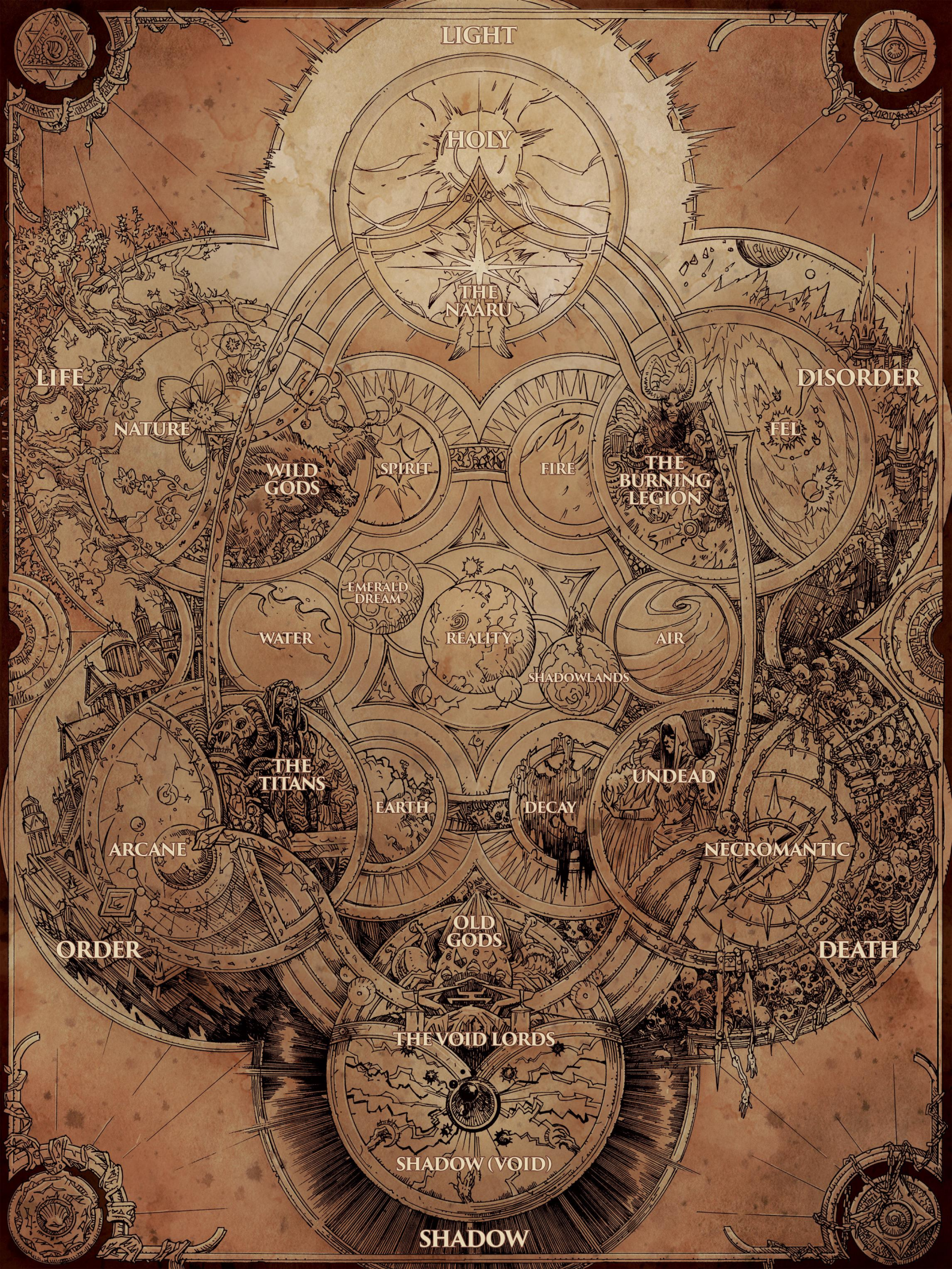
PART II HORDE AND ALLIANCE

Chapter IV: The First War 104

Chapter V: The Second War 146

Chapter VI: Beyond the Dark Portal 182

Index 200



LIGHT

HOLY

THE
NAARU

LIFE

NATURE

WILD
GODS

SPIRIT

FIRE

THE
BURNING
LEGION

DISORDER

FEL

EMERALD
DREAM

WATER

REALITY

SHADOWLANDS

AIR

THE
TITANS

EARTH

DECAY

UNDEAD

NECROMANTIC

ARCANE

ORDER

OLD
GODS

THE VOID LORDS

SHADOW (VOID)

SHADOW

DEATH




PART I

THE DOOM OF DRAENOR



CHAPTER I
**PRIMORDIAL
DRAENOR**

PETER LEE 16



CHAPTER I

PRIMORDIAL DRAENOR

ECHOES OF CONFLICT

The universe was not crafted by loving hands; it was born from the clash of Light and Void.

The constant strife between these two primordial forces ignited a cataclysmic explosion of energy. From the fires of destruction, reality itself was forged and set into motion.

Echoes of the struggle between Light and Void suffused this new realm of existence. Opposing energies surged through the physical cosmos, which was called the Great Dark Beyond. Every star, world, and mote of magic reflected the universe's destructive origins.

Nowhere was this more apparent than in the Twisting Nether. This astral dimension was bound to the Great Dark Beyond, but it was a fundamentally different realm. Volatile magics ran rampant throughout the Nether and kept it in a state of turmoil.

When mortal life arose in the universe, it inherited this tradition of conflict. The clash of opposing forces, wills, and ideologies became the one constant in the cosmos.

Some creatures who lived in the Great Dark Beyond stood as champions of order, hope, and life. The godlike titans embodied these traits. Their spirits—known as world-souls—took shape in the molten hearts of a handful of different worlds.

After many long ages of slumber, the colossal titans awoke in grand fashion—in the form of living, breathing worlds. The titans wandered the Great Dark Beyond to find and awaken sleeping world-souls. In the process, they used their considerable powers to shape and order the worlds they encountered.

Other forces stood in opposition to the titans, including sinister beings known as the void lords. The void lords saw great potential in the titans to serve as weapons of darkness. If even one of them fell to the void lords' corruption, that titan could be used to bring about the end of the universe.

The end of everything.

Time and time again, the void lords' subtle attempts to corrupt the titans failed. Influencing full-grown titans was impossible, but what about *before* they had awakened? Such was the tactic the void lords pursued. They bent all of their malice and dark intent toward corrupting a slumbering world-soul. They knew it was only a matter of time before they succeeded.

The noble titans had no knowledge of the void lords' plans. In their quest to find sleeping world-souls, they had come into conflict with other dark creatures. These beings rallied under the

banners of destruction, turmoil, and death. They came in many different forms, and they spoke many different tongues. Yet the titans knew them by one name: demons.

Demons had originated from the broken wastes of the Twisting Nether. Many of them reveled in the powers of fel magic, which was fueled by the destruction of life. The demons tore their way into the physical universe and wrought havoc on the titans' ordered worlds.

Two titans went to war with the troublesome demons. Their names were Sargerass and Aggramar, and they were the greatest warriors the universe would ever know. As they hunted demons across the stars, they witnessed worlds dying and entire civilizations burning to ash. Seeing these unspeakable horrors only fueled Sargerass and Aggramar's belief that what they were doing was right.

Yet Sargerass's conviction had its limits. In the end, it wasn't demons that broke his will.

It was something far worse.

THE FALL OF SARGERASS

While hunting demons by himself, Sargerass discovered the void lords' plans to corrupt a slumbering world-soul. Doubt flooded his spirit. Had the void lords already succeeded? Even if they had not, Sargerass knew that stopping them was impossible. The titans could not keep watch over the entire universe all at once.

As Sargerass pondered how to stop the void lords, he came to a troubling conclusion. Existence itself was flawed. The only way to spare the universe from the void lords was by burning away all creation. It was drastic, yes, but necessary. Though it pained Sargerass to imagine it, even a dead universe was preferable to one controlled by the powers of the Void. His only solace was the knowledge that since life had arisen in the cosmos once before, it could do so again.

Sargerass brought his findings to Aggramar and the rest of the titan Pantheon, and he proposed his drastic solution. It was not received well. The other titans admonished Sargerass for considering such a plan. Even Aggramar, his closest friend, stood against him, believing it was the Pantheon's duty to safeguard life and maintain order in the universe.

In that moment, Sargerass lost all faith in the Pantheon. The other titans lacked the willpower to do what needed to be done, and he would waste no more time weathering their criticisms. The titan champion abandoned his allies and disappeared into the Great Dark.

The Pantheon was saddened by Sargerass's departure, but that did not stop its members from their great search. They continued exploring the distant reaches of creation, seeking out slumbering titan spirits.

Meanwhile, Aggramar took on the burden of fighting demons alone. It was harrowing work, and he longed for the days of fighting shoulder-to-shoulder with Sargerass. Aggramar's hope was that one day his old friend would come to his senses and return to the fold.

Such a reunion would never come to pass. Sargerass had made his decision. He would cleanse the universe in fire to thwart the void lords' plans. And he would not stop this quest—this *Burning Crusade*—until every star had gone dark and he stood over a universe of embers.

Despite Sargerass's vast power, he could not prosecute his Burning Crusade alone. He needed loyal servants, ones that would embrace their role as agents of destruction. He needed the very things he had once sworn to destroy.

He needed demons.

Sargeras rallied the wicked creatures to his side, and he indulged in the terrible might of fel magic. The destructive energy enveloped his soul and scarred his noble form forever, but it also granted Sargeras power beyond anything he had ever known.

The corrupted titan gave some of this newfound power to his demonic acolytes, uniting them as one in the emerald fires of fel magic. He named his growing army the Burning Legion, and he unleashed it upon the unsuspecting universe.

In time, the Legion's ranks would swell with new types of demons. World after world would fall to their relentless onslaught. Some mortal civilizations would willingly join the Legion to escape oblivion. Others would be forcibly corrupted.

And still others would be erased from existence forever.

DRAENOR AND THE EVERGROWTH

Before the Burning Legion launched its crusade, a small world took shape in a distant corner of the Great Dark. This world would be known by many names in the coming ages. The mighty ogres would call it *Dawgar*, meaning “the Known Earth” in their brutish tongue. An intelligent avian race known as the arakkoa would later name it *Raksbar*, “the Sunstone.”

In modern times, the most common name for this world would be Draenor.

Draenor did not contain a slumbering world-soul, but it was remarkable in other ways. Nearly all worlds in existence were home to elemental spirits of fire, air, earth, and water. Sometimes, these primordial beings were highly destructive. They took on physical forms and waged war against each other, keeping their respective worlds in a state of constant upheaval.

Such was not the case on Draenor. An abundance of the fifth element—the Spirit of Life—had saturated the world. This force had a natural calming effect on the elemental spirits. It tempered their violent nature, and it even prevented them from taking on physical forms.

The fifth element had another, far more extraordinary effect on Draenor. It accelerated the growth of flora and fauna. It made the world into a cradle of vibrant, untamed life.

Creatures of every shape and size roamed the young world, vying for dominance. The strong preyed on the weak. The cunning preyed on the strong. Savagery became critical to survival.

Draenor's greatest predators did not hunt with fang or claw. They hunted with root and thorn.

A carnivorous, invasive strain of plant had sprouted on Draenor. These life-forms were known as Sporemounds. Their tendril-like vines slithered over the earth and strangled every primitive beast that they could reach. As they grew, the Sporemounds consumed more and more and more. Their hunger and need to expand knew no end. They blossomed into living mountains of tangled brambles and noxious pods.

Wherever the Sporemounds' tendrils crept over the earth, lush forests and swampy mires took root. Before long, a labyrinth of deep wilds stretched to the far corners of the world.

Not even Draenor's elemental energies were safe from the Sporemounds. Their roots wormed deep underground in search of water. As they did, the invading plant life tapped into the fifth

element that suffused Draenor's stones and soil. Consuming this primordial energy ignited a crude communal sentience within the Sporemounds and the surrounding wilds. This newfound intelligence allowed Draenor's plants to act as a single massive organism. The Sporemounds and all other vegetation became known collectively as the Evergrowth.

If any major threat arose, the Evergrowth could react in unison. Yet such threats were nonexistent. The Evergrowth dominated everything in sight, and nothing could hold it at bay.

THE TAMING OF DRAENOR

While the Sporemounds flourished, Aggramar continued his hunt for demons. His grand mission eventually took him near Draenor, a world not yet discovered by the titans.

Aggramar lingered among the vast emptiness over Draenor, listening for the dreams of a world-soul at its core. He heard none. And yet the world still intrigued him. He had never seen a place of such voracious and diverse plant life, a place of such untamed savagery.

The more Aggramar observed the Evergrowth, the more he foresaw doom in Draenor's future. If left unchecked, the plant life would consume *everything* on the world, even the elemental spirits. Once that happened, the Evergrowth would devour itself. Draenor would be left a dust-blown wasteland, devoid of even the most primitive life.

Though Aggramar was eager to continue his war against demons, he could not leave Draenor to such a fate. His natural affinity for order compelled him to take action.

The titan warrior did not want to exterminate Draenor's plant life; he desired only to temper it. He knew that to do so, he would need to neutralize the Sporemounds. They were the heart of the Evergrowth's power and the cause of its rampant expansion.

Aggramar considered destroying the Sporemounds himself, but his power was so great that he feared he would irreparably damage or even shatter Draenor. He also knew he could not stand guard over the world forever. Instead, he would create a mighty servant in his image to uproot the Sporemounds and then maintain balance over Draenor.

Aggramar swept his colossal hand over the world and wove its fire, air, earth, and water energies into a massive elemental storm. He channeled the roaring tempest into Draenor's largest mountain. The energies blasted through the crust and sent shockwaves of force around the globe. Then the mountain itself groaned to life and stood up on two colossal legs. Raw elemental power crackled over a craggy hide crisscrossed by veins of molten stone.

Aggramar named his creation Grond. He would serve as the titan warrior's hand on Draenor.

At Aggramar's command, Grond set out to divide and conquer the Evergrowth. The walking mountain lumbered over the world, lakes of elemental fire trailing in his footsteps. Grond dredged out seas, carved valleys, and forged mountains to separate the Evergrowth. Then he marched toward the nearest Sporemound, which towered nearly as high as the giant.

The Sporemound's gnarled roots exploded from the earth to entangle Grond and bar his way. The giant smashed through them with ease. Grond stabbed his jagged fingers into the Sporemound, and then he tore it from the world's surface with a single mighty heave.

The other Sporemounds shivered in agony at the destruction of their kin. Mere roots and vines would not topple Grond. The Sporemounds needed a new weapon. They needed to adapt.

Each Sporemound drained the surrounding forests and jungles of life essence, leaving behind only withered tracts of land. Infused with these energies, the Sporemounds arose to walk the world.

There were three Sporemounds in total, and each embodied a different region of the Evergrowth's domain. The first was called Zang. Swampy mires and mushroom thickets glistened across its hide. The second, Botaan, was covered with primal forestlands. The last of the Sporemounds was known as Naanu, and it wore a fleece of dense jungles.

As one the Sporemounds moved against Grond, and Draenor buckled under the weight of warring giants.

THE FALL OF GROND

From the skies over Draenor, Aggramar watched the Sporemounds converge on Grond. Zang, Botaan, and Naanu were determined to preserve the Evergrowth at any cost. They called upon their primal fury, and they lashed Grond with tendrils hard enough to crack diamond. Massive boulders crumbled away from the elemental giant's skin. The stones crashed to the ground with enough force to carve out valleys and shatter mountaintops.

Through their communal sentience, the Sporemounds moved in perfect unison. They nearly overwhelmed Grond, and he teetered on the verge of collapse.

But it was only for a moment. Like Aggramar, Grond possessed a will that was forged of steel. He would not give up until he had brought balance to Draenor.

Elemental storms howled to life over Grond's body as he gathered his strength and launched himself at the Sporemounds. He pummeled them with fists that carried the weight of mountains. Each blow sheared away pieces of the verdant giants. Broken roots and seeds tumbled from the Sporemounds and fell to the earth.

Grond was relentless, but the Sporemounds gave no ground. They endured the elemental giant's wrath and continued their fight for dominion over the world. The tide of battle shifted between each side, and the world's crust trembled and cracked beneath their feet.

Though the Sporemounds were resilient, they could not hold out forever against Grond's attacks. Zang suffered the most from the elemental giant. It was the smallest of the Sporemounds and the first to fall before Grond's onslaught.

Grond took hold of Zang and tore the monstrous creature in half. The Sporemound's shredded corpse toppled to the world's surface with a deafening thunderclap. In the ages to come, the rotting body would transform into a fungal region known as the Zangar Sea.

Grond pressed his attack against Naanu and crushed the other giant between his unyielding hands. The lifeless Sporemound collapsed to the ground. Its broken husk would slowly sink into the earth and become a region called Tanaan Jungle.

Two Sporemounds had fallen to Grond, but the long battles had chipped away at his mighty form. He was a shadow of his former self, riddled with cracks and fissures.

Botaan sensed its enemy's weakened state, but it needed power to defeat Grond. The Sporemound leached the dwindling life essence from the bodies of Naanu and Zang, drawing the energies into itself and growing to a monstrous size.



Even with its new strength, Botaan was cautious. It evaded Grond's direct assaults, all the while entangling its foe in thousands of small vines. The thorny tendrils coiled around Grond and gradually burrowed into the cracks and wounds on his skin.

Grond considered the vines nothing more than a nuisance, and he ignored them. Yet as the tendrils tunneled deeper and deeper, he realized the true threat they posed.

By then, it was too late.

The vines wrenched open Grond's existing wounds and caused new fissures to erupt across his body. The elemental giant collapsed beneath his own weight and crumbled to pieces. The bulk of his corpse formed a mountain range at the edge of a region later known as Nagrand.

THE BLOOD OF GIANTS

During the battles between Grond and the Sporemounds, pieces of the leviathans had fallen to the earth and given rise to new types of creatures.

The seeds and roots that had tumbled from Zang, Naanu, and Botaan contained a small portion of their life essence. Many unique beings sprouted from this plant matter. The strongest were lumbering giants called the genesaur. A mane of thick fronds covered the skin of these four-legged beings. Despite their enormous size, they were incredibly swift and agile.

Much like the plant matter that fell from the Sporemounds, the rocks that toppled from Grond stirred with life essence. The largest boulders arose as sentient beings called the colossals. Though they were not as mighty as Grond, their shadows still loomed large over the land.

Much of the stony debris that fell from Grond also contained the primordial elements of fire, air, earth, and water. These energies gradually coalesced into pools of power, from which elemental spirits took physical shape for the first time in Draenor's history. If not for the Sporemounds, this would not have been possible. They had devoured much of the fifth element, which allowed the elemental spirits to grow in power.

These spirits were initially few in number. But after Grond's defeat, their population exploded. Vast quantities of elemental power had bled from his corpse. As a result, countless physical elementals emerged around Grond's mountainous remains. Among them were the Furies. They were the most powerful elemental spirits on Draenor, and they dwelled near what remained of Grond's head. Their names were Incineratus, the Fury of Fire; Aborius, the Fury of Water; Gordawg, the Fury of Earth; and Kalandrios, the Fury of Air.

The four Furies lamented the death of Grond, and they vowed to dwell in his corpse's shadow forever. The place that these beings called home would be known by Draenor's future mortal cultures as the Throne of the Elements.



IN GROND'S SHADOW

When the colossals emerged on Draenor, hope swelled in Aggramar. Though the creatures were not as mighty as Grond, they were many. Aggramar was confident that they could destroy Botaan and bring balance to Draenor, but they would need his help.

Aggramar fashioned immense stone discs from Grond's remains and branded them with titan runes of power. He fused these objects onto the colossals' craggy hides like plates of armor. The discs flooded the giants with primordial energy, enhancing their strength and resilience.

The colossals' empowerment had not come a moment too soon. With nothing to oppose them, Botaan and the genesaur had free rein over Draenor. The Sporemound and its followers were cultivating the Evergrowth and reclaiming territories destroyed by Grond.

Before Botaan could fully restore the Evergrowth, Aggramar unleashed the colossals. He had learned much about the Sporemound while watching it battle Grond. He knew its strengths and its weaknesses, and he imparted this knowledge to the colossals.

Just as the colossals began their march, Aggramar sensed a faint ripple of energy cascading through the Great Dark Beyond. Its source was unmistakable: it was the death rattle of a constellar. These celestial beings kept watch over the titans' ordered worlds. For one of them to have perished was a dire omen. *Something* had vanquished the constellar.

Though his work on Draenor was far from over, Aggramar could not stay. He needed to find out what had killed the constellar and whether the nearby world was in danger.

Aggramar charged the colossals with defeating the Evergrowth in his absence. He bade them farewell, vowing he would return one day. Then he launched himself into the stars.

He would never see Draenor again.

SACRIFICE OF THE COLOSSALS

The colossals would never know of Aggramar's fate. They fully expected their titan master to return. The giants were determined to bring balance to Draenor before that happened, but the task ahead was immense.

The Evergrowth had enveloped much of the world. As the wilds had flourished, so had Botaan's strength. The monstrous Sporemound now eclipsed Grond in size. It stalked through the dense jungles at the Evergrowth's heart, surrounded by hundreds of fierce genesaur.

Using the knowledge shared with them by Aggramar, the colossals debated how to defeat the Sporemound. Launching an attack into the Evergrowth, where Botaan was at its most powerful, would be suicide. The colossals needed to draw the Sporemound and its followers away from the wilds if they were to have any chance of succeeding.

The colossals gathered at the Evergrowth's borders and hacked away at the forests. Just as they had hoped, the giants drew Botaan's ire.

The Sporemound rallied its genesaur and stormed toward the meddlesome colossals. As Botaan's shadow loomed closer, the stone giants retreated into the barren ravines and hills beyond the Evergrowth, where they could use the terrain to their advantage.

THE FATE OF AGGRAMAR

After leaving Draenor, Aggramar discovered that the constellar had fallen to the Burning Legion. He hunted down this vast demonic army, only to find that it was led by his beloved mentor, Sargeras. Aggramar demanded an explanation from the corrupted titan, but he received none.

Sargeras would not abandon his Burning Crusade to extinguish all life in the cosmos. Not for Aggramar. Not for anyone.

The mentor and his protégé came to blows. Aggramar was no match for Sargeras's fel power. He retreated from the battle and gathered the rest of the Pantheon to stop their fallen brother.

Despite his earlier confrontation with Sargeras, Aggramar clung to the stubborn belief that he could bring his friend back to the side of good. He tried to reason with Sargeras one last time. He tried to awaken whatever nobility still remained in his mentor's soul.

In response, Sargeras annihilated Aggramar.

The stunned members of the Pantheon made war on Sargeras and his Legion. Their apocalyptic battle warped reality and darkened the stars.

In the end, Sargeras prevailed. He engulfed his kin in a storm of fel fire and shattered their physical forms. Only the titans' disembodied spirits survived the attack. Though they escaped Sargeras's wrath, they would never be the same again.

The Burning Legion was victorious.



Botaan followed without hesitation, seeing the colossals as little more than pale imitations of Grond. When the Sporemound strayed beyond the Evergrowth's borders, the colossals attacked. Many of the stone giants had lain in wait amid the rocky landscape to mask their numbers. Now they emerged from hiding, and the full might of the colossals smashed into Botaan and its genesaur.

The war that followed would rattle Draenor for thousands of years. Control of the world constantly ebbed and flowed between the colossals and the Evergrowth's agents.

Over time, these battles took their toll on the colossals. Many succumbed to Botaan and the genesaur, and their broken bodies littered the ground. Just as the stone giants had risen from pieces of Grond, new creatures called the magnaron emerged from the colossals' remains.

The magnaron were not as large or as intelligent as the colossals, but they commanded great power. Veins of fire and raw elemental energies coursed over their jagged skin.

The colossals called on the magnaron to fight the Evergrowth, but they did not obey. By their nature, the molten giants opposed the Evergrowth, but they felt no loyalty toward their progenitors. Some of the magnaron battled genesaur they crossed paths with, but most of the others wandered into the barren tracts of Draenor to seek out areas of volcanic activity.

With their numbers dwindling, the colossals could do little to stop Botaan from spreading the Evergrowth. Unless the stone giants took drastic action, they were doomed to fail.

Most of the colossals gathered to make a final stand. Their hides were worn and cracked by millennia of fighting, but the titan relics fused to their skin still contained immense power.

With this power, they would sacrifice themselves to bring balance to the world.

The colossals forged into the Evergrowth and swarmed Botaan. They dug their rocky hands into the Sporemound and clung tight to its giant form. In unison, the colossals unleashed the energy stored within their titan relics, channeling it through themselves and into Botaan.

A massive explosion ripped through the Sporemound and the colossals. The blast was so immense that it shattered their bodies and hurled the pieces across Draenor.

Botaan's death rattle blazed through every root and leaf in the world. Lush tracts of forest withered, and hundreds of genesaur dropped dead where they stood. For one brief moment, the entirety of the Evergrowth trembled with the shared agony of Botaan's annihilation.

Then there was silence. No thoughts or emotions passed among the world's plant life. Botaan's demise had destroyed the communal sentence that connected Draenor's wilds.

The colossals had triumphed, but they had paid a terrible price. No creatures would ever arise from their remains. Drawing on the power of their titan relics had burned away all life essence from the colossals and seared their corpses. Over time, their broken bodies would sink into the earth and become veins of a nearly indestructible metal called blackrock ore.

Unlike the fallen colossals, Botaan's body still contained potent life energies. Wherever fragments of the Sporemound fell to the earth, forests and jungles bloomed. The bulk of Botaan's corpse formed a vibrant region that would later be known as Farahlon.

Genesaur and other plant-creatures would continue to thrive in these havens of life, but they would not have a Sporemound to unite them in purpose and guide their collective will.

The Evergrowth was no more, but that did not mean peace for Draenor.

THE BREAKERS AND THE PRIMALS

For many ages after the end of the Evergrowth, the descendants of the colossals and the Sporemounds vied for dominance over the world. Magnaron and genesaur were not the sole inheritors of this conflict. New creatures of stone and root emerged to join the war.

When Botaan had exploded, its body had released countless spores teeming with the Spirit of Life. These spores drifted back to the world's surface and warped whatever they touched. They clung to the hides of magnaron and weakened their bodies.

Some of the magnaron devolved into half-flesh, half-stone giants called gronn. These massive predators stalked the edges of the wilds, terrorizing lesser life-forms and devouring anything they could find. The gronn were only moderately intelligent, but they proved to be exceptional hunters. The jagged spikes that protruded from their skin served as weapons to kill their prey, and rocky plates functioned as armor to protect them from other dangerous creatures.

Due to the lingering effects of the spores, a small number of gronn continued degenerating into the one-eyed ogron. They were more intelligent than gronn, but they were not as strong. The ogron feared the gronn, and they viewed the hulking beasts as gods.

Just as some gronn had evolved, so, too, would a number of ogron. Over thousands of years, the residual spores would transform them into fleshy creatures called ogres. These brutes were smaller than their progenitors, and many of them would become slaves to the ogron.

From the ogres would arise yet another race—a people called the orcs. They were the smallest of Grond's line. Yet what they lacked in size and strength, they made up for with a fierce intellect and a sense of community. By banding together, they survived the harsh wilds.

The first few generations of stone-born creatures—the magnaron, the gronn, and the ogron—were known collectively as the breakers. They laid claim to the world's barren mountains and rocky chasms. Though the breakers were different in many ways, they had all descended from Grond. Their common ancestry did not make them allies, but it did infuse them with a shadow of the ancient giant's influence. No matter how diverse their individual customs or ways of life were, all of the breakers were opposed to the verdant wilds.

The breakers met fierce resistance from the genesaur and other plant-based life. These creatures were known collectively as the primals, and they traced their lineage back to the Sporemounds.

Like the breakers, many of the primals arose in the aftermath of Botaan's destruction. The numerous spores released from the giant's corpse settled in the wilds. While these spores weakened the creatures of stone, they had the opposite effect on plant life.

The spores gave sentience to existing forms of plants. The jungles stirred as new beings took shape and walked the land. Some were small and simpleminded creatures called podlings and sporelings. The most intelligent and prolific new race was called the botani.

The bark-skinned botani spread through Draenor's wilderness. Faint memories of the Evergrowth lingered in their minds, but they did not know the full truth of the Sporemounds or their battles with Grond and the colossals.

Even so, what little the botani knew of the Evergrowth still had a profound impact on their culture. They revered the genesaur as gods, seeing them as echoes of the great Sporemounds. The botani also rejected the idea of self, believing that their individual souls were part of a collective spirit that interlinked all plant life on Draenor.

Along with the genesaur and other plant-creatures, the botani devoted themselves to protecting the forestlands. As they did so, they inevitably clashed with the breakers.

REMNANTS OF THE COLOSSALS

Legends say that a small handful of colossals survived the battle with Botaan. They, too, were affected by the spores that spread throughout the world. As the millennia passed, their bodies diminished and became fleshy.

When mortal civilizations later came to power on Draenor, these colossals were long dead. Creatures such as the orcs would discover their bones and use them to fashion weapons, dwellings, and trinkets. They believed that the giants' remains contained power.



For many long ages, sporadic battles erupted between these two factions, but neither side could ever destroy the other. Their endless conflict slowly carved out the borders of the world and brought balance to Draenor. Over time, the breakers asserted complete control over lands such as Gorggrond, Frostfire Ridge, Nagrand, and Arak, while the primals cultivated the wilds of Tanaan Jungle, Zangar Sea, Farahlon, Shadowmoon Valley, and Talador.

THE GODS OF ARAK

The Spirit of Life that had saturated primordial Draenor had birthed many kinds of animals. Nearly all of these beasts had been consumed by the Evergrowth and the Sporemounds.

With the end of the Evergrowth, animal life had a chance to take hold in the world again. The scattered remains of Botaan had become forests teeming with the Spirit of Life. These energies transformed the land and accelerated the development of new species.

The first beasts to arise were enormous creatures that wielded extraordinary power over the land. Some of them had an affinity to the nature magics that the botani and other primals had mastered; others tapped into Draenor's elemental energies. Still others reached beyond the veil of reality, touching the forces of Light and Void that permeated the cosmos.

Despite their considerable powers, Draenor's giant animals faced a daunting struggle for survival. The botani ensnared them for use as food to nourish the wilds, or to infest them with fungi that transformed them into the primals' minions. Elsewhere, the gronn and ogron hunted the beasts like game. The animals most suited to thrive on this unforgiving world were winged species that could soar above the reach of the primals and the breakers.

Most of Draenor's avian races developed in Arak. A massive stone spire towered over the region's dense woods and coastal scrublands. There, three godlike creatures took form: the majestic fire bird Rukhmar, the vicious wind serpent Sethe, and the cunning raven Anzu.

These animals were each powerful in their own right. Rukhmar's spirit was touched by the primordial force of Light. Her connection to this energy allowed her to summon enchanted flames that could either destroy life or nourish it. White-hot fire constantly rippled over her reddish-orange wings without ever singeing her.

Sethe's wings were short and leathery, and he could not fly as high as Rukhmar. He had an affinity to the shadow energies—the Void—that existed in the universe.

Anzu was much smaller than Rukhmar and Sethe. What he lacked in physical power, he made up for with a keen intellect. Ever curious, Anzu investigated the magical ley lines that crisscrossed the world, and he discovered arcane magic.

For many years, these three creatures largely kept to themselves. They eked out an existence in Arak, constantly fending off attacks from primals and breakers. Only Anzu dreamed of a better future for himself and his feathered kin.

Anzu called on Rukhmar and Sethe to work together to transform Arak into a sanctuary for birds of all kinds. Why should they live under the oppression of primitives like the primals and the breakers when they could rule this land for themselves?

As one, Anzu and his new allies drove the children of stone and root from Arak. With the breakers and the primals gone, the region flourished into a haven for winged creatures. Rukhmar, Sethe, and Anzu settled in as caretakers of the land and its varied species.

Rukhmar developed close ties with the most beautiful birds: the kaliri. She treated them as her own beloved children. She and the kaliri spent much of their time perched at the apex of Arak's spire, basking in the warmth of the sun.

Though Rukhmar was noble, she was also arrogant. She saw herself as the epitome of grace and beauty among the world's creatures. She never set her talons on the ground, and she regarded the creatures that dwelled in and around the forests with disdain.

Anzu watched over the multitude of lesser ravens that lived throughout Arak. He frequented the forest canopies below the spire.

Sethe ruled the smaller wind serpents and lived with them among the shadowy nooks and crannies at the spire's base. He did not treat his followers with the same respect that Anzu showed the ravens. Sethe was a cruel and demanding master of the wind serpents.

All seemed well in Arak, but darkness was stirring near the spire.

THE CURSE OF SETHE

Over the years, Sethe became envious of Rukhmar. His wings were not as great as hers, and he could not soar through the clouds as she did. Sethe could barely even reach the top of the spire. He was doomed to live out his existence in Rukhmar's shadow.

That was not a fate he would accept. Sethe dreamed of striking down Rukhmar and stealing her powers for himself, but he knew he could not do so alone. The wind serpent eventually approached Anzu and asked for his help. Once they had vanquished Rukhmar, they would soar the roof of the world. They would reign as the twin kings of Arak.

Sethe had assumed that Anzu was jealous of Rukhmar's power as well. After all, the fire bird looked down on the raven with scorn for dwelling so near the ground. Yet Sethe was wrong. Anzu did not hate Rukhmar; he adored her. The raven had long harbored a secret affection for the fire bird, but he had never mustered the courage to profess his feelings for her. He knew that Rukhmar would never accept him as her equal.

Anzu warned Rukhmar of Sethe's intentions. The raven and the fire bird made a pact to work against the wind serpent. On the day Sethe launched his attack, Rukhmar was ready.

She engulfed Sethe in her fiery wrath and burned his wings to ash. When the wind serpent plummeted to the earth, Anzu fell upon him and clawed out his eyes. Sethe used his dying breath to exact vengeance on Rukhmar and Anzu. He wove a terrible curse through his own flesh and blood, one that seeped from his body and spread into the land itself.

Fearing that the curse would destroy Arak, Anzu devoured Sethe whole and locked the wind serpent's dark energy within himself. Excruciating pain racked the raven as the curse twisted his body and soul. Anzu's form shriveled and warped, and he lost the ability to fly.

Though he had paid a terrible price, Anzu had contained the curse. Only a small portion of Sethe's blood was left behind. It corrupted the area where the wind serpent had fallen, but it did not spread. This shadowy region would later become known as Sethekk Hollow.

Anzu could not bear to present himself to Rukhmar. If she had not thought him worthy before, she would be disgusted by the aberration he'd become. He disappeared into the forest deeps, and he ignored Rukhmar whenever she called for the raven to show himself.



ANZU SUCCUMBS TO THE CURSE OF SETHE

Though Sethe's curse weakened Anzu, it also gave him new power. Consuming the wind serpent had granted him command over dark magic. As Anzu grew more familiar with his abilities, he shrouded himself in a realm of shadow to hide from Rukhmar forever.

After much fruitless searching, Rukhmar gave up. She was humbled by Anzu's noble sacrifice, but she was also horrified by the curse that now darkened her home. Rukhmar took to the skies and left Arak. She finally settled atop Gorgrond's highest peak.

Rukhmar decided that if she could not find Anzu to thank him, she would reward his sacrifice by creating a new race in his honor. The fire bird drew on her own life energies to transform some of her kaliri followers into a winged people called the *arakkoa*, or the "heirs of Arak." They embodied Rukhmar's physical grace and majesty as well as Anzu's intellect and cleverness.

Rukhmar intended that the arakkoa would one day return to Arak, but not yet. Sethe's curse still lingered, and the fire bird did not want her new children to suffer from it. After they had matured as a race and become wise, Rukhmar would lead them back to their ancestral home.

Her only fear was that she would not live long enough to do so. Rukhmar had expended much of her own life essence to create the arakkoa. She would never be as powerful as she'd once been. The fire bird knew she would eventually grow old and pass from the world.

Before that happened, she was determined to help shape and guide the arakkoa's culture.

DAWN OF THE APEXIS

3,000 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

For many generations, Rukhmar watched the arakkoa develop from afar. Occasionally she communed with the fledgling race. She told stories of Arak, of Sethe's evil, and of Anzu's nobility. Rukhmar also taught the arakkoa the rudimentary ways of commanding the Light.

The arakkoa were quick learners. They mastered wielding the Light, and they became adept healers and seers. Many of their primitive customs revolved around the worship of Rukhmar. They revered her as the goddess of the sun, which they considered the source of their Light magic.

The arakkoa were not content to harness the powers of the Light alone. Due to Rukhmar's teachings, they revered Anzu as a deity much in the same way they did the sun goddess. Many arakkoa discovered arcane magic and became extraordinary sorcerers.

As the arakkoa flourished, Rukhmar felt her life force fading. She communed with her children one last time and urged them to claim Arak for themselves. Rukhmar took to the winds and soared south, and the arakkoa followed. Just as they reached Arak, the fire bird breathed her last breath. Flames consumed her form, and she burned like a second sun in the sky.

The arakkoa took Rukhmar's passing as a sign of their own ascendancy. They vowed to create a grand civilization in Arak to honor her, one that would outshine any other culture on Draenor. The light of their knowledge and their power would blaze in the heavens just as Rukhmar had.

Calling themselves the Apexis, the arakkoa claimed the highest reaches of Arak's spire. They harvested timber from the surrounding woods, and metals from the nearby mountains. They built immense gilded structures around their towering new home. Using their mastery of the Light, the Apexis also crafted enormous lanterns infused with enchanted flames, which they hung along the length of the spire.

Guided by the mythical tales of Anzu and his noble sacrifice, arakkoa sorcerers investigated Sethekk Hollow. They carefully studied the pool of cursed energy there, and they unraveled the mysteries of shadow magic. These sorcerers developed a unique ability to combine their knowledge of the arcane with the darker powers found at Sethekk Hollow.

The Apexis embraced both Light and Void, believing they were natural parts of life. Two factions formed, each specializing in an opposing force. The Anhar order studied the arts of wielding holy magic. The Skalax order dedicated itself to studying shadow and arcane magics. Both groups occupied the upper echelons of Apexis society, and they shared equal prestige and influence.

As the arakkoa solidified their power in Arak, they explored the world. They were not an expansionistic people, but they were curious. They forged outposts across Draenor to observe the local flora and fauna. The arakkoa studied the forests and their shapes, and they mapped out the great mountain ranges that crisscrossed the world. In awe, they realized that many of these places were the ancient remains of creatures that had once walked Draenor.

Based on stories passed down from Rukhmar, the Apexis knew that the primals and the breakers were the offspring of these primordial giants. The arakkoa watched their endless warring with equal parts fascination and pity, but they never intervened. They were Rukhmar's children, and they had inherited a touch of her arrogance. To play a part in the lives of land-dwellers was seen as beneath the Apexis.

HERALDS OF THE EVERGROWTH

2,000 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

The arakkoa's rise did not go unnoticed by Draenor's other inhabitants.

Near Arak, the dense forest of Talador teemed with primals. One of the most powerful was a treant known as Gnarlgar. Much like Rukhmar and her kin, this highly intelligent living tree emerged in the aftermath of Botaan's destruction. Gnarlgar commanded immense power over nature magic as well as the Spirit of Life that flowed through the wilds.

Gnarlgar's knowledge of the ancient days was also vast. From the genesaur, the treant learned of the Evergrowth, the Sporemounds, and the communal sentience that had bound the forests as one.

For millennia, Gnarlgar roamed the world on legs of tangled roots. The treant used its magics to strengthen the other primals in their war against the breakers. Gnarlgar also honed its own abilities and learned how to influence the minds of its plant kin. Before long, the treant could manipulate other primals and guide their actions.

Gnarlgar found the botani to be the most promising of the world's primals. If they were cultivated properly, the treant knew they could become a force of extraordinary might. Gnarlgar became the botani's caretaker, and it refined their culture. The treant taught them the truth of the Sporemounds, convincing them that they would one day restore the Evergrowth to its former glory.

Though the botani existed throughout Draenor, those in Talador were the most numerous and advanced. They became the heart of their race's culture.

Gnarlgar taught Talador's botani unique ways to harness nature magic. They crafted pools of potent nature energies, which they used to transfer the spirits of fallen genesaur into new bodies.

While the botani focused their attention on battling the breakers, Gnarlgar became aware of the Apexis. Their civilization was an affront against nature itself, something artificial that did not belong on the world. What was worse, the arakkoa abused the wilds and killed entire forests to build their unnatural golden temples and cities.

Gnarlgar knew that these arakkoa were something far more dangerous than the breakers. Their devastating magics had the power to burn nature to cinders or inundate it with shadow energy. Unless the arakkoa were stopped, Gnarlgar believed they would soon conquer the whole of Draenor.

The treant would not let that come to pass. Gnarlgar departed Talador in search of something from the primordial days, something it could use as a weapon against the Apexis. In time, the treant came across a massive fossilized root, one of the few intact pieces of Botaan that still remained in the world.

After returning to Talador, Gnarlgar rallied the botani to its side and made a proclamation: to revive the Evergrowth, they must first defeat the blasphemous Apexis civilization.

Then the treant revealed the root it had recovered. Gnarlgar told the botani they would use it to craft a new Sporemound, one greater than any that had come before it. The monstrous creature would stand at the head of their army and cast the Apexis from their lofty spire.

Gnarlgar planted the root deep within Talador and began a great ritual to nourish it. Thousands of botani willingly sacrificed themselves, and the treant infused their spirits into the root. Slowly leaves and branches sprouted from the earth. These in turn grew into a mound of thorny brambles and leathery fronds. Gnarlgar named the burgeoning Sporemound Taala.

As Taala took shape, the primals made preparations for war. The botani awakened new genesaur from their birthing pools. Meanwhile, Gnarlgar channeled the Spirit of Life into the forest and gifted thousands of trees with intelligence and will.

These trees became known as the Gnarled. They uprooted themselves and walked the earth just as their creator did. Gnarlgar ordered them to form the front lines of its army, enchanting their trunks and boughs to ward off the arakkoa's flames and shadowy curses.

Tens of thousands of primals, bristling with nature magic and bedecked in armor of thorns, gathered in Talador. There, they watched and they waited as Taala's awakening neared.

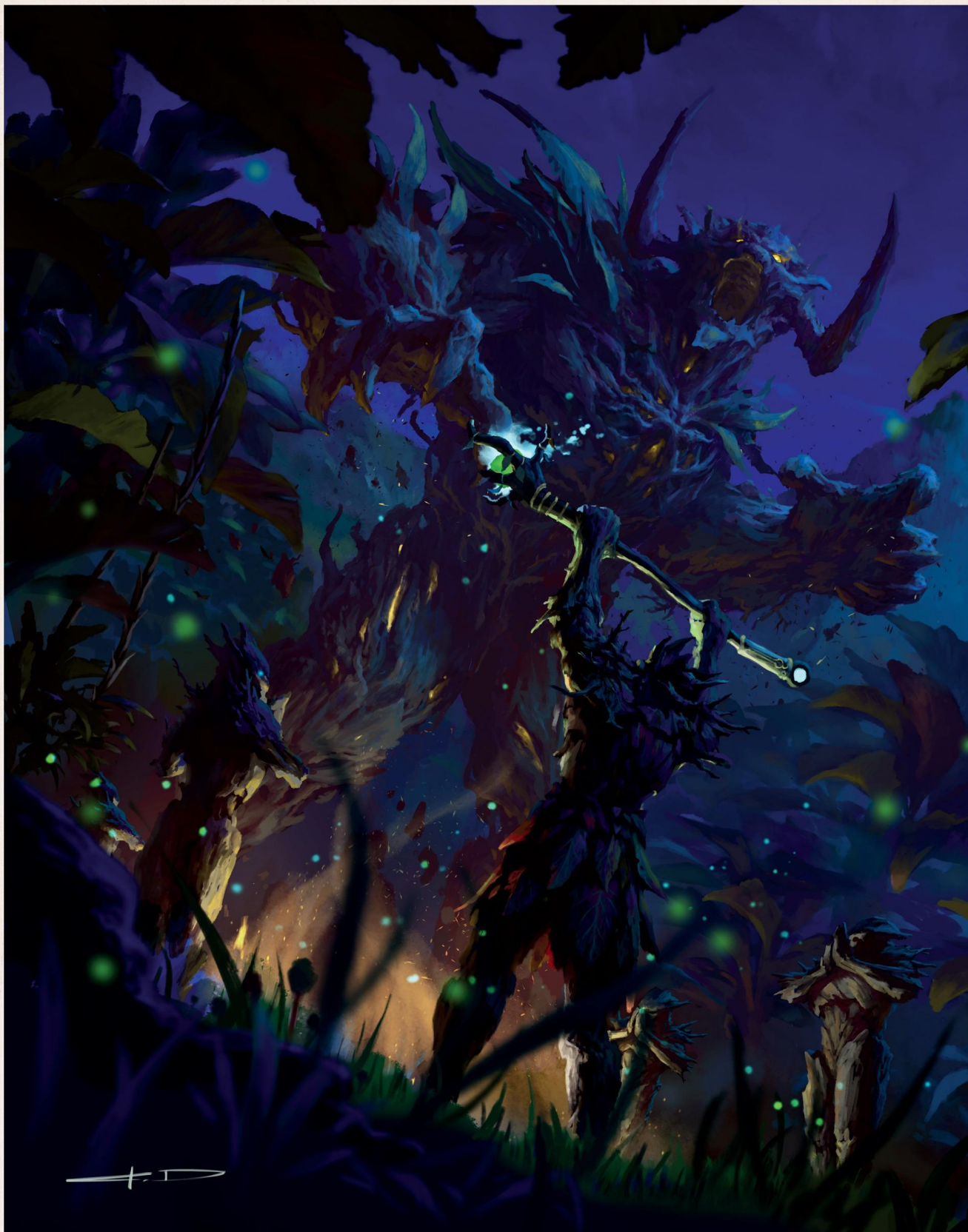
THE BIRTH OF TAALA

The Apexis ignored the stirrings in Talador at first, believing them to be part of the war between the primals and the breakers. Yet the forests at the edge of Arak soon grew thicker. Vines crept toward the spire, planting seeds that sprouted into hundreds of new trees with astonishing speed.

As the wilds encroached on the spire, members of the Anhar and the Skalax orders investigated Talador. Very few of these scouts ever returned. Those who did reported horrifying news.

The trees themselves had come alive, and thousands of botani and genesaur were girding themselves for battle. Yet the most troubling discovery was the monstrous creature forming in the center of Talador. Arakkoa scouts reported that it was already larger than a genesaur.

From what they had gleaned of the Evergrowth, the Apexis feared that this emergent being could be one of the giants that had shaped the infant world. If such a creature awoke, it would annihilate the arakkoa and bring devastation to the rest of Draenor.



THE BOTANI BRING A NEW SPOREMOUND TO LIFE

The Anhari and the Skalaxi leaders had no choice but to act. Their race's survival depended on it.

The two orders mobilized the Apexis and hastily formed an invasion force. The Anhari priests and Skalaxi sorcerers formed the bulk of the arakkoa military. They stormed through the skies over Talador. Guided by the Anhari and the Skalaxi leaders, the arakkoa ignored the primals they came across and focused on destroying the monstrosity forming deep in the forest.

The Apexis army descended into Talador's murky depths to find Taala, and brutal fighting engulfed the arakkoa and the primals. The Anhari priests carved through the wilds with blades of enchanted flame, and the Skalaxi sorcerers enfeebled their enemies with curses. Yet despite the powers at their command, the arakkoa could not break the primals.

Gnarlgar entered a trance that allowed the treant to touch the minds of the primals and coordinate their movements. Every vine and root moved against the Apexis. The primals worked in perfect unity, routing the arakkoa and driving them back to the skies.

The defeat shocked the Anhari and the Skalaxi orders. Nearly half of their forces had fallen in battle. The arakkoa scrambled for a means to defeat the primals.

It was the Anhari order that proposed a solution. Its priests had devised an ingenious new weapon, which they called the Breath of Rukhmar. This mechanism would channel the energies of the sun and allow the arakkoa to wield incredibly destructive powers. The Anhari crafters began building this device atop the spire's highest point.

Meanwhile, Gnarlgar quickened Taala's maturation. The treant knew the time had come to attack the arakkoa, before they could regroup and strengthen their defenses. Gnarlgar ordered more botani to sacrifice themselves, and it shunted their spirits into the Sporemound's veins.

Finally, Taala stirred. Giant fronds unfurled from around it, and the Sporemound rose up to its full height, towering over the forest canopy. The monstrous thorn-skinned creature took its first step, and the forests trembled with awe.

Gnarlgar entered a trance once again, reaching out its mind to Taala and the other primals. At the treant's command, they marched toward the spire.

THE BREATH OF RUKHMAR

The Apexis watched the primals slowly approach, the awakened Sporemound silhouetted on the horizon. The Anhari's weapon was not yet finished, and they feared they could not complete it before their enemies reached the spire. The arakkoa were doomed.

A small number of brave Skalaxi sorcerers were not ready to give up. They volunteered to waylay the primals and give their Anhari allies the time they needed to complete the Breath of Rukhmar. During their defeat in Talador, these sorcerers had discovered Gnarlgar and learned of the treant's ability to guide the actions of the botani and other creatures. If they could assassinate the primals' leader, the Skalaxi sorcerers would deal a great blow to their enemies.

The Skalaxi shrouded themselves in shadow to elude the approaching primal army. They reached Talador and stalked unseen through the forests until they found Gnarlgar.

Just before the sorcerers launched their attack, Gnarlgar sensed their presence. The enraged treant broke away from its trance and quickly disposed of the Skalaxi, but not before the sorcerers had bent their dark powers against the creature.

A curse bloomed within Gnarlgar. The creeping rot spread through the treant's roots and boughs. Gnarlgar withered into a blackened husk and collapsed beside the bodies of its assassins.

Gnarlgar's death broke the unity of the primals. Confusion rippled through Taala and its kin. For a time, the primals halted at the edge of Arak before continuing their march.

Destroying Gnarlgar had only delayed the primals, but it was enough for the arakkoa priests to finish their work. Just as Taala reached the spire, the Anhari ignited their weapon.

A violent tremor shook the spire as fierce energies roared through the Breath of Rukhmar. A beam of white-hot fire exploded from the mechanism and lanced through Taala's chest. The Anhari weapon blew the Sporemound apart in a cloud of ember and ash.

The Anhari then turned their wrath on the rest of the primals. The Breath of Rukhmar sliced through the botani, the Gnarled, and the genesaur, incinerating thousands in the blink of an eye. The few primals who remained retreated back to Talador in terror.

The Anhari gave no quarter. They engulfed the fleeing primals in flames, and they scoured the forests that had crept into Arak. Once the arakkoa halted their attack, blackened earth and smoldering roots stretched out from the spire as far as the eye could see.

The Apexis victory permanently blunted the might of nature. The Evergrowth would never return again, in any form. A new golden age of mortal civilization dawned on Draenor.

FALL OF THE APEXIS

1,200 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

Centuries after defeating the resurgent Evergrowth, the Apexis had flourished into an empire, and their population swelled. The high-minded arakkoa saw themselves as the most powerful force in the world—a force that not even the mightiest of the primals had been able to contend with.

With nothing to threaten their existence, the Apexis devoted themselves to the advancement of science and magic. Knowledge became the most coveted resource in their culture. The Anhar and the Skalax orders became the caretakers of wisdom. It was their duty to catalog history, the study of magic, and information about the world and its various creatures.

Rather than keeping this knowledge in tomes or scrolls, the Apexis developed something else. Anhari priests and Skalaxi sorcerers combined their magics to create crystalline storage devices. By merely touching one of these crystals, an arakkoa could consume all of the knowledge stored within it. They could even experience the memories of whoever had crafted the device.

The Apexis applied their magics to the creation of mechanical constructs that could do their bidding. The arakkoa had always been arrogant, and they became even more so after their victory. They deemed those who walked the world's surface to be unclean. The Apexis used their constructs to mine metals from the earth and gather resources from the ground.

Religion also defined the Apexis and their daily lives. The Anhari priests constructed a gleaming sun temple around the mechanism they had used to annihilate Taala. Hundreds of arakkoa gathered at this site each year to commemorate the Apexis victory and honor Rukhmar.

Other arakkoa visited shrines carved into the solid rock near the foot of the spire. There, Skalaxi sorcerers performed rituals to honor the raven god, Anzu, and his ancient sacrifice.



FROSTFIRE RIDGE

GORGROND

FARAHLON

ZANGAR
SEA

TANAAN JUNGLE

ASHRAN

NAGRAND

TALADOR

BARRIER SEA

ANCIENT
DRAENOR

ARAK

SHADOWMOON
VALLEY

- Breakers
- Primals
- Apexis

The Apexis culture seemed destined to continue its rise, but such was not the case. A bitter rivalry developed between the Anhar and the Skalax orders as each vied for the support of the greater populace.

The Anhari knew that to seize power over their race, they would need to control knowledge. The order's leader, Priest-Lord Velthreek, told his followers to gather as many of the Apexis crystals as they could. Over a number of years, the Anhari did so in secret. They hoarded the crystals and stored them within their sun temple atop the spire.

The Skalaxi and their leader, Sorcerer-Lord Salavass, eventually uncovered what was happening. They believed that knowledge was a basic right for all arakkoa and that it should be available to every member of their race. Salavass called for the immediate release of the crystals from the sun temple.

Velthreek ignored the demand. He declared the Anhari the sole rulers of the Apexis. The order would decide who could access the crystals and their knowledge. In addition, Velthreek claimed that he and the Anhari were the living representatives of Rukhmar herself. Therefore, following the order's teachings was the only way the arakkoa could attain the sun goddess's favor.

Salavass was a cunning arakkoa, and he foresaw what would happen to his order if they did not act. The Skalaxi would become marginalized in society, and they would gradually lose influence. The sorcerer-lord gathered his followers and struck at the sun temple. If the Anhari would not share the Apexis crystals, the Skalaxi would take them by force.

At the gates of the sun temple, a terrible battle erupted between the two orders. It quickly spilled into the lower levels of the spire. Some arakkoa sided with the Anhari; others, with the Skalaxi. For many months, a civil war engulfed every corner of Apexis civilization. To turn the tide of the conflict, the Anhari harnessed the Breath of Rukhmar. They ignited the colossal weapon and prepared to incinerate the Skalaxi and their followers.

Against the Breath of Rukhmar, Salavass knew that the Skalaxi were doomed. Yet he would not give in. He led a handful of his most gifted sorcerers to the top of the spire. They stormed through the Anhari guardians and reached the Breath of Rukhmar itself.

As the Anhari cut down the intruders, Salavass wove a spell to destabilize the Breath of Rukhmar. It worked, but the result was catastrophic.

A furious explosion erupted from the mechanism, instantly killing most of the arakkoa on the spire and shattering the land. After the light of the blast dimmed, all was dark.

The explosion had split Arak's single spire into numerous smaller stone towers. The surrounding region was left a barren wasteland. In time, it became known as the Spires of Arak. It would take generations for life to bloom in the area again, and even longer for the surviving arakkoa to recover from what had happened.

The Apexis society was no more, but from its ashes new cultures would arise.



THE REBIRTH OF RUKHMAR

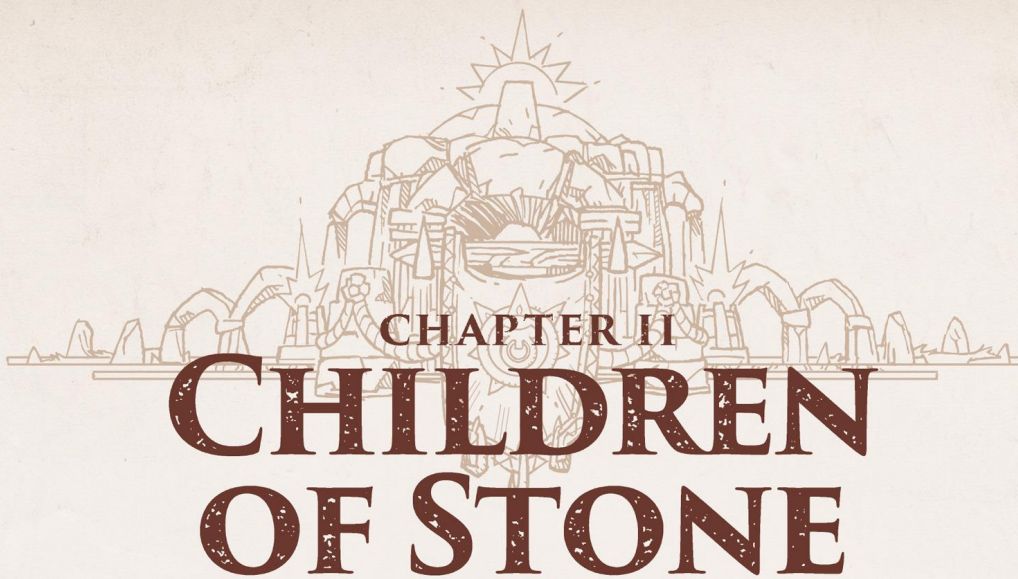
During the height of the Apexis culture, a small group of Anhari priests sought out the remains of Rukhmar. They found her charred bones near the spire, and they used their magics to resurrect the great bird. The Anhari succeeded, but only partially. This new Rukhmar had but a sliver of the original deity's power and intelligence. Nonetheless, the Apexis worshipped her as the goddess reborn. The Anhari infused her with their Light powers, granting the fire bird a long life so she could soar the skies for millennia.



CHAPTER II
**CHILDREN
OF STONE**



PETER LEE 16



CHAPTER II

CHILDREN OF STONE

THE LINE OF GROND

1,200 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

The Apexis empire, while it was still at its height, permanently shattered the power of the Evergrowth. This allowed other races the opportunity to grow, free from the threat of having their burgeoning societies choked away by the primals. Conflict between these emergent cultures and the arakkoa was rare; they did not occupy the same land, nor did they survive on the same resources. The arakkoa soared through the skies, and those on the ground needed not fear them.

But the descendants of Grond did not live peacefully with one another.

By the time arakkoan civilization had fallen, the children of stone had grown in number and spread across the land. Relatively small populations of gronn, powerful and massive giants who towered above the jungles and forests, still roamed the world. They lived in solitude; no place on Draenor could sustain the hunting needs for multiple gronn at once. When they met, they often fought to the death over territory.

Other creatures, smaller in stature than the gronn, came together to form rudimentary societies. The ogron, though brutish, cruel beings, quickly learned the value of working together. Strength in numbers meant the conquest of their rivals. Isolation meant defeat and death. These early tribes warred constantly. The pride of an ogron was easily wounded, and only blood could repay an insult. Most of the world's other races were beneath their notice, save when they could serve as food or slave labor.

Even the races that shared a common ancestry with the ogron were not spared. Ogres and orcs quickly learned to fear the attention of the larger ogron. The best fate a conquered ogre clan could hope for was to be sent into battle as disposable combatants to fight against other ogron tribes. Sick, weak, or elderly ogres were typically offered as living sacrifices to appease the gronn and keep them from attacking ogron territories.

The smallest of Grond's descendants were the orcs, and they stayed far, far away from ogron lands. The largest orc settlement of this time was in a massive cave network beneath Gorgrond. Though it was not a bountiful region, the orcs preferred living a meager—but free—existence to enduring the horrors of life as ogron slaves.

THE GORIAN EMPIRE

1,000 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

In the centuries after the Apexis society collapsed, arakkoa priests and sorcerers had spread across the land, taking with them many of their race's coveted crystal shards.

Small conclaves of Skalaxi arakkoa began searching the land for more of these nuggets of knowledge and power. Some sought personal glory. Some sought to preserve the wonders of their fallen people. Some even believed that a new golden age might emerge if the arakkoa could collect enough of this ancient wisdom and build their society anew.

The Skalaxi leader, Yonzi, learned that critical caches of knowledge were buried beneath the ruins of an Apexis coastal settlement in Talador, a place now occupied by ogron. Attempts to bribe or barter with the ogron rulers ended violently. Though far less intelligent creatures, the ogron were quite formidable when it came to size and strength. The arakkoa retreated, biding their time.

Yonzi and his followers observed the ogron tribe from the sky, searching for opportunities to topple the brutes by force. One quickly presented itself: the ogron's slaves. The ogres, though not as mighty as their barbaric masters, were more intelligent. Most importantly, their enslavement made them angry. Only fear kept them from revolting.

Arakkoa sorcerers began to approach the ogres in secret, offering to teach them the ways of arcane magic. The slaves proved to be excellent students. They were distant descendants of Grond, a creature empowered by the titan Aggramar, and thus they were naturally attuned to the arcane. The Skalaxi were surprised and delighted by this discovery. They had never seen new spellcasting techniques be developed so effortlessly. The ogres held a special affinity for the earth, and they could use arcane power to shape and bend rock and stone to their will.

One of the first ogres to master this new power was named Gog, and the Skalaxi believed he was the perfect leader to inspire a full-scale rebellion. Empowered, Gog strode forth . . . but not to fight the ogron. He had a far more significant target in mind: the gronn, the giant predators whom all ogres revered and feared as deities.

Even the arakkoa were stunned at his ambition, but they couldn't argue with the results. Gog single-handedly struck down a gronn, and the story of his bloody conquest spread among the captive ogres like wildfire. He killed another. And another. By the time he defeated his fifth gronn, whispers of his deeds had reached almost all ogre settlements. Gronn were seen as towering monstrosities, practically gods in stature and power. They could not be killed, not by the likes of an ogre. At least, that was what the slaves had once believed.

Gog's heroics had shattered that belief. If gronn could be slain, what did the ogres have to fear from the ogron?

When "Gog the Gronnslayer" returned to his people, there was no need to spend time convincing the other slaves to revolt. They rose up together against their ogron overlords, igniting a bloody war. There was a catastrophic loss of life on both sides. The arakkoa patiently watched from a distance, eager to claim their crystals from the ogron settlement.

In the end, nearly every ogron tribe fell to their captives. The ogres' thirst for vengeance and their newfound arcane magics were too much to withstand. The ogron who were not torn limb from limb were forced to scatter across the world to escape.

After the ogres cast off the chains of slavery, the Skalaxi sorcerers quietly moved in, searching for Apexis relics and artifacts in the ruins of the city. Gog the Gronnslayer put a quick end to that. As a sorcerer himself, he had no interest in giving away any potential source of power. The ogres had paid for the land with blood. Gog declared himself “Gorgog”—King Gog—and proclaimed that he was ruler of this city. He renamed it *Goria*, the “Throne of the King.” Gog commanded Yonzi and his Skalaxi followers to leave the area on pain of death.

The arakkoa did leave, but not for long. Gog’s actions infuriated Yonzi and his kin, and they decided to take the land by force. In the dead of night, the arakkoa sorcerers launched a surprise attack on the fledgling city of Goria. Gog and his apprentice arcanists fought back, bolstered by the countless ranks of newly freed ogres who saw him as their savior. The king defeated the arakkoa and captured Yonzi. The Skalaxi leader’s death did not come slow.

The tales of Yonzi’s gruesome end at Gog’s hands spread across the land. Despite the promise of undiscovered Apexis crystals, further arakkoan incursions on ogre holdings were few and far between after that.

The Gorian Empire slowly expanded over generations. Though the ogres were not focused on conquest, wide swaths of land fell under their control. Roaming gronn and ogron were hunted down wherever they were found, paving the way for new settlements. Cities sprang up throughout the world’s continents. The two largest were Highmaul, located in western Nagrand, and Bladespire Hold, tucked away in Frostfire Ridge. These cities became highly militant outposts that constantly expanded the ogre empire’s borders. An advanced trade network, crossing land and sea, was established to link Goria with the far-flung strongholds.

Goria itself remained the capital and a distinguished place for apprentices to train in the arcane arts. Apexis crystals became highly prized there, the fragments of arakkoan knowledge eagerly sought by the most learned ogre sorcerers.

The ogres’ practice of sorcery and their exposure to raw arcane magic had some unexpected side effects. Though it was very rare, children would sometimes be born with two heads. It soon became clear that these ogres were astonishingly gifted spellcasters, and their appearance was seen as a good omen. In time, Goria’s arcanists even developed spells to replicate this phenomenon, causing normal ogres to grow a second head, increasing their intelligence and aptitude for magic.



FORMATION OF THE ORC CLANS

800 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

The ogre revolt dramatically altered the hierarchy of survival throughout Draenor. In breaking the power of the ogron and the gronn, the Gorian Empire eliminated the two greatest threats to Gorgrond's orcs. No longer confined to their underground caverns, they forged permanent settlements on the world's surface for the first time in generations.

The population of orcs exploded. Before long, overcrowding became a serious issue, and Gorgrond's scant wildlife was hunted to the brink of extinction. Tensions between families simmered, but before they boiled over into a catastrophic war, many of the orcs migrated out of the region. They did not need a comfortable existence—their harsh life underground had made them resilient and strong—but they needed new land to settle.

The orcs who remained in Gorgrond gradually formed several distinct clans: Blackrock, Laughing Skull, Lightning's Blade, and Dragonmaw. The Blackrock clan lorded over much of Gorgrond. They remained in their ancestral caves, studying the earth around them, developing their knowledge of metallurgy and smithing. The unique blackrock ore scattered throughout the area was difficult to mine and use, but once they learned its secrets, the orcs were able to create astonishing tools and weapons. Blackrock blades were soon coveted for their reliability and durability.

The orcs who migrated east found themselves drawn to Tanaan's lush jungles. The region was filled with primals, and the orcs discovered that their new home was tremendously perilous. Though there was no shortage of wild game, poisonous plants and venomous animals thrived in the jungle. One mistake could lead to a slow, agonizing death. It became commonplace to hear forbidding tales about mighty orcs who were paralyzed by a single snake bite and then dragged away into the wilds by unseen creatures. Moreover, there were dark caves and hollows that seemed to vibrate with sinister power. Sometimes the orcs who tapped into this shadowy essence found glory. Sometimes they found madness.

Tanaan's orc population adopted a savage, superstitious mindset. Those who kept their sanity called themselves the Bleeding Hollow clan. Those who truly lost themselves to the dark impulses of the wilds were exiled. Over time, they formed another, smaller clan: the Bonechewers, so named for their willingness to resort to cannibalism in times of hardship. The two clans were never allies, but rarely were they at war. The jungle was a dangerous enough enemy for both.

The orcs who traveled west of Gorgrond settled in the bleak and icy region of Frostfire Ridge, named for its brutal winters and volcanic activity. Some of these orcs believed they should adapt to the environment. Two clans, the Frostwolves and the Whiteclaws, learned to hunt alongside the region's native wolves, even befriending and training them as companions. Other orcs sought to dominate the land. The Thunderlord clan roamed the frozen wastes in huge packs, often hunting the fearsome gronn. A single kill could sustain them for weeks, but when a hunt failed, the orcs would suffer great hardship.

The orcs who ventured south found the rich, fertile land of Talador. Three clans settled in the region's mountains and plains: the Burning Blade, the Redwalkers, and the Bladewinds.



BLACKROCK CLAN

LIGHTNING'S
BLADE CLAN

Bladespire Hold

WHITECLAW CLAN

FROSTWOLF CLAN

THUNDERLORD
CLAN

LAUGHING SKULL CLAN

DRAGONMAW
CLAN

BONECHEWER CLAN

Throne of the Elements

Highmaul

WARSONG CLAN

Goria

BLADEWIND CLAN

BLEEDING HOLLOW CLAN

BURNING BLADE CLAN

REDWALKER CLAN

Skyreach

SHADOWMOON
CLAN

ORCISH
TERRITORIES

DRAGONMAW CLAN

In the Orcish tongue, the Dragonmaw clan is called Nelghor-shomash, or “Cry of the Beasts.” The clan earned its name after learning to tame the fierce rylaks, winged creatures that hunted on the outskirts of Gorgrond. The Dragonmaw fondly referred to them as nelghor, or “loyal beasts.” When the clan later encountered dragons in the world of Azeroth, it would apply this term to those creatures as well. All orcs would eventually refer to dragons as nelghor. The name of the Dragonmaw clan never changed, but its meaning surely did.



A fourth clan migrated even farther southwest, deep into Nagrand’s open prairies. It was known as the Warsong clan, and its orcs roamed the grasslands like nomads, rarely staying in the same place for more than a few months. The Warsongs had to constantly fight against the Gorian Empire’s ogres to maintain their presence in Nagrand. Some generations of Warsongs thrived more than others. The clan had a taste for battle, but when its warriors provoked the ogres too much, the consequences sometimes proved disastrous.

To the southeast, another clan formed in Shadowmoon Valley. These orcs dwelled far from major Gorian settlements, allowing them to live in relative peace. The Shadowmoon clan became fascinated with the starry sky, and they believed they could glean the future from stellar movements. The region’s orcs were a deeply mystical people, and they developed traditions and rituals centered around astrology and ancestor worship.

THE FIRST SHAMAN

Shadowmoon mystics frequently set out on pilgrimages across the world, hoping to hear the will of the divine. Many of these travelers received strange dreams and visions near the mountains of northwestern Nagrand. Unbeknownst to the orcs, this was the final resting place of Grond. Elemental energies suffused the area, particularly at the base of the mountains. There, the ancient giant’s head formed a small island in the middle of a tranquil lake.

The first Shadowmoon visitors to this place learned about the world’s primordial spirits of fire, air, earth, and water. The orcs treated these beings with the utmost respect, and they named the site of their discovery the Throne of the Elements.

The birth of shamanism among the orcs was a gentle process. These children of stone flocked to Grond’s remains and learned to guide the elemental spirits with open hearts and a sense of harmony. Unlike the ogres, whose ruthless sorcery tore and shaped the earth, the orcs held their power in absolute reverence. And when the elements granted a shaman power, the results were



THE THRONE OF THE ELEMENTS

astounding. Floods could be turned aside. Strong winds could push back arakkoa raiders. No orc had ever seen such miracles. No orc had ever held such ties with the natural world.

The Shadowmoon were the first to dedicate themselves to the elements, and they transformed Grond's head into a crude temple. Soon, they spread their teachings to other orcs, and nearly every clan adopted the practice. Young orcs were raised from birth to be stalwart, steadfast allies of the elemental spirits. When they came of age, these fledgling shaman traveled to the Throne of the Elements to seek the spirits' blessing. They entered trances to attune their minds to the elements. Some orcs were found worthy; others were not.

In the act of reaching beyond the veil of the physical world, a few orcs even found themselves communing with dark forces. These poor souls accidentally glimpsed a realm beyond Draenor—the realm of the Void. What the orcs saw drove them insane. The ones who survived were exiled from their clans and forced to live in seclusion in the caves beneath Nagrand. White skulls were tattooed on their faces, marking them as “dead” to their people.

Those orcs who were welcomed by the elements returned to their clans as respected spiritual leaders. Their counsel was highly valued, second only to the words of the clan chieftain. The bond between shaman crossed clan boundaries, allowing them to mediate arguments and solve conflicts peacefully.

The Shadowmoon clan began a biannual gathering of shaman called the Kosh'harg festival. Soon, this meeting grew to include all orcs. The Kosh'harg became a rare time when the clans could put aside their rivalries, share news, foster ties, and feast in friendship.

TALON KING TEROKK

600 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

Despite the growth and migration of the ogre and orc peoples, no clan or empire ever dared to expand into the Spires of Arak. The broken ruins of the arakkoan civilization were thought to be cursed and haunted, and the winged creatures zealously guarded their holdings.

The arakkoa who still called the region home had become dark, troubled, and superstitious. Though they named themselves the “high arakkoa,” they were but a pale shadow of what their race had once been. The glory of the Apexis empire had long ago faded. Only fragments of its knowledge remained, much of it pieced together incorrectly.

A line of kings ruled over the high arakkoa, sharing power with the remnants of the Anhar order. The priesthood still worshipped Rukhmar, but her teachings had become twisted and distorted by time. The Apexis empire had treated Anzu's sacrifice with reverence, preserving Sethekk Hollow and studying it carefully to learn its shadowy powers. That respect had long since disappeared.

The high arakkoa now used Sethekk Hollow as a place of punishment and execution. Any who disagreed with the Anhari priests were deemed heretics and cast into the region's pools, which were still cursed from the blood of the wind serpent god, Sethe. Most of the unfortunate arakkoa who were thrown into Sethekk Hollow died. The others were deformed and rendered flightless by the dark energies that inundated the area. They became known as the Outcasts, and they were exiled from all high arakkoan settlements.

Confined to the ground, the Outcasts were forced to contend with a cunning predator in the region: the saberon. This intelligent feline race roamed throughout Draenor. After the fall of the Apexis empire, many saberon tribes had migrated to the Spires of Arak. They delighted in hunting Outcasts, who could not escape into the sky. For a time, only these cursed arakkoa were in danger from the saberon.

Then came a saberon tribe that made it a sport to bring down the arakkoa who could still fly. The Bloodmane tribe and its mighty leader, Pridelord Karash, had grown bored with preying on the Outcasts. Karash trained his followers in the use of nets, ropes, and harpoons. The Bloodmane targeted isolated high arakkoa scouts at first, honing their craft without warning those who lived atop the Spires of Arak.

Once he was confident in his tribe's abilities, Karash declared war on the high arakkoa. Bloodmane fighters began ambushing large groups of the winged creatures, slaughtering them to the last. This threw the high arakkoa into disarray; for generations they had imagined themselves immune to threats from any "lower" creatures. The Anhari priests struggled to explain why Rukhmar had apparently withdrawn her favor, and the spires themselves came under siege.

The king of the high arakkoa, Terokk, saw his people falling to despair and knew he needed to take drastic action. Before he committed his soldiers to battle, he launched raids by himself, diving into Bloodmane encampments and eviscerating their defenses before a single one of his subjects was put in danger. He single-handedly turned the tide of the war, inspiring other exceptional arakkoa fighters to follow him against suicidal odds.

After months of whittling away the Bloodmane, Terokk cornered Pridelord Karash and slew him, ending the source of the saberon's tactical brilliance. The war had been won.

The high arakkoa celebrated their king as a living legend, some even declaring that he must be the reincarnation of Rukhmar herself. The Anhari priests grew nervous—until now, only *they* had been allowed to speak in the sun goddess's name. Terokk used his widespread support to build a new city in the clouds. It was known as Skyreach, and it would call back to the accomplishments of the ancient Apexis. Terokk even instituted new laws restricting the authority of the Anhar order, declaring that high arakkoan society must be guided by a thirst for knowledge and wisdom, not by fear and superstition.

That prompted the Anhari to action. In the dead of night, the priests kidnapped Terokk and his daughter, Lithic, and cast them into Sethekk Hollow. The next day, the priests told their people that Rukhmar had withdrawn her favor from the king and cursed his bloodline. They called themselves the Adherents of Rukhmar, and they declared that they were to be the stewards of the high arakkoa's future. Never again would there be an arakkoa king; the priests would jealously cling to control of their civilization until it ended in fire and bloodshed centuries later.

Meanwhile, Terokk struggled to endure his new life as an Outcast. He had survived the fall into the cursed pools, but Lithic had not. The ordeal had left Terokk physically and mentally twisted. Anguished, angry, and alone, he very nearly succumbed to his grief in Sethekk Hollow, but in the darkness, a voice urged him to move forward.

Terokk gathered the other Outcast arakkoa and sought out the source of the mysterious voice. In time, the fallen king understood that he was speaking to the dread raven god Anzu. This astonished the deformed arakkoa—Anzu was revered as a creature long dead, not a being who could still affect the world. The raven god taught Terokk and his followers the secrets of sorcery and shadow magic, giving rise to powerful Outcasts known as talonpriests.

Empowered by Anzu's guidance, Terokk led the Outcasts to ancient Apexis ruins and built the city of Skettis on their bones. This small refuge served as an anchor for their territory. In time, they would assert dominion over the forests near the Spires of Arak, and their lands would become known as Terokkar Forest.

It was a dark, tormented existence. The curse of Sethekk Hollow tore at Terokk's mind, bringing him to the brink of total insanity. He desperately sought a solution to his affliction, resorting to brutal methods to find any cure. When he began to sacrifice his own followers, the talonpriests sorrowfully subdued their leader. They sealed him away in the same realm of shadow where Anzu had once hidden, keeping him alive but protecting the Outcasts from his madness.

In the centuries to come, the Outcasts avoided the high arakkoa. Whenever the Adherents of Rukhmar cast out dissenters and heretics, the talonpriests welcomed them into their society. Slowly, the Outcasts grew in number, until their population rivaled that of the high arakkoa.

DOMINATION OF THE ELEMENTS

403 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

For generations, orc clans lived on the fringes of the Gorian Empire, trading blows over territorial disputes but never committing to all-out war with the ogres. For their part, the Gorians had little interest in (or fear of) the orcs. The ogres focused their efforts on claiming fragments of Apexis crystals and any other sources of power they could find in the world. Some orc clans sought out these artifacts, too, but only because of the lavish prices ogre merchants would pay for them.

Gorian sorcery had reached new heights of power and structure. The entire system of ogre rule and justice had been codified in support of magic and the wisdom of sorcerer kings, called imperators.

Ogres were amused by the orcs' practice of shamanism, seeing the tradition as nothing more than quaint trickery to make the wind blow a little harder or a fire burn a little hotter. It wasn't until ogres witnessed the might of an elder shaman—turning away a flash flood that would have destroyed an orc village—that they began to understand the true power of the elements.

Rather than seeking to learn this power with the same humility and awe that the orcs had, the ogres decided to take it by force. The Gorian leader of this time, Emperor Molok, sent an army into orc territory and claimed the Throne of the Elements for his empire. The incursion enraged the orc shaman, but the clans themselves were not yet stirred to action. The Gorians had not engaged in wanton slaughter; they had simply driven away the orcs.

The ogres eagerly dissected the Throne of the Elements with their arcane spellwork, examining every inch of the site. Unbeknownst to the ogres, this land was the final resting place of Grond, the massive giant empowered by the titan Aggramar.

The Gorian sorcerers never could have imagined the mix of raw titan and elemental power that still lingered in the ancient giant's remains, and their careless experiments were disastrous. One fateful day, the dissonance between the ogres' magic and Grond's residual energies ignited an explosion. The temple the orcs had carved out of the giant's skull was blown apart and destroyed.

The blast killed every Gorian sorcerer inside the structure and left behind only some standing stones that remain to this day.

This act threw the elements out of balance, leading to far-reaching effects. Huge storms lashed across the world, and Draenor's native spirits descended into turmoil.

And yet, the Gorians sent more sorcerers to replace the ones who had been killed. Emperor Molok was not deterred in the slightest. He now had proof of the true power of the elements, and he was determined to claim it for himself.

The tormented elementals cried out to the orc shaman for help. Finally, the clans were moved to act.

THE CLANS UNITED

402 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

At the next Kosh'harg festival, there was no celebration or revelry, only mourning for what had happened to the Throne of the Elements. The clans' shaman struggled together to calm Draenor's native spirits and bring them back into balance, to no avail. Not only were destructive storms raging across the world, but the elementals had been rattled. Within a few seasons, every clan would undoubtedly suffer a famine the likes of which had never been seen, one that might not ever end.

The Shadowmoon clan's elder shaman, Nelgarm, made an impassioned plea to all of the clans to act. The elements were calling for help. The reckless ogre sorcerers were still meddling with the sacred Throne of the Elements. The world itself was on the verge of suffering irreversible harm.

The clans agreed to join together, and Nelgarm called upon the elements to bless this unity with their protection. The orcs marched to war as a single people.

The clans first descended on the Throne of the Elements. Utterly surprised by the attack, the Gorian sorcerers retreated with little bloodshed. Yet Emperor Molok was quick to retaliate. The armies of the Gorian Empire moved en masse, attacking and slaughtering every orc encampment they could find. Total war engulfed Draenor. Now all orcs were targets. Every village and dwelling, every male, female, and child, had to be prepared to fight.

The Gorians imagined that this merciless tactic would strike terror into the hearts of their enemies. They certainly were not expecting the clans to rise to the challenge. Small, mobile groups of orc raiders slowly dismantled the Gorian Empire's network of fortresses and trading outposts, pushing the ogre armies back to their capital city: Goria.





ORC CLANS RALLY FOR WAR

THE SIEGE OF GORIA

400 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

Goria's fortifications were significant, and the orcs saw no reason to waste countless lives breaking them down. They kept their distance on the hills surrounding the ogre city, content to starve out their enemy. The Gorians believed they could outlast any siege; they had ships and an ocean port, which the orcs could only threaten with help from the distressed elemental spirits. Due to the tumultuous state of the elements, the shaman were not as effective in calling on their powers as they once had been.

But as the months passed, the ogres found themselves unable to maintain their empire. They had been wrong in thinking that they could solely rely on trade via the ocean to support their city. It simply wasn't enough. The ogres needed access to their network of land-based trade routes, which the orcs had severed. Emperor Molok and his sorcerers revisited their Apexis crystals, searching for a way to break the siege. In time, they discovered the ancient arakkoan legend about the Curse of Sethe, and they began experimenting with ways to induce a similar affliction among the orcs.

They succeeded. A new affliction called the "red pox" spread like wildfire through the orcs' encampments. This wasting disease was highly contagious, lasted for months, and killed many of the infected. The orcs found their number of healthy combatants dwindling rapidly. After consulting the elements, Nelgarm and his fellow shaman learned that this was not a natural disease; it was an unseen attack from the ogres.

Uncertainty took hold in the clan chieftains as they realized that the siege was now doomed to fail—too many orcs would die before Goria succumbed. And with so many warriors ill, a frontal assault against the city was no longer possible. Time was running out.

Nelgarm and the other orc shaman decided to take a very dangerous step to secure victory: they beseeched the elements to annihilate Goria. Never before had shaman made such a violent request. Yet both the orcs and the elemental spirits understood that Emperor Molok would resume meddling with the Throne of the Elements if the clans failed.

The shaman gathered outside Goria's mighty walls and witnessed the true fury of the spirits. What happened next would never be forgotten.

A roaring storm churned above the city. The ground groaned and trembled. Over the course of hours, lightning and earthquakes brought down every wall and every building inside Goria. Fire enveloped the ruins, sealing off the escape routes and burning the ships in the capital's harbor. When there was nothing left but ash and rubble, the earth itself wrenched open like a giant maw, and Emperor Molok and the remains of his great city were swallowed whole.

Untold thousands of ogres died that day. The elementals let none survive. Only whispers of the event would reach the other Gorian cities and outposts, but those whispers would be enough to discourage any further tampering with the elements.

The orcs stood victorious but not jubilant. They had suffered tremendous losses, and they had witnessed a destructive power they never wanted to see again. Nelgarm and the other shaman were particularly frightened by the elementals' wrath. They said that the need for a unified army had passed and that the clans should go their separate ways.

There was little argument. The clans returned to their lands, but life had changed forever. The red pox never truly disappeared. Every few generations, an outbreak would wreak havoc among the clans.

The Gorian Empire never recovered. The ogres' remaining fortresses—particularly Highmaul and Bladespire Hold—secured their own territories. They would gradually become more akin to individual city-states than a unified nation. The Gorians sought no retribution for the loss of their capital, for they feared what else it would cost them.

With Goria itself gone, ogre territory was far more vulnerable. Many orc clans seized chunks of their enemy's land by force. More and more, orcs surpassed ogres to become the most advanced, dominant race in the world.

That would soon change.

THE EXILES' REFUGE

200 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

Ages before the fall of Goria, events transpired that would one day change the orc race's future . . .

Far from Draenor, Sargeras and his Burning Legion defeated the titan Pantheon. Now nothing could oppose the demons and their quest to destroy all life in the universe. Yet Sargeras needed new allies to continue his work. His ranks of demons were wild, difficult to control. He required lieutenants and tacticians who could help him guide the unruly Legion, and he found them among a highly intelligent race called the eredar.

Led by three wise rulers—Archimonde, Kil'jaeden, and Velen—the eredar had turned their world, Argus, into a paradise that held knowledge and philosophy in high esteem. When Sargeras corrupted these beings, most of them willingly accepted their fate. They reveled in the opportunity to act as the Legion's commanders, and they brought the demonic army into line.

A number of eredar resisted. Velen was the sole leader who did not give himself over to Sargeras. He led other dissidents on a daring escape from Argus—an escape that was only possible with the help of beings known as the naaru. These creatures of the Holy Light were sworn protectors of the cosmos and its inhabitants, and they had foreseen the eredar's corruption.

For thousands of years, Velen and most of the *draenei*—or “exiled ones,” in the eredar tongue—fled from the Legion, seeking a refuge in the cosmos. They traveled between the physical universe and the Twisting Nether aboard a dimensional fortress called the *Genedar*. This naaru-powered vessel could transport the draenei across vast distances.

It had been a dangerous journey. Velen's draenei had successfully evaded almost all contact with the Legion, and the demons had little luck in tracking them. With three naaru aiding the renegades—K'ure, K'ara, and D'ore—the draenei could sense the approach of their hunters. Every time that happened, the exiles would pull up stakes and disappear into the stars.

Velen knew that his people would never have a chance to resist the Legion with force until they found a world to settle. Until then, the *Genedar* was the draenei's only true home.

But traveling through the cosmos required incredible amounts of energy. The naaru's spirits had to bear the burden of this extended journey, and over time, they weakened. As their radiant energies flagged, the *Genedar* threatened to fall apart.

The naaru knew that the time for running had come to an end. They found a world the Legion had not yet touched, and they called on their dwindling powers in a desperate attempt to reach it. Velen and his renegades would name this world *Draenor*, or “Exiles’ Refuge.”

CRASH OF THE *GENEDAR*

The final journey to Draenor was catastrophic. One of the naaru, K’ara, lost touch with its connection to the Light, and Void energies began to consume it. Such was the fate that awaited many of these holy beings. Though Light and Void were opposing forces, they were inexorably linked together. When a naaru was weakened or pushed to the verge of death, its radiant energies would dim. The fading Light would then give way to its polar opposite: the Void.

K’ara’s final act was to convince the draenei to eject it from the *Genedar*. This was not easily done. Void energy now coursed through K’ara’s body, and instinctively, the being went to war against the other weakening naaru. Their energies clashed within the *Genedar*, and the chaos of the battle threatened to kill anyone who interfered. Velen stepped in anyway, using the Light to shield the two naaru from their corrupted kin and cast K’ara away from the vessel. For centuries to come, the darkened being would drift in the skies above Shadowmoon Valley.

Velen’s heroics had saved the draenei, but there were consequences. The battle had injured him and sapped much of his strength, both physically and mentally. His ability to foresee future events became unreliable, and it would take him centuries to fully recover.

The other two naaru were too weak to land the *Genedar* on Draenor safely. The vessel plummeted to the ground, killing D’ore and many of the draenei aboard. When the smoke cleared from the crash site, all that remained of the ship was a crystal mountain.

The draenei who survived emerged from the *Genedar* into a strange new world. The naaru K’ure told them to leave the wrecked ship immediately. The being knew it was decaying much as K’ara had, and it did not want them to be exposed to the Void. Velen and his draenei were truly alone, and as far as they knew, this would be the last world they would ever see.

Velen, injured but unwavering, led his people onward. Their surroundings were vibrant but dangerous, a world filled with many mysteries and wonders. Velen’s first act was to create an order called the Rangari, survivalist scouts who would explore their unfamiliar home in search of resources—and threats—that might impact the draenei’s future.

In time, they found plenty of both.





THE GENEDAR CRASH-LANDS ON DRAENOR

THE COUNCIL OF EXARCHS

Since leaving Argus, Velen had received constant visions of the future from the naaru and the Holy Light, earning him the name “Prophet.” Countless threats had been avoided because he’d seen them coming and guided his people away from the danger. Now the naaru could no longer lead the draenei, and Velen’s injuries made his foresight unfocused, drifting between possibilities and certainties.

His visions had also grown frightening. When he touched the darkened K’ara, he had seen into the mindset of the chaotic, evil creatures that lurked within the Void. Not only could Velen see possible futures, but now he could see the Void’s *desired* futures. It was difficult to distinguish the visions of true calamity from glimpses into the Void’s dreams of a corrupted universe.

Velen decided that it would be disastrous if he were the only leader among his people. His judgment was no longer without fault.

Velen formed a council of sages that would oversee different aspects of draenei culture. The first of these “exarchs” was Naielle, the leader of the newly forged Rangari. She led her followers by example, spending most of her time in the wilds with the other scouts.

The second exarch was charged with guiding draenei engineers—the Artificers—in building armor, weapons, and settlements. Hataaru was tremendously skilled, and he had already learned how to shape Draenor’s raw materials. Among his first creations were arkonite crystals. They served as conduits of arcane energy, which brought light and power to draenei society and also allowed them to build constructs to protect their homes from danger.

The third exarch, Akama, was placed in charge of the draenei Vindicators. As warriors of the Light, Vindicators defended the draenei from the dark forces that lurked in their new home.

The fourth and final exarch was Othaar. The *Genedar*’s naaru were either dead or slowly decaying, but some of their holy energies lingered. The draenei had also recovered D’ore’s remains. They did not yet know whether the fallen naaru was dangerous, or exactly how much of it had been consumed in Void energy. It fell to Othaar to study D’ore and its kin, analyze them, and hopefully learn enough to communicate with the other naaru and draenei beyond Draenor. Othaar became the leader of the Sha’tari, an order dedicated to this cause.

FOUNDING OF SHATTRATH

195 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

The Rangari scoured Draenor for a place to build a permanent settlement. They discovered a prime location that no other creature had settled, a site protected by mountains and with access to the sea.

Unbeknownst to the Rangari, this had once been the ogre city of Gorias. Draenor’s other societies remembered the elemental rage that had consumed it, and none had any desire to resettle that land. The draenei had no such memories, and thus, no such reluctance. Velen led his people there and established the city of *Shattrath*, a word meaning “Dwelling of Light” in the draenei’s tongue. Artificers labored day and night to erect buildings, crystals, and roadways, laying the foundation for the draenei civilization to grow and expand.

As the draenei worked, a strange phenomenon caught their attention. One of the Sha'tari, Maladaar, sensed that something was happening to the souls of draenei who had died in the *Genedar*'s crash. The remains of the naaru D'ore had drifted deeper into a Void state, and they were attracting these spirits. Most shocking of all, once the souls arrived at the naaru, living draenei found that they could communicate with their fallen brethren.

Nothing like this had ever happened before in the history of eredar society. Velen immediately directed Maladaar and a group of Sha'tari to move D'ore's remains to a secluded place. They found a location on the outskirts of Terokkar Forest that was a safe distance from all other civilizations. The Sha'tari then built an immense mausoleum to house D'ore. After they had moved the naaru's remains within the tomb city, the draenei spirits followed.

The site became known as *Auchindoun*, "a Home for the Honored Dead," and Maladaar was named as the fifth exarch on the draenei council. He would lead an order called the Auchenai. Maladaar and his followers would be responsible for communing with the draenei dead and protecting their souls from harm.

THE DARK STAR

180 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

As Shattrath City flourished, Velen urged the draenei to avoid settling too far outside the stronghold. He did not want to disturb the orc and ogre civilizations in the region.

Within a few years, he changed his mind. As the Rangari explored Draenor, they discovered more and more signs that the crash of the *Genedar* had caused serious harm to the world. The impact had unleashed a mix of arcane, Light, and Void energies that were warping the local flora and fauna. Primals and breakers were emerging from their enclaves, fighting openly with whatever creatures they could find. The plant life on Draenor was far more aggressive than on any world Velen and his people had ever visited, and it seemed dangerous to ignore it.

Velen decided that it was the draenei's responsibility to fix what they had broken. Groups of Artificers, Rangari, and Vindicators established outposts and cities across Draenor, linking them to the world's arcane ley lines. The greatest of these new settlements was the Temple of Karabor. Tucked away at the eastern edge of Shadowmoon Valley, it would soon become one of the draenei's holiest and most beautiful sites.

Over time, by using arcane and Light energies, the draenei were able to repair the damage done to Draenor. The primals and the breakers quieted within a few decades, and the harm seemed to be contained.

This expansion brought the draenei into contact with other races. Velen made it clear to the exarchs that he expected his people to avoid conflict with native creatures. But his hopes of keeping the orcs and the ogres free of any ill effects from the draenei's arrival were quickly dashed.

The Shadowmoon orcs had always been sensitive to signs of divine power, and they saw meaning in the movements of celestial bodies. When K'ara's remains appeared in the sky, the clan's mystics called the manifestation the "Dark Star" and worshipped it as a deity.

A few bold shaman tried to access K'ara's shadowy power. Touching the fallen naaru's Void energies shattered their minds. The Shadowmoon soon decided that the Dark Star's power was not meant to be wielded by mortals. Anyone who tried was sharply rebuked, and if they continued, they would be immediately exiled far from Shadowmoon Valley.

OSHU'GUN: "MOUNTAIN OF SPIRITS"

The decaying naaru trapped within the *Genedar*'s crystal wreckage also had an effect on orc society. Just as D'ore's remains had begun attracting the souls of fallen draenei, K'ure began attracting the souls of dead orcs. Once the clans discovered this, shaman made frequent pilgrimages to the crystal mountain, which they named *Oshu'gun*, to speak with their ancestors.

Some of the orc spirits, suffused with Light energies that lingered in the *Genedar*, now had wisdom far beyond what they had known in life. Advice from these ancestors often proved prescient, and clans that obeyed the spirits' words were usually overjoyed at the results.

This turn of events deeply troubled the draenei. Though D'ore's remains were emitting Void energies, all that was left of the naaru was a small part of its original form. Yet K'ure was fully intact, and the dark powers bleeding from it seemed incredibly potent. The draenei did not know what the long-term effects of this would mean for the world or the orcs, and the Sha'tari order's quiet missions to study the *Genedar* yielded no answers.

Every action they could think to take would potentially cause disaster. If the orcs were cut off from their ancestors, they might go to war; if K'ure were to suddenly fall deeper into the Void, there was no telling what horror might result. In the end, the draenei did nothing.

As they feared, K'ure's Void energies would later have detrimental effects on the orcs. When the draenei had crash-landed on the world, a small society of orcs who dwelled under Nagrand had taken notice. This society was composed of exiles who'd been banished from their clans because they had tapped into the Void and lost themselves to madness during their shamanic rites of passage. For generations, these outcasts had gathered in caves below Nagrand, their faces tattooed with the white skull that marked them as pariahs.

The exiles expanded their tunnels under Oshu'gun to investigate the strange newcomers. In time, they tapped into the Void energies that bled from K'ure and seeped into the ground.

Through the study of this power, the outcasts began communing with the void lords. These monstrous entities responded to the orcs, bombarding them with visions of apocalypse and revealing the secrets of using shadow magic. The influx of Void energies would gradually turn the exiles' skin a sickly white, and they would call themselves the Pale.

Apart from creating the Pale, K'ure's dark energies had little immediate effect on the orcs. In the decades that followed, some clans engaged in trade with the draenei, but most kept their distance. It was not uncommon for orc scouts—particularly young and curious ones—to survey draenei settlements from afar.

Some orcs believed the draenei were divine creatures; others did not. No one considered them to be a real threat. As far as the orcs were concerned, the reclusive draenei were not much more than a passing curiosity.

The ogres, however, saw the draenei's isolation as a sign of weakness.



RECLAMATION OF GORIA

100 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

The ogres had been aware of the draenei since the first day they arrived. The blazing ball of fire slamming into the ground had attracted considerable interest, and scouts from Highmaul had kept a close watch on the draenei's expansion across Terokkar Forest.

When Shattrath was first built, there was an explosion of anger within Highmaul. The draenei were newcomers, smaller and weaker than ogres, and yet they were bold enough to build a city on the bones of the Gorian Empire's great capital? It was seen as an unforgivable insult.

And yet Shattrath's sleek construction and otherworldly defenses gave the ogres pause. Nothing like the draenei's technology had ever been seen on this world. Their weakest apprentices had more refined and effective magical techniques than even the most advanced ogre sorcerers.

When a new leader seized control of Highmaul, he declared that he would conquer Shattrath. Emperor Hok'lon, a gifted arcanist himself, believed that the draenei had stolen their power. Perhaps they'd had *some* skill before, but they had built their city atop Goria. Who knew how much hidden knowledge was left beneath the old capital? It had been the greatest center of Gorian power, the place where all apprentice sorcerers had trained.

Hok'lon incited his people to wage war by publicly sneering at the draenei, calling them "usurpers." He promised that Highmaul would become the center of a new, enlightened Gorian Empire once the draenei were slaughtered. The ogres would not even need to rebuild their city. The draenei had already taken care of that. Highmaul's aristocracy threw their support behind Hok'lon, eager to claim the extraordinary new city for themselves.

Though the ogre army that marched on Shattrath vastly outnumbered the draenei, it did not matter. The city's defenses easily repelled Highmaul's first attack. There was never an opportunity for a second.

As the ogres regrouped, Rangari and Vindicators launched surprise attacks from multiple directions, stabbing deep into the ogres' ranks. Akama led an elite force of holy warriors that included two of his greatest followers: Maraad and Nobundo. They found and killed Hok'lon and his generals, leaving Highmaul's forces in disarray. Rather than slaughter the rest of the ogres, the draenei immediately called off their attack and returned to Shattrath.

Velen then appeared on Shattrath's ramparts, wreathed in the scintillating Light. He issued a single statement, his voice rumbling through the heavens: "Go home, and you will not be harmed."

The ogres needed little encouragement. They fled. The grandiose war that was meant to revive the Gorian Empire had fallen after one attack, with an unexpectedly small death toll. The Highmaul ogres never tried a frontal assault on the draenei again.



A DELICATE BALANCE

99 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

Before the ogres' attack on Shattrath, the orcs had seen the draenei as mostly harmless. That was no longer the case.

Word of the swift resolution to the Highmaul aggression spread quickly. The draenei's command of arcane and holy magics was unlike anything the orcs had ever seen, and that unfamiliarity resulted in suspicion. The gathering of the orc clans at one of that year's Kosh'harg festivals was quite tense. Some clans resolved to avoid all contact with the draenei. Others decided to treat them as enemies, vowing to attack the strangers if they ever strayed into orcish territory. The fact that the draenei had taken care to minimize ogre casualties was seen as a weakness. A few orc chieftains speculated that the draenei hated fighting and would shrink away from a worthy opponent.

The Kosh'harg ended with no consensus, just unease. The draenei had never shown aggression toward the orcs, after all. Most clans were content to keep their distance.

Yet the Bladewind clan took a different approach. Since they inhabited the area between Terokkar Forest and Nagrand, they knew of the draenei's favorite trade routes and caravan schedules.

When a number of caravans went missing on a single day, Velen and the exarchs took notice. The burning remains of the traders were soon discovered. Among the draenei dead were orc corpses bearing Bladewind clan tattoos. It was obvious who had launched these raids. Most distressingly, some of the draenei traders were missing; the orcs had taken prisoners.

Many draenei wanted to retaliate. Forcefully. Velen forbade it. He allowed the Rangari to launch covert missions to rescue prisoners, but an offensive campaign against the Bladewind orcs would only lead to calamity. The clan was not large. It would be relatively easy to defeat, but orcs were not known to surrender. The war would not end until nearly all the Bladewinds had died—and then what? Would the other orc clans be cowed? That was not in their nature.

Velen did not want war, but he also knew that the orcs respected bravery in combat. Future caravans were well guarded, often by squads of Vindicators openly displaying weapons that glimmered with the Holy Light. Any orc raiders who confronted the traders were usually defeated. Sometimes caravans fell, and sometimes more prisoners were taken.

The Rangari managed to save a number of draenei prisoners, but not all. These few poor souls were forced into slavery for the rest of their lives. Some of them bore children for their masters. Their half-breed offspring were reviled and scorned by both draenei and orc cultures.

The Bladewinds soon developed a respect for the Rangari and the Vindicators. Raids only took place on lightly guarded caravans or when the orcs were led by the particularly bold (or foolish).



ORGRIM AND DUROTAN

13 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

As the years wore on, a new balance took hold on Draenor between the orcs and the draenei. Blood would be shed on both sides in occasional skirmishes. Yet not all encounters between the two races were violent. An example of this was when two young orcs named Orgrim Doomhammer and Durotan crossed paths with the draenei.

One day, both of these youths would become great leaders. One day, both would change the destiny of the orc race in their own ways.

Orgrim hailed from the Blackrock clan, and Durotan from the Frostwolf clan. They had met at one of the Kosh'harg festivals. As the clan chieftains had discussed current events and trade agreements, Orgrim and Durotan had challenged each other in feats of strength and willpower. Their rivalry had blossomed into a friendship that would last for many years to come.

Though friendship between members of different clans went against longstanding tradition, the Frostwolf and Blackrock elders permitted Orgrim and Durotan to maintain their bond. One summer, the youths met at the border between Frostfire Ridge and Gorggrond. They had been warned not to stray beyond this point, but Orgrim and Durotan were not orcs prone to following the rules.

They set out into the thick forests of Terokkar, where they were attacked by an enraged Highmaul ogre. Orgrim and Durotan were strong, but they could not match the ogre's might. The brute descended on the youths, but he never had the chance to kill them.

Rangari scouts had been tracking this ogre, who had strayed deep into draenei lands. The Rangari emerged from the woods and felled the brute with their arrows. The draenei hunting party's leader, Restalaan, admired Orgrim's and Durotan's bravery, yet he knew they were in great danger from other ogres who were prowling the forests. He offered a safe haven in the nearby settlement of Telmor.

Orgrim and Durotan were wary of the draenei, but they accepted the offer. They had never been inside a draenei settlement. Few orcs had. They were shocked by the draenei's hospitality, but even more so by the wondrous technology and craftsmanship of Telmor.

Orgrim and Durotan's arrival in Telmor was also fortuitous for the draenei. Velen was in the city to meet with Restalaan. After hearing of the two newcomers, he requested an audience with them. Of late, Velen had been experiencing strange dreams of the orcs, in which he saw them united and marching for war. In some of these visions, the Prophet also saw a great shadow slowly creeping over Draenor.

Due to his lingering injuries, Velen was not sure whether these premonitions had any truth to them, but he was determined to find out. While meeting with Orgrim and Durotan, Velen observed the two orcs carefully. Yet he did not find any darkness stirring in their hearts. Much to the contrary, the youths seemed proud and honest.

Under Velen's orders, Rangari scouts escorted Orgrim and Durotan back to the borders of Gorggrond. Their stay in Telmor had been short, but the two youths had learned much about the draenei. They returned home with tales of the hospitality that had been shown to them, and of the extraordinary sights they had seen.

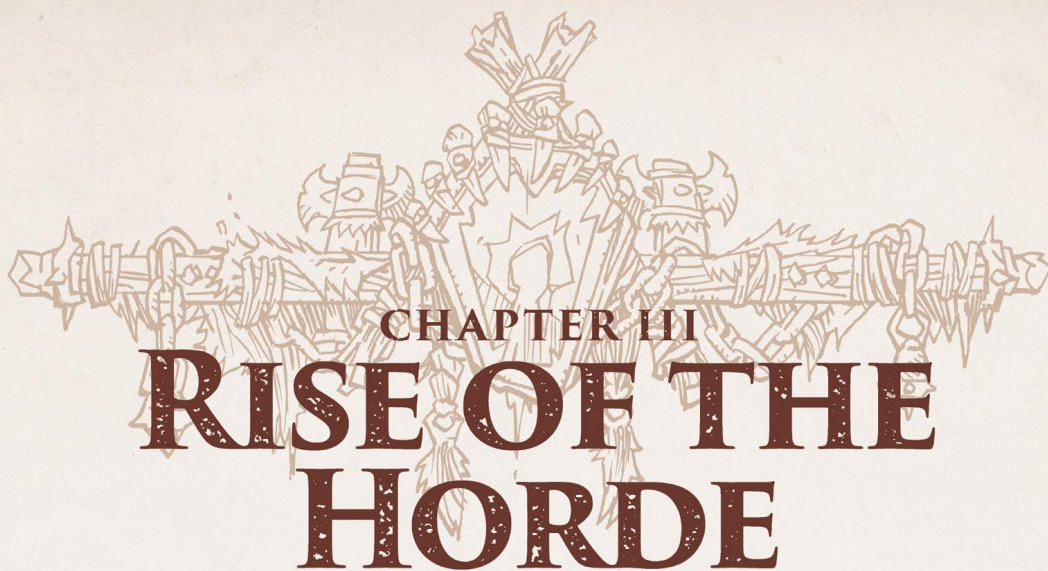
This event would mark one of the last peaceful encounters between orcs and draenei.





CHAPTER III
**RISE OF THE
HORDE**

PETER LEE 16



CHAPTER III

RISE OF THE HORDE

THE SECOND INVASION OF AZEROTH

For millennia after the draenei fled Argus, Sargeras and his Legion continued their Burning Crusade. Demons laid waste to countless worlds, burning entire civilizations from existence.

Yet there was one world that turned the Legion back. *Azeroth*.

Azeroth was an extraordinary place. It contained a nascent titan spirit, one destined to become more powerful than Sargeras himself. The Legion's ruler knew that if it fell to the void lords, Azeroth would become a weapon that not even he could stand against.

Sargeras was eager to conquer Azeroth before the void lords shrouded it in darkness. To do so, he launched a massive invasion of the world. Demons of all kinds flooded into Azeroth, slaughtering its inhabitants and inundating the wilds with fel magic. The War of the Ancients had begun.

Then the impossible happened. Led by a noble race called the night elves, Azeroth's native creatures overcame the invading Legion and banished it back to the Twisting Nether.

The defeat infuriated Sargeras. He became obsessed with seizing Azeroth at any cost, and he plotted a second invasion. Many challenges faced the Legion's ruler, not the least of which was bringing his demons to the world again. It was no simple task to open portals between the Twisting Nether and the physical universe that were large enough and stable enough for armies to pass through. It required astronomical amounts of energy.

In the first invasion, the Legion had harnessed the power of Azeroth's Well of Eternity. This enormous fount of arcane magic allowed the demons to craft a gateway to the Nether. Yet the Well of Eternity was now gone, destroyed by Azeroth's defenders. Finding another way to breach the world was not impossible, but it would take time and great effort. What was more, Sargeras wanted to be certain that when the Legion did invade, it would face no heavy resistance. He wanted Azeroth's inhabitants to be broken before his demons set foot on the world.

An idea took shape in Sargeras's mind. He and his Legion would find new weapons that they could use to soften Azeroth's defenders before a proper demonic invasion force arrived. Sargeras ordered his followers to scour the universe for suitable races to corrupt and add to the Legion's ranks.

Meanwhile, the fallen titan focused his attention on Azeroth itself. He sought out a powerful individual there, someone who would serve as a vessel to begin the next invasion.

THE SECOND WELL OF ETERNITY

Though the Well of Eternity was destroyed, not all of its energies were gone. A night elf named Illidan Stormrage had stolen some of the fount's water. With it, he created a new Well of Eternity.

Sargeras and his Legion would eventually learn of its existence, but they would not be able to use this new source of power as easily as they had the first Well of Eternity. The second fount was capped by Nordrassil, a colossal World Tree enchanted to protect the Well's energies.



THE LONG HUNT

12 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

While the Legion was bolstering its strength for the next invasion of Azeroth, Kil'jaeden the Deceiver tasked a demon named Talgath with hunting the draenei. He visited dozens of worlds that the renegades had momentarily touched, but he was always one step behind his prey. After a series of failed attempts to capture the draenei, Talgath finally found evidence of their whereabouts.

When the *Genedar* crashed on Draenor, the impact had sent waves of holy energy surging through the Twisting Nether. Talgath sensed this influx of power and investigated the strange phenomenon. His anticipation swelled as he realized that these energies had come from the naaru, the same ones who had helped Velen and his renegades escape Argus.

For more than a century, Talgath tracked the contrails of holy power, until he reached the lush world of Draenor. He steeled himself for yet another disappointment, expecting to find that the draenei had once again slipped through his fingers. But this time was different.

As he observed Draenor, Talgath saw the fledgling draenei civilization. Not only had they settled on the world, but their dimensional fortress lay in ruin. They were trapped.

Talgath communed with Kil'jaeden and told him what he had found. The discovery of the draenei greatly pleased the demon lord. He had once been great friends with Velen. When the Prophet and his renegades had fled from Argus, Kil'jaeden saw it as a betrayal of trust, a grave insult that required punishment. At long last, the demon lord could make good his desires.

Kil'jaeden commanded his servant to remain hidden and report on what he learned of Draenor. Talgath relayed information about the draenei and their way of life to Kil'jaeden, along with details of the orcs and the world's other indigenous races.

Though Kil'jaeden wanted to destroy the draenei outright, he stayed his hand. Sargeras had specifically tasked him and the Legion's other commanders with finding new races to incorporate into their armies. Perhaps the orcs could serve that purpose.

For the time being, Kil'jaeden ordered Talgath to continue watching Draenor and its inhabitants. The demon lord had much yet to learn about the orcs and their customs.

AN AGE OF LEGENDS

11 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

Talgath spent time observing the orcs and their ways. The demon found that the creatures were incredibly resilient, and many were prone to violence. Though he watched all of the clans, he devoted his attention to those that held the most power and influence among their race. These included the Warsong, Blackrock, Bleeding Hollow, Shadowmoon, Thunderlord, and Frostwolf clans.

In Nagrand, constant battle with the Highmaul ogres had shaped the Warsongs into fearsome nomads. A warrior named Grommash Hellscream led the clan. The Highmaul outnumbered the Warsongs, but that did not stop the clan's bold chieftain from leading attacks against the ogres. Hellscream's highly mobile wolf riders swarmed across Nagrand's plains, using hit-and-run tactics to raid ogre settlements. Grommash and his people eventually shattered Highmaul's hold on the region, seizing much of it for themselves. They pushed the ogres back within the walls of their stronghold, and the Warsong chieftain became a legend among the clans.

This was only the beginning of the Highmaul's woes. The ogres had a long history of enslaving orcs. For entertainment, they forced their captives to fight each other in brutal arenas. One slave known as Kargath led an uprising in Highmaul. He tore off his own hand to escape his chains, and he challenged his fellow slaves to do the same. Those who did joined Kargath as he rampaged through the city and spilled the blood of his masters.

Kargath and these former slaves established a new clan called the Shattered Hand, and they settled in the Spires of Arak. Slavery had changed these orcs into a twisted and embittered people who knew only pain and torment. Kargath and his followers adopted bloody traditions of self-disfigurement and scarification. They attached weapons to the ends of their severed limbs, and Kargath himself earned the name "Bladefist" for starting this practice.

North of the Shattered Hand territories lay Gorgrond, home of the Blackrocks. Their leader, Chieftain Blackhand, commanded enormous respect from orcs across the world. Though he was arrogant and power hungry, he was also a charismatic leader and a great fighter. His mighty soldiers would follow their chieftain to the ends of Draenor without hesitation.

The Blackrocks boasted the largest, most organized, and best equipped orcish military in the world. The clan's shaman had perfected the art of using elemental fire to shape blackrock ore, a rare metal found in Gorgrond. The Blackrocks worked their forges day and night, crafting enchanted weaponry and armor that were nearly indestructible.

Like the Warsongs, the Blackrocks had long clashed with local ogre populations. By the time Talgath began observing Blackhand and his followers, the orcs had crushed their brutish enemies and driven most of them from Gorgrond.

The Bleeding Hollow were much different than other clans. The highly superstitious orcs dwelled in the remote corners of Tanaan Jungle, where they practiced dark rituals. The Bleeding Hollow faced many threats, from botani and genesaur to ogres and arakkoa. These enemies had pushed the clan to the brink of extinction before a new leader came to power: Kilrogg Deadeye.

Before becoming chieftain, Kilrogg had undergone a rite of passage to see the future. He gouged out his eye and was granted a vision of his own death. The gruesome ritual did not trouble Kilrogg. He lived his life without fear, for he knew the exact day of his demise.



CHIEFTAIN BLACKHAND MAKES WAR ON THE OGRES

Kilrogg murdered his father to take control of the ailing Bleeding Hollow clan. Under his leadership, the orcs stormed through the jungles and eradicated their old enemies.

Talgath was intrigued to find that not all clans were so warlike. The Shadowmoon were relatively peaceful orcs. They were a spiritual people who inhabited Shadowmoon Valley, and many of their traditions revolved around shamanic practices. The clan's shaman frequently traveled to the Throne of the Elements to commune with the world's elemental spirits. They also revered the orcs' dead ancestors, calling on them for advice.

The wise chieftain Ner'zhul guided the Shadowmoon. He was respected by every clan, a rarity for the fragmented orc race. Ner'zhul acted as an advisor to all shaman, and he helped foster and maintain the loose bonds shared among the different clans.

Then there were the Frostwolves, whom Talgath saw as an enigma of sorts. The clan lived in a rugged corner of the world known as Frostfire Ridge. The Frostwolves were exceptional fighters, but they did not seek to dominate the land. They lived in harmony with it. Chieftain Garad embodied the Frostwolves' noble ideals of family and community. He believed that only by helping each other and standing united could the orcs survive in their harsh environment.

Garad pressed his values onto his three sons, but not all of them accepted his teachings. The chieftain's two youngest children, Ga'nar and Durotan, idolized their father and the clan's ancient traditions. The eldest son, Fenris, was different.

Fenris abandoned the Frostwolves and joined their rivals, the Thunderlord clan. Unlike the Frostwolves, the Thunderlords valued acts of bravery and valor above all others. They often embarked on dangerous adventures to kill Frostfire's mighty gronn and magnaron. Fenris earned the renown he so craved, and he would eventually become the chieftain of the Thunderlord clan.

For a number of months, Talgath continued watching the clans, specifically those that dwelled in Frostfire Ridge. Tensions were increasing between them and the local Bladespire ogres. The demon wanted to see how far the orcs would go to secure peace for themselves.

THE MOK'NATHAL UPRISING

Highmaul never recovered from the battles with the Warsongs and Kargath's slave uprising. The ogres' hold on Nagrand was broken forever. This turn of events greatly troubled the Bladespire and their leader, Imperator Kelgrok. Ogre influence was waning across Draenor. The imperator was determined to retain control of Frostfire Ridge. Rather than simply shore up the Bladespire's defenses, Kelgrok sought to expand. And he had the perfect weapon to do so.

Ever since the fall of the Gorian Empire, the ogre population had remained relatively low. To make up for their lack of numbers, Bladespire sorcerers had conducted cruel experiments to create new creatures whom they could use to fill their labor force. The most promising results came from selective breeding between ogres and enslaved orcs.

The children of these forced unions were called mok'nathal. They possessed the strength of ogres and the intelligence of orcs. The Bladespire kept the mok'nathal in chains, and they bred them together to create even more servants. To maintain loyalty from the half-breeds, the ogres threatened to kill entire families if even one of their members rebelled.

Imperator Kelgrog unshackled many of the mok'nathal and ordered them to make war on the orcs. They would form the bulk of the Bladespire's army.

The Bladespire forces rampaged across Frostfire and seized large tracts of resource-rich land from the orcs. Chieftain Garad called upon the region's two other clans—the Thunderlords and the Whiteclaws—to unite with the Frostwolves against this new threat.

Due to Fenris's influence, the Thunderlords rejected Garad's call for unity. They decided to deal with the Bladespire in their own way. Teams of Thunderlord orcs raided ogre settlements in the dead of night, slaughtering young and old alike.

Yet the Whiteclaw clan did embrace Garad's request for help. They felt an affinity toward the Frostwolves, with whom they shared many customs and traditions.

Garad was declared leader of the Frostwolf and Whiteclaw army. He named his sons Ga'nar and Durotan as his lieutenants. With a formidable force now under his command, the chieftain struck at the Bladespire. The orcs didn't win any decisive victories, but they did capture a number of mok'nathal and their elder, Leoroxx.

When Garad met with Leoroxx, he was surprised by what he learned from his enemy. The Frostwolf chieftain had always assumed that the half-breeds served the ogres willingly. From Leoroxx, he learned of the mok'nathal's cruel treatment at the Bladespire's hands, and the specter of execution that constantly hung over their families. After much discussion, Garad and his prisoner came to an agreement. They would help each other destroy the Bladespire forever.

Leoroxx returned to Bladespire Hold and incited open rebellion among the mok'nathal. The half-breeds rose up against their oppressors and set fire to the stronghold. As pillars of smoke billowed into the sky, Garad and his army smashed into Bladespire Hold's outer defenses.

The Battle of Bladespire dragged on for a full bloody day before the allied orc and mok'nathal armies drove the ogres from their fortress. In the heart of the burning stronghold, Leoroxx strangled Imperator Kelgrog with the chains that he had worn for so much of his life.

The orcs had won, but at great cost. Hundreds of Frostwolves and Whiteclaws had died in battle, including Ga'nar. He had sacrificed his life, helping many young mok'nathal escape the besieged fortress. Ga'nar's death broke his father's heart. Though Durotan remained to carry on the family line, the Frostwolf chieftain would never recover from losing his second son.

After the battle, Chieftain Garad offered Leoroxx and his people land in Frostfire to make a new home. The elder mok'nathal declined, knowing the orcs would never truly accept half-breeds.

Leoroxx gathered his fellow mok'nathal and settled in a remote corner of Gorggrond. Resources were scarce, but they would be able to live in peace. They disavowed fighting and swore to take up arms only to defend their meager lands from threats.



HARBINGER OF THE LEGION

10 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

From Talgath's observations, Kil'jaeden learned much of the orcs. They were a resilient, proud, and mighty race. They were also superstitious creatures who engaged in ancestor worship and honored the world's elemental spirits. Kil'jaeden believed that these strong traditions would make the orcs easy to manipulate. If he could bend them to his will, he would use them to enact vengeance on the draenei before incorporating the orcs into the Legion.

Talgath was infuriated when he learned of Kil'jaeden's plans. The renegades were finally in his grasp. He had not endured millennia of hunting the draenei just so the primitive orcs could spill their blood. He demanded that his master reconsider.

Kil'jaeden would have normally repaid such insubordination with death, but he understood Talgath's anger. Still, the demon lord would not allow such disobedience to go unpunished. He ordered Talgath to leave Draenor. Kil'jaeden's servant would play no part in the draenei's downfall.

With Talgath gone, Kil'jaeden focused on corrupting the orcs. He needed an agent from their race to follow his will, and he carefully searched for someone whom he could sway to his side.

Kil'jaeden found many suitable candidates, but none held as much potential as Gul'dan. He'd been born with physical weaknesses into a small clan at the edge of Gorggrond. The superstitious orcs saw Gul'dan's twisted form as an ill omen, and they eventually exiled him.

Only the clan's elder shaman took pity on Gul'dan. He told him to seek out the Throne of the Elements in Nagrand, where he might find his purpose in life from the native spirits.

At first, Gul'dan rejected the shaman's advice. Years of being treated with disdain had made him bitter and vengeful. But after struggling to survive alone in the wilds, he sought out the Throne of the Elements. Gul'dan reached the holy site a shadow of what he once was—a pitiful orc wasted away by hunger and pushed to the brink of death. He fell to his knees and cried out to the spirits, proclaiming he would serve them if it meant an end to his suffering.

The elements answered, but not in the way Gul'dan had hoped for. The spirits sensed the darkness and fury in the orc's heart, and they rejected him just as his clan had.

Gul'dan's sorrow overwhelmed him. Everything in this world had abandoned him. He had nothing. He *was* nothing.

Kil'jaeden reached out to his desperate prey and whispered in his mind. He promised to make Gul'dan so powerful that no one would ever pity or dominate him again. The orc would become like a *god*, and he would punish all who had wronged him. In exchange for this power, Gul'dan would help the Burning Legion use the orcs as a weapon to destroy the draenei.

Gul'dan agreed to this shadow pact. He had no love for his own people, only disdain. Their customs and traditions had caused his suffering. If attaining godhood meant manipulating the orc race, he would not hesitate to do so.

Kil'jaeden instructed his new servant in the ways of fel magic. The demon lord knew that these energies would physically change the orc or even draw the draenei's attention, so he took steps to hide Gul'dan's new abilities. Kil'jaeden taught the orc how to mask his powers, and he ordered him to use fel magic only when absolutely necessary. Gul'dan took to the volatile power faster than expected. He reveled in the destructive might at his fingertips.

So was born the first orc warlock.

THE BLIGHTING OF DRAENOR

Kil'jaeden had an agent among the orcs to do his bidding, but the conditions were not yet right to turn them against the draenei. He needed the entire orc race to be desperate and plagued by dark emotions, so much so that they would be easy to unite as a single force.

From what Gul'dan told him of Draenor's past, Kil'jaeden learned of a time when the orcs had joined as one. Long ago, ogres had sought to dominate the Throne of the Elements. Their meddling had thrown the elemental spirits into turmoil, leading to hardship. Fearing calamity, the orcs had banded together to fight the ogres. If Kil'jaeden could re-create that elemental upheaval, perhaps the clans would repeat history.

Kil'jaeden guided Gul'dan, helping the orc inundate the Throne of the Elements with fel magic. Just as planned, the corruptive power began to weaken the world's native spirits. Draenor's Elemental Furies—Gordawg, Aborius, Kalandrios, and Incineratus—materialized to stop Gul'dan. Yet they had never faced a warlock before. The orc called on his strange magics to draw the life from the Furies, crippling their strength. He nearly destroyed them before they fled before his wrath.

It was the first time in Gul'dan's life that he had dominated other living creatures. The victory was intoxicating.

Gul'dan's fel magic threw the elements into disarray. As the seasons passed, long droughts were followed by heavy rain. Floods devastated arid regions in Gorggrond and parts of Nagrand. Freak snowstorms blanketed portions of Tanaan Jungle and Terokkar Forest in ice. Rivers and streams dried up, which caused game like clefthoof and talbuk to die by the thousands.

Disease, water scarcity, and the loss of food sources led to immense suffering among the orcs. The shaman could offer no relief. The elemental spirits were tormented by fel energy, and they rarely communicated with the orcs anymore.

Gul'dan also used his magic to spread the red pox among the clans. This outbreak was the worst in orcish history. Months passed, and hundreds perished from the virulent plague.

Many of the victims contracted the pox during one of the orcs' Kosh'harg festivals in Nagrand. Led by Chieftain Ner'zhul, the clans met to discuss the current elemental troubles. As the Kosh'harg ended and the orcs began their journeys home, some displayed signs of the pox. The afflicted included Chieftain Garad of the Frostwolf clan.

Ner'zhul feared that these orcs would spread the pox to new victims. He urged Garad and the other plague bearers to remain in Nagrand. They would construct a new village to house the affected and keep them away from greater orc society.

Though the thought of not returning home filled Garad with great sorrow, he saw the wisdom in Ner'zhul's words. The last thing the Frostwolf chieftain wished for was to spread the pox to his family and clan members. Garad remained in Nagrand, and he took charge over his fellow plague victims.

Durotan volunteered to stay behind with his father, but Garad gave him other orders. The young Frostwolf was the sole remaining heir to the clan. Garad convinced Durotan to return home and look after their people for the time being.

It was the last time Durotan would ever see his father. In a matter of weeks, the red pox consumed Garad. Though he had led the other pox victims for only a short time, he had earned their eternal respect. They named their settlement Garadar in his honor.

NER'ZHUL'S SHADOW

8 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

Violence and desperation were spreading among the clans. Kil'jaeden sensed that it was almost time to unite the orcs, but he needed a public figure to do so. Gul'dan, for all his talents, could not inspire his people or lead them by example. The demon lord commanded his servant to ally with someone who could. But first, Gul'dan would need to exterminate anyone who knew of his past.

The hooded warlock returned to his old clan. He engulfed the settlement in fel fire, burning every single orc within to ash. When the inferno finally died down, nothing remained. No one would ever know of Gul'dan's true history.

With his past erased, he set out for the Shadowmoon clan. Its wise shaman commanded respect from all orcs. One of them would serve as the Legion's perfect pawn.

Gul'dan was careful to hide his fel powers, never revealing that he was a warlock. He told the Shadowmoon that ogres had destroyed his village and killed everyone except him. Though it was uncommon for a clan to bring outsiders into its fold, the Shadowmoon took pity on Gul'dan and accepted him. The newcomer carefully observed the clan's elder shaman to learn which one would be the easiest to sway. After much consideration, he chose the clan's charismatic yet troubled chieftain, Ner'zhul.

Ner'zhul was a dedicated and forthright leader. He also had a penchant for dogged persistence. Once he had a goal in mind, he would pursue it obsessively until he succeeded.

This trait would serve Gul'dan and the Legion well. But far more important were Ner'zhul's inner turmoil and sorrow. Years ago, the shaman's beloved mate, Rulkan, had passed away. Ner'zhul had come to terms with her death, but the recent elemental troubles that plagued Draenor had awakened old wounds. He had always found peace through communing with the elemental spirits, but now they were silent. Ner'zhul began dwelling on memories of Rulkan, and his grief became just as raw and crushing as it had been when he'd first lost her.

Gul'dan preyed on Ner'zhul's inner darkness. He told the elder shaman of his own troubles, of the family and friends he had lost at his village. In time, Gul'dan won Ner'zhul's friendship and trust. He even convinced the elder to accept him as his shamanic apprentice.

Through Gul'dan, Kil'jaeden had access to a public figure whom he could bend to his will. As the demon lord began to twist Ner'zhul's thoughts, he sent Gul'dan on another task. The orcs were desperate and agitated, and now they needed to see the draenei as their enemies.

Gul'dan would make it so.



THE SEEDS OF HATRED

To incite conflict between the orcs and the draenei, Gul'dan turned to the Bladewind clan. Its largest village was at the edge of Terokkar Forest, near the draenei capital, Shattrath. For many decades, tensions had simmered between this community of Bladewinds and its neighbors. The orcs sometimes ransacked draenei caravans and enslaved or killed anyone who could not escape.

When the elemental spirits became erratic, the Bladewinds suffered greatly. Their water sources went dry, and the wild game they hunted died off. The red pox also decimated the clan. Nearly seventy percent of the Bladewinds succumbed to the disease.

The Bladewinds were desperate, and that made them vulnerable.

Gul'dan approached the Bladewind village as a representative of the Shadowmoon. After many long discussions with the orcs, he convinced them that the draenei were responsible for the red pox and the world's elemental woes. Gul'dan assured the Bladewinds that if they were to spill draenei blood, such an act would appease the elemental spirits.

Like all orcs, the Bladewinds held the Shadowmoon shaman in high regard. They had no reason to question Gul'dan. They embraced his advice, eager to change their fortunes.

Lightly armed Bladewind raiding parties soon gathered and assaulted draenei caravans in greater numbers than ever before. The orcs murdered dozens of innocents and took just as many prisoners. One of these captives was Leran, the sister of a Vindicator named Maraad.

When Maraad learned that his sister had gone missing, he urged the draenei leadership to take action. Many other Vindicators also called for something to be done. The Bladewinds had preyed on their traders for too long. It was time to eliminate the threat once and for all.

Velen appealed for calm. Something did not sit right with the Prophet. In the long years since the *Genedar's* crash, he had slowly regained his ability to see the future, but his visions remained unreliable. Strange images bombarded his thoughts, many of them indecipherable.

Yet there were a few that concerned him. Around the time of the Bladewind attacks, he saw visions of an immense shadow looming over the orcs, guiding their actions.

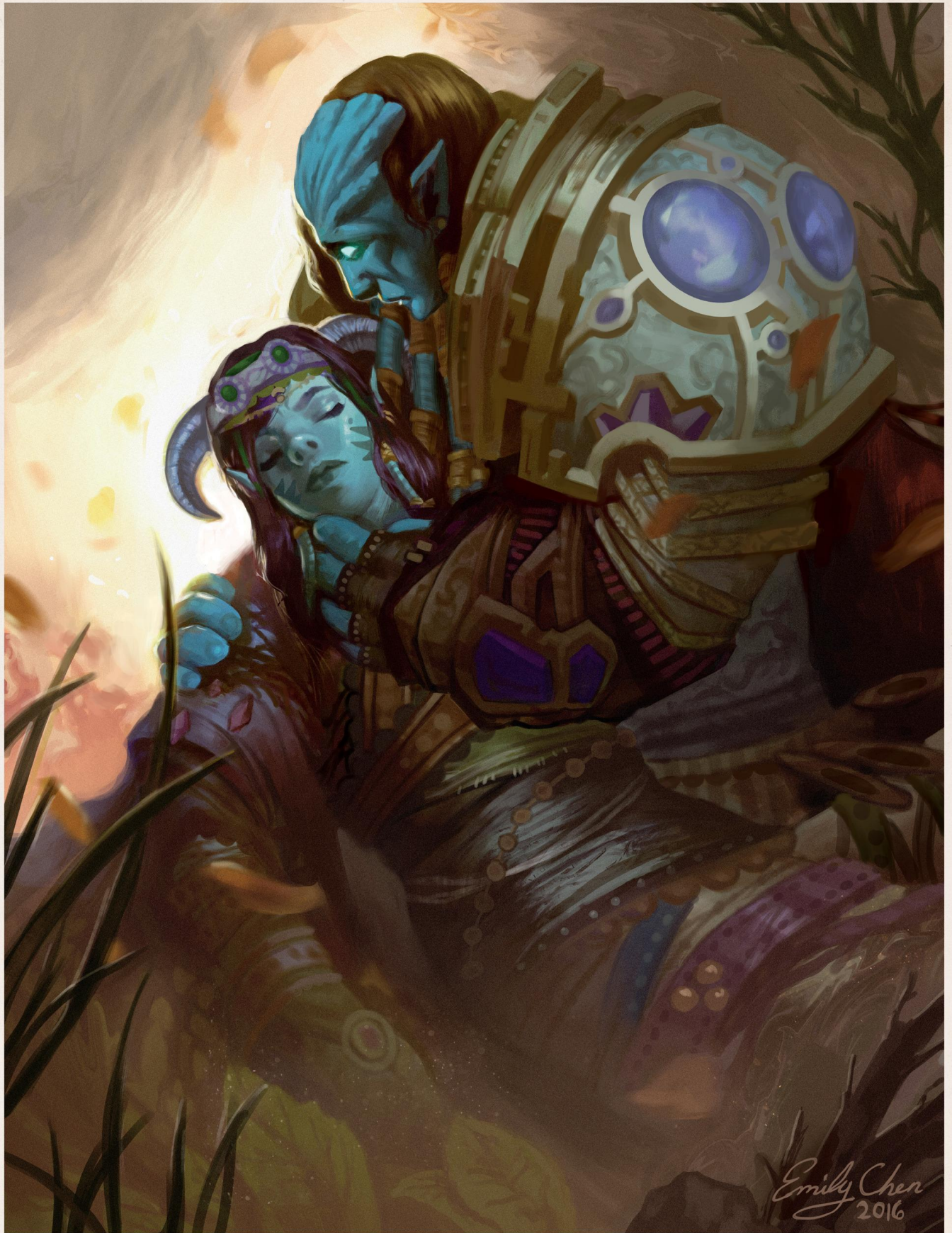
Velen and the exarchs sent the Rangari to report on the Bladewinds' activities and discern whether some unseen power was at work behind their violent outburst. The draenei scouts found no evidence that the orcs were being manipulated, but they did return with horrific stories. The Bladewinds were slaughtering their prisoners in gruesome rituals to appease the elements. Only a few captives had not yet suffered this grim fate, and Leran was among them.

Maraad could stand by no longer, not when there was still a chance to save his sister. He made an impassioned plea to Velen and the exarchs to launch an offensive against the orcs. Reluctantly, the draenei leadership agreed.

Led by Maraad, a small force of Vindicators and Rangari stormed the Bladewind village. By the time they reached the settlement, Leran and the other captives were dead. The sight of his sister's mutilated body enraged Maraad, and he rampaged through the village.

From a distance, Gul'dan watched as violence engulfed the Bladewind settlement. The orcs were so desperate to appease the elements that they fought until nearly every single one was dead. A few survivors fled east toward Shadowmoon Valley, but they never reached their destination.

Gul'dan murdered the survivors so that they could never tell of what had truly happened in Terokkar Forest. Only the warlock's version of events would survive.



MARAAD DISCOVERS HIS SISTER IN THE BLADEWIND VILLAGE

After returning to the Shadowmoon clan, Gul'dan recounted the atrocity as he saw it. The draenei had launched an unprovoked slaughter against the Bladewinds. They had murdered male and female, young and old. Word of the bloodshed spread throughout the clans.

The seeds of hatred and suspicion toward the draenei took root.

WHISPERS FROM THE DEAD

As Gul'dan was orchestrating the attack against the Bladewinds, Kil'jaeden preyed on Ner'zhul's emotions. He appeared in the orc's dreams as the spirit of his beloved mate, Rulkan. This false apparition told Ner'zhul that the recent flare of red pox and the elemental turmoil were all the work of the draenei. The reclusive race sought to eradicate the orcs.

Ner'zhul was initially wary of Rulkan's dire proclamation. Conflicts between orcs and draenei were not unheard of, but they were rare. Ner'zhul had never known the creatures to be warlike. When Gul'dan arrived with news of the Bladewind atrocity, Ner'zhul changed his mind.

Rulkan had been right. The draenei were not what they seemed.

Rulkan's spirit pressed Ner'zhul. She told the orc that the only way to save his people was to make war on the draenei. Yet the clans could never accomplish such a feat in their current state. They needed to unite as a single army as they had centuries ago, when the Gorian Empire had threatened their existence. Rulkan convinced Ner'zhul that he was destined to be the savior of the orcs. No one else had the wisdom to lead the clans as one.

Ner'zhul revealed to his clan what he had learned from Rulkan. The superstitious orcs rarely went against the advice of important ancestral spirits. Rulkan's warning was taken as truth. The Shadowmoon lent their support to Ner'zhul, Gul'dan the most vocal among them.

Ner'zhul sent an urgent summons to the other clans. They were to meet at Oshu'gun, where the shaman would reveal ill omens he had received from the ancestors.

In preparation for this event, Kil'jaeden exerted his power over Oshu'gun, preventing any orcs from communing with the real ancestral spirits within the crystal mountain. He also reached out to the minds of elder shaman across Draenor. Just as he had done with Ner'zhul, he took on the guise of trusted ancestral spirits and warned the orcs of the draenei's violent intentions.

FORGING THE HORDE

Over a number of weeks, the orc chieftains gradually arrived at Oshu'gun. Grommash Hellscream, Kilrogg Deadeye, Kargath Bladefist, Blackhand, Fenris, and other famed leaders took their places in the crystal mountain's shadow.

The Frostwolf chieftain, Durotan, was there as well. He had come with his mate, Draka, and his clan's elder shaman, Drek'Thar. For Durotan, the meeting at Oshu'gun was a rare opportunity to speak with his old friend Orgrim Doomhammer, who had become Chieftain Blackhand's second-in-command. In recent years, clan responsibilities had prevented them from meeting regularly.

As Durotan and Orgrim rekindled their bond, the elder shaman Ner'zhul finally appeared to address the assembled orcs. He told them of Rulkan's prophetic warning about the future and of

other unsettling things he had learned. The draenei were responsible for the elemental unease and the red pox outbreak. Their slaughter of the Bladewind clan's main settlement was only a precursor, a sign of more death to come. The draenei sought to annihilate *all* orcs.

Yet there was still hope to avert doom. If the clans put aside their differences and joined forces, they could destroy the draenei and save the world.

Ner'zhul knew this was much to ask of the orcs, a race unaccustomed to unification. He gave the chieftains a full day and night to consider his words.

The orcs debated the elder shaman's proposal deep into the night. Warmongering chieftains like Grommash, Blackhand, and Kargath supported unification. Ever since news of the Bladewind massacre had reached them, they had become wary of the draenei.

Yet others were not so eager for bloodshed. One of the most outspoken critics of war was Chieftain Zagrel of the Whiteclaw clan. He did not believe slaughtering the draenei would make life better. On the contrary, it might anger the elements even more.

Durotan was of a similar opinion. Years ago, he and Orgrim had crossed paths with the draenei and taken shelter in one of their cities. The orcs had even met and spoken with their mysterious leader, Velen.

Would those same peaceful creatures make war on the orcs? What did they hope to gain by doing so? Had their earlier hospitality merely been a ruse to learn more about his race?

Though he felt conflicted, Durotan was in no position to question the ancestral spirits' wisdom. If they saw the draenei as a threat, so it was. Other shaman, including Drek'Thar, revealed that they, too, had received visions from the ancestors that confirmed Ner'zhul's claims.

As discussion continued, Gul'dan stalked among the clan leaders. He knew that the other orcs considered him a weakling due to his physical ailments, and he used that to his advantage. He openly championed Ner'zhul's cause, and he welcomed the prospect of war. In doing so, Gul'dan made the choice of uniting a matter of honor. If even a wretch like him was willing to fight and die for the clans, then anyone who rejected unity would be seen as a coward.

Gul'dan's manipulations won many of the orcs to Ner'zhul's side, but not everyone. He took note of Zagrel and others who stubbornly opposed unity. He would not forget their names.

At dawn, the orcs came together to cast their votes. Nearly every chieftain agreed to unite.

From that day forward, they would be known as the *Horde*.

THE DOOMHAMMER PROPHECY

Orgrim bore a weapon known as the Doomhammer, which had been passed down through his family for generations. An ancient prophecy was associated with this legendary artifact. It was said that the last of the Doomhammer line would use it to bring salvation and then doom to the orcs. Afterward, the weapon would pass into the hands of an orc not of the Blackrock clan. This new wielder would then use the Doomhammer for a cause of justice.



THE PROPHET'S DILEMMA

7 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

In the months after the Horde's formation, the clans rallied their warriors and began sporadic attacks against draenei hunting parties. News of these battles quickly reached Velen and the Council of Exarchs. The draenei leadership was puzzled by the sudden flare of bloodshed, but it did not come as a complete surprise.

Velen and his followers assumed that the elemental turmoil was agitating the orcs, driving them to violence. After all, that was what had happened with the Bladewind clan. The misguided orcs had sacrificed draenei captives in the hopes of appeasing the elements.

At Velen's behest, draenei emissaries tried to make contact with the clans. All attempts to do so were either ignored or met with open hostility. When Rangari scouts reported that the orc clans were uniting into a single army, Velen and the exarchs knew the time for diplomacy had passed. They would need to defend themselves against the battle-hungry orcs.

Rather than launch offensives at the orcs, the draenei leadership decided to defend their holdings. The draenei did not yet know that the Burning Legion was manipulating the clans. Velen and the exarchs considered the orcs victims of the world's natural disasters and elemental upheaval, just like every other living creature on Draenor.

Exarch Akama, leader of the Vindicators, was charged with organizing the defenses. He dispatched his followers to different draenei settlements across the world. Meanwhile, Artificers constructed new defenses in major cities such as the Temple of Karabor and Shattrath.

Velen himself occupied his time with unraveling what was causing the elemental turmoil. The thought had crossed his mind that the Legion might be responsible, but he had found no evidence of demons on Draenor.

Nonetheless, Velen kept his attention on the stars in the event that the Legion did appear. He wouldn't realize until it was too late that the demons already had a presence on the world.

THE BENEFACTOR

Ner'zhul watched the war against the draenei unfold with growing apprehension. He had followed Rulkan's advice, but what good had come of it thus far? The orcs were devolving into a bloodthirsty people. Of even greater concern was the state of the elements. After the attacks on the draenei began, the world's elemental spirits had gone completely silent.

Kil'jaeden sensed Ner'zhul's anxiety, and he acted to retain his hold on the shaman. One night, the false visage of Rulkan again graced Ner'zhul's dreams. The spirit told the shaman of powerful beings who could help the orcs triumph over the draenei and bring balance to the world. Ner'zhul urged Rulkan to call on these potential allies.

The next night, one of these beings made contact. Kil'jaeden appeared to Ner'zhul in the form of a radiant elemental entity. He told Ner'zhul to push the Horde to victory before the draenei could muster a defense. Kil'jaeden promised that in doing so, Ner'zhul would please the elements.

Though Ner'zhul was initially in awe of this new benefactor, his unease deepened. Kil'jaeden was eager to annihilate the draenei, and he wanted the orcs to slaughter their victims without

mercy. The benefactor seemed particularly obsessed with killing the one known as Velen. Ner'zhul had never before communed with a spirit who was so violent.

Also, ever since Kil'jaeden had begun speaking with him, Rulkan had disappeared. Ner'zhul needed her guidance now more than ever. He secretly embarked on a journey to Oshu'gun, hoping to reestablish contact with his dead mate and glean advice from the other ancestral spirits.

Unbeknownst to Ner'zhul, Kil'jaeden was aware of his plans. The elder shaman was not the leader the demon lord had hoped he would be. Kil'jaeden commanded Gul'dan to gather allies who could help him control the Shadowmoon clan, since they could no longer rely on Ner'zhul.

Gul'dan met with a young but highly respected Shadowmoon shaman named Teron'gor. To win the orc to his side, the warlock showed him the might of fel magic, which he claimed was a higher form of shamanism. Teron'gor had spent too long trying and failing to call on the elements for aid. After experiencing fel magic for the first time, he knew he'd found a means to make a difference in the world, a means to help his troubled race.

Teron'gor was only the first Shadowmoon shaman to become a warlock. Slowly, Gul'dan won other shaman to his side. Whatever noble intentions these orcs once had faded with the influx of fel energy. The corruptive magic twisted their thoughts and darkened their hearts.

They became loyal to Gul'dan alone.

THE BREAKING OF NER'ZHUL

As Gul'dan trained his warlocks, Ner'zhul reached Oshu'gun. He called out to the ancestors, his force of will so strong that he broke through the unseen barriers that Kil'jaeden had placed around the sacred mountain. A storm of ethereal voices howled in the shaman's mind. Among them was his mate, Rulkan.

This was not the guise assumed by Kil'jaeden. It was the real Rulkan. The spirit revealed that Ner'zhul had been used. The draenei were not the enemy. Kil'jaeden was. He was not concerned with saving the orcs. His goal was to corrupt them. With Gul'dan's help, Kil'jaeden had coerced Ner'zhul into forming the Horde and igniting war against the innocent draenei.

Rulkan and the other ancestral spirits then turned their backs on Ner'zhul. Their silent condemnation crushed the elder shaman, for he knew that there was nothing he could ever do to win back their favor. For the spiritual orcs, such a fate was worse than death.

Shame flooded through Ner'zhul. The ancestors were right to disavow him. He had been a fool, delivering the orcs into the hands of evil without even realizing it. His head bowed and his heart heavy, he skulked back to Shadowmoon Valley to decide what he would do in the days ahead. At the very least, he believed he could find ways to sabotage whatever Gul'dan and Kil'jaeden planned for the orcs.

He would never have that chance. Before the chieftain reached Shadowmoon Valley, Gul'dan and his new followers apprehended him.

Many of the warlocks called for Ner'zhul's death, but Gul'dan did not indulge them. Kil'jaeden had given his servant specific orders regarding the elder shaman. The demon lord wanted Ner'zhul to watch what would become of the orc race. Kil'jaeden also had practical reasons for keeping the elder shaman alive. Ner'zhul had been the one to lobby for war against the draenei. If he suddenly disappeared, it would raise suspicion among the other clans.

In the weeks and months to come, Gul'dan and his warlocks would constantly abuse Ner'zhul and treat him as little more than a slave. The elder shaman feared death, and he became too weak and timid to disobey his masters. He would gradually fade from the public eye, and his usurpers would become the voice of the Shadowmoon clan.

THE BLACKROCKS ASCENDANT

6 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

While Gul'dan betrayed Ner'zhul, the orcs continued their war against the draenei. The clans crushed small outposts across the world, but they were not as successful with seizing larger settlements. The draenei's defenses were mighty, and their armies worked in unison.

The orcs were quite the opposite. Rival chieftains like Blackhand and Grommash Hellscream often argued over battle tactics. These disagreements ignited fighting between the clans. They were a Horde in name only.

Kil'jaeden was well aware of this. He had watched the war unfold with growing displeasure. Gul'dan yearned to take Ner'zhul's place and control the Horde, but the demon lord denied him the opportunity. As useful as the warlock was, he couldn't serve as a leader. His strength lay in subterfuge and manipulation—activities best performed in the shadows.

The orcs needed a true leader. They needed a *warchief*.

Kil'jaeden's voice thundered in Gul'dan's mind. He commanded the orc to find another leader for the Horde. Without one, the clans were doomed to crumble and fall to the draenei. Though Gul'dan was furious that his master would not allow him to rule over the Horde, he obeyed. The warlock's lust for power was second only to his fear of Kil'jaeden.

Gul'dan knew of only one orc with the strength and confidence to exert control over the Horde: Chieftain Blackhand. Of all the clans, his Blackrocks had been the most successful against the draenei. If they led the Horde, they could impose their strict military discipline on the other orcs. The Blackrocks could also use their elemental forges to arm the clans and create massive war machines to destroy the draenei's defenses.

Gul'dan met with Blackhand and urged him to take up the mantle of warchief. If he did, the warlock promised to grant his clan otherworldly strength. Not only would Blackhand's shaman wield power again, but his soldiers would become mightier than those of the other clans. Blackhand himself would be remembered as the greatest orc leader who had ever lived.

The warlock knew it would take more than promises to win Blackhand's support. Gul'dan trained some of the Blackrock clan's shaman in the ways of fel magic. He also taught these new initiates how to magically increase the number of soldiers in their clan. The warlocks flooded adolescent orcs with fel power. The influx of magic caused the orcs to grow rapidly and gave them the strength of adult warriors. But another consequence was the psychological effect this technique had. The fel energies warped the young orcs' minds and left them prone to sudden outbursts of violence.

Regardless of the drawbacks, Blackhand was astounded by the results. He ordered the warlocks to transform his young sons, Dal'rend and Maim, into "proper soldiers."

Seeing Gul'dan as a useful ally, Blackhand agreed to lead the Horde. The warlock vowed to create a clandestine order to help them watch over the orcs and maintain control. This group would be known as the Shadow Council, and Blackhand would be one of its members. What Gul'dan did not reveal was that his trusted Shadowmoon warlocks would form the inner circle of this secretive order, and they would owe their loyalty to him and him alone. Blackhand's inclusion in the Shadow Council was merely a tactic used by Gul'dan to trick the warchief into thinking he would hold authority over all aspects of the Horde.

Distrust festered between Gul'dan and Blackhand, and for good reason. They saw each other as a means to an end. Gul'dan intended to use Blackhand as a puppet ruler. Through the Shadow Council, the warlock would control the Horde and its destiny. Meanwhile, Blackhand was no fool, and he assumed Gul'dan would seek power for himself. He was confident he would not be used by the warlock. To the contrary, he would use Gul'dan to secure his place in orcish history.

THE SHADOW COUNCIL

While Blackhand renewed the orcs' offensive against the draenei, Gul'dan formed his Shadow Council. Its initial members were the first Shadowmoon warlocks, including Teron'gor. Individuals from other clans also joined the order. They were sworn to secrecy and warned not to betray the Shadow Council's existence or purpose to *anyone*.

Gul'dan inducted more than just orcs into the secret order. He sought out powerful individuals across Draenor. The two who would prove most effective were Garona and Cho'gall.

Garona hailed from the Bladewind clan. Her father had been a great orc warrior, and her mother had been a draenei prisoner. Garona was not the first half-breed born into the clan, but she was one of the few who survived past childhood. Years of abuse had forged Garona into a ferocious fighter. Apart from natural physical strength, she also possessed a keen intelligence and a gift with tongues. She had mastered the draenei's language from other Bladewind captives, and her clan had often used her as an interpreter.

After the draenei destroyed the main Bladewind village, Garona fled into the wilds of Terokkar. She had worked her way east before running across the Shadow Council. While some of the warlocks viewed Garona as an oddity, Gul'dan saw great potential in her.

Gul'dan sympathized with Garona to win her trust—he knew well the pains of living as an outcast. Once the half-breed put down her guard, the Shadow Council struck. Gul'dan and his warlocks called upon their dark power to ensorcell Garona and use her as an assassin.

Cho'gall served a much different role than Garona. As a two-headed ogre, Cho'gall was treated as an omen of good fortune. He had lived a life of privilege in Highmaul, where he tutored under the most talented ogre sorcerers. Cho'gall had a natural affinity to the arcane arts. He gained an immense following among Highmaul's common ogres, but not among the city's aristocracy.

Cho'gall's arrogance and lust for power put him at odds with the ruling elite. High-ranking ogres feared that his growing popularity would allow him to seize control of the city. To prevent that, the aristocracy tried to assassinate Cho'gall. The ogre mage narrowly survived the attempt on his life, and he fled from Highmaul.

THE NECROLYTES

With Kil'jaeden's help, Gul'dan also formed a group of orcs called necrolytes. They dedicated themselves to learning the dark art of necromancy. Through it, they would be able to spread plagues to the draenei and raise the dead to fight at the Horde's side.



Cho'gall thirsted for vengeance, but he knew it would not come unless he acquired more power. As he searched the world for knowledge and weapons, he came across the Shadow Council and its fel magics.

Gul'dan was intrigued by Cho'gall's unfettered confidence and insatiable lust for power. He made the ogre mage his foremost apprentice, and he taught him the secrets of fel magic and told him of the Burning Legion's existence.

Though Cho'gall pledged his loyalties to Gul'dan, he was prepared to break them at any time. The ogre mage wanted only power, and he was not interested in the ideologies Gul'dan spouted concerning demons and the Legion. The moment Gul'dan and the Shadow Council ceased being useful, Cho'gall was prepared to turn his back on them.

BLADE OF THE SHADOW COUNCIL

Though Gul'dan had won Blackhand's support, he knew the other clans would not accept the Blackrock chieftain as their warchief. Not yet. He dispatched his Shadow Council agents to the orcish territories, spreading word of Blackhand's mighty deeds. They claimed that his shaman had discovered new power and tapped into a force even greater than the elements. Many orcs grew intrigued by these mysterious stories, and they looked upon Blackhand with awe.

During their journeys, the Shadow Council agents also spied on the clans. They took note of those orcs who opposed the Horde, and they relayed this information back to Gul'dan. There was one orc in particular who drew the warlock's ire: Chieftain Zagrel of the Whiteclaw clan. He had called on the clans to end their pointless war with the draenei and focus their attention on shamanic rituals. Zagrel believed that only through dedicated worship and adherence to old traditions could the orcs rekindle their relationship with the elemental spirits.

If he were given enough time, Gul'dan feared that Zagrel could win the support of orcs who questioned the Horde—orcs like Chieftain Durotan and his Frostwolves. The warlock would need to deal with the Whiteclaws' troublesome leader quickly, and he had the perfect weapon.

Gul'dan ordered Garona to strike down Chieftain Zagrel. The ensorcelled half-orc could not resist his commands. As silent as a shadow, she slipped into the Whiteclaws' encampment and



THE SHADOW COUNCIL LORDS OVER NER'ZHUL

stabbed Zagrel through the heart. None of his clan would ever know she'd been there. After their leader's untimely death, inner turmoil crippled the clan as Zagrel's brothers and sons battled for the title of chieftain. The Whiteclaws would endure, but they would never be as strong as they had once been.

Chieftain Durotan was already growing wary of the war against the draenei. Zagrel's demise only deepened his unease. It was not a mere coincidence that the Horde's most vocal opponent had died. Yet Durotan had no proof of who had murdered the Whiteclaw chieftain. Had it been one of his power-hungry kin, or had it been the work of some other, unseen force?

THE FIRST WARCHIEF

5 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

With Zagrel eliminated and respect for the Blackrock clan on the rise, Gul'dan called a meeting of the chieftains and their shaman at Oshu'gun. The time had come to nominate Blackhand as the Horde's leader, but the warlock had one last ploy to secure support for the new warchief.

Gul'dan preyed on the fears of the shaman at Oshu'gun. They had begged and groveled to the elements for years to no avail. Now they needed to face the harsh truth: the world's feckless spirits had abandoned the orcs. Yet Gul'dan said there was still hope for the shaman. He proclaimed that the Blackrocks had restored their strength with a glorious new power.

Its name was fel magic, and it was the orcs' only hope of saving themselves from the draenei.

Gul'dan claimed that benevolent beings had taught the Blackrocks how to wield this magic. They were eager to secure victory for the orcs. Yet Gul'dan never revealed the name Kil'jaeden to the clans, nor did he speak of demons. Not even Blackhand knew about the Burning Legion. Only Gul'dan's most loyal Shadow Council agents were aware of the full truth.

The Blackrock warlocks demonstrated their magics on captive draenei, siphoning the prisoners' life essence and burning them from the inside out. Having been powerless for so long, the shaman pleaded with the Blackrocks to share the secrets of their fel might.

Even Drek'Thar of the Frostwolves beseeched Durotan for permission to learn this magic. Though plagued with suspicion about fel magic and its seemingly corruptive properties, the chieftain gave his blessing to Drek'Thar. To deny his shaman such power would be to put the Frostwolf clan in a place of weakness. Durotan would not allow that to happen.

Drek'Thar was only one of many shaman to embrace fel magic. Orcs from all clans tutored under Blackrock warlocks. It was just as Gul'dan had planned. The Blackrocks and their chieftain were seen as the masters of fel magic, and they were treated with immense reverence.

As the shaman basked in the strength of fel magic, Gul'dan addressed the orcs once again. He warned that the draenei were mobilizing their defenses. If the clans did not work together, they would surely lose the war, even with fel magic at their command. What the orcs needed was a single leader to oversee military operations—a *warchief* to command the chieftains.

And who would be better to fill such a role than Blackhand, who had led his clan to victory after victory against the draenei?

Some chieftains saw Blackhand as a rival, but none could deny his power. He held the secrets of fel magic. He had also transformed his clan into an unstoppable war machine. If the chieftains named Blackhand their leader, perhaps he could do the same for their clans.

In the end, the vote was unanimous. Durotan himself begrudgingly cast his lot with Blackhand, whom he saw as a tyrant. The Frostwolf chieftain feared that if he were the only voice of dissent, he and his clan would face dire consequences from the Blackrocks.

The Horde now had a fierce and unbending leader: Warchief Blackhand. Under his guidance, the orcs would no longer fight in disarray. They would strike with purpose and precision. They would grind the draenei to dust and sweep their remains from the world.

For the ancestors. For the clans. *For the Horde.*

THE DRUMS OF WAR

Warchief Blackhand set out to unify the clans and forge the Horde into a proper fighting force. He ordered his Blackrock masons to construct a new capital in western Tanaan Jungle. This imposing stronghold would become known as the Citadel. It would act as neutral ground for the clans, a place where chieftains could meet and strategize about battles to come.

The Citadel would also house the Horde's warlocks. Within the fortress, they could hone their abilities and tutor apprentices in the ways of fel magic. Gul'dan and his Shadow Council would use the Citadel as their new headquarters. Very few orcs would know of this, not even warlocks outside of the order. The Shadow Council would blend in with the stronghold's other inhabitants, secretly watching over them and reporting all that they saw to Gul'dan.

As masons laid the Citadel's foundations, Blackhand instituted new rules to structure the Horde. Thus far, the clans had launched attacks against the draenei with reckless abandon. Blackhand would not stand for such disorder in his ranks. He knew the strengths and weaknesses of the clans, and he gave them each a specific role in the Horde.

The smallest and most mobile clans would act as scouts, raiders, and auxiliary forces that could quickly move from one region of the world to another. These clans included the Bleeding Hollow, the Dragonmaw, the Shattered Hand, the Thunderlords, the Shadowmoon, and the Bonechewers.

Blackhand also formed a new clan called the Black Tooth Grin. Composed of soldiers handpicked by the warchief himself, it would serve as the scouting arm of the Blackrock clan.

The rest of the clans made up the Horde's main fighting force. They would lead direct assaults on draenei settlements, and they would form the backbone of the orcish army. Chief among these clans were the mighty Blackrocks, Warsongs, and Frostwolves.

At first, not all clans accepted Blackhand's orders willingly. Many orcs bristled at the thought of an outsider commanding them in battle, even one who bore the title of warchief. Blackhand won the support of some orcs with offers of power, but more often than not, he relied on violence to secure their obedience. The new warchief was a tyrant, and he did not accept insubordination. Not from his own clan. Not from any member of the Horde.

Blackhand publicly executed anyone foolish enough to speak out against him. He threatened entire clans with annihilation should they try to resist his will. With the Blackrock clan at his

disposal, the warchief had the power and means to make good such threats. Begrudgingly or not, the clans gradually accepted Blackhand's rule and settled into their roles in the Horde.

To maintain order and discipline in his armies, Blackhand surrounded himself with mighty lieutenants. The greatest of them were Eitrigg, Orgrim Doomhammer, and Varok Saurfang. Each of these orcs would have made a successful chieftain in his own right.

Orgrim and the other lieutenants oversaw the Blackrock war machine as it churned to life. Smiths slaved away at their forges in Gorggrond day and night. Plumes of thick smoke blotted out the sun. The Blackrocks crafted thousands of new weapons, armor, and siege engines for the clans.

THE PRICE OF FEL MAGIC

For Warchief Blackhand, armaments were only one part of his plan to strengthen the Horde. To increase the number of soldiers at his disposal, the warchief offered ogres and mok'nathal a place in his armies. He also sent his most powerful warlocks to the other orc clans. They would use their fel magics to imbue adolescents with the strength and fury of adults.

Nearly all of the orc chieftains embraced this new technique, seeing it as a way to bolster their clans' forces. Durotan was the exception. The thought of subjecting young Frostwolves to the warlocks' strange magics unsettled him, but he had no choice. Blackhand had made it clear that anyone who resisted his command would suffer, as would their entire clan. Durotan placed the safety and security of the Frostwolves above all else. Before his eyes, the Blackrock warlocks flooded his clan's youths with their green magic, warping them into hulking, bloodthirsty warriors.

This brutal empowerment technique was not the only thing that troubled Durotan. The rampant use of fel magic was changing the orcs. Their brown skin was becoming splotchy and green.

Though Durotan didn't know the exact cause, he suspected that the warlocks' magics were to blame. The shift in skin color was a dire sign. It only affirmed his belief that the power wielded by the orcs had sinister origins.

The rest of the orcs were not troubled by this transformation. If a change in skin color was the price they had to pay for fel magic, so be it.



THE TWILIGHT'S HAMMER

While the Horde was rising, the Pale flourished in catacombs beneath Nagrand. Generations ago, this society of exiles had tapped into the Void energies emanating from K'ure, the decaying naaru contained within Oshu'gun. Their dark power rivaled even fel magic in potency.

Rumors of the Pale and their otherworldly abilities eventually reached Gul'dan. Though the warlock paid little heed to the stories, Kil'jaeden was intrigued. The demon lord pressed Gul'dan to ensure victory over the draenei at any cost. That meant investigating the Pale and determining whether their magic could strengthen the Horde.

Gul'dan sent his apprentice Cho'gall to learn more about the Pale. If the exiles proved as mighty as the rumors claimed, he commanded the ogre mage to bring them into the Horde.

Cho'gall threw caution to the wind and stormed into the Pale's underground caves. The ogre mage expected a fight, but he found none. The Pale did not resist his intrusion. They were eager to share their prophecy of doom, which they called the Hour of Twilight. The Pale saw this as a time when shadow would envelop the universe and snuff out all life in existence.

Cho'gall had little interest in this Hour of Twilight. Far more intriguing to him was the Pale's shadow magic. He had never experienced its like, and he knew it would serve as a potent weapon for the Horde.

To win the exiles to his side, Cho'gall used their beliefs to his advantage. He claimed that the Horde was a means to an end—a weapon by which they could bring about the Hour of Twilight. The Pale reveled in this opportunity to serve as agents of apocalypse. They committed themselves to the Horde and formed a new orc clan known as the Twilight's Hammer.

As he learned to master shadow magic, Cho'gall also began to see truth in the Pale's prophecy. It would take him many years, but the ogre mage would eventually devote himself to their quest.

THE DYING WORLD

4 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

Under Warchief Blackhand, the Horde launched a coordinated offensive against minor draenei settlements and outposts across the world. Armed with mighty siege engines and new weapons, the orcs toppled their enemy's defenses and razed stronghold after stronghold.

As these battles progressed, draenei morale foundered. It was not the defeats alone that wore away at their spirits, but the startling revelation that the Burning Legion was influencing the orcs.

The signs were now all around the draenei. Some orcs had become warlocks, and their rampant use of fel magic was taking its toll on Draenor. Forests were dying. Streams and rivers were drying up or becoming polluted with foul energies.

No one was more shocked by this than Velen. His ability to reliably foresee the future had almost returned, but it did not matter anymore. The discovery that the orcs had become tools of the Legion had taken the draenei by surprise.

Velen and the exarchs long debated what to do. They had no means of escaping Draenor. Their only chance of survival was holding off the Horde's onslaught and hoping the Legion did not follow up with a full-scale invasion.

The draenei leadership knew they could no longer defend their outlying settlements from the Horde. They ordered their forces to withdraw to Shattrath and the Temple of Karabor. Fortifying these two cities became their most pressing goal.

The draenei were not the only ones to notice the effect of fel magic on Draenor. For years, these energies had dampened the power of elementals and thrown them into turmoil. Yet as the warlocks' magic began killing Draenor, something changed in the world's native spirits. They rallied together, vowing to destroy the orcs and stop their desecration of the land. The elementals pooled their dwindling strength and fused into a single mighty being.

Its name was Cyrukh the Firelord, and it would shatter the Horde forever.

CYRUKH AND THE BREAKING OF THE ELEMENTS

After much of Draenor had fallen under the orcs' control, Blackhand commanded the clans to gather near the Temple of Karabor, the spiritual heart of draenei society. The assault would be the largest ever conducted by the Horde thus far. Blackhand believed that by destroying Karabor, the orcs could break the draenei's morale. This would then make conquering the heavily fortified capital, Shattrath, all the easier.

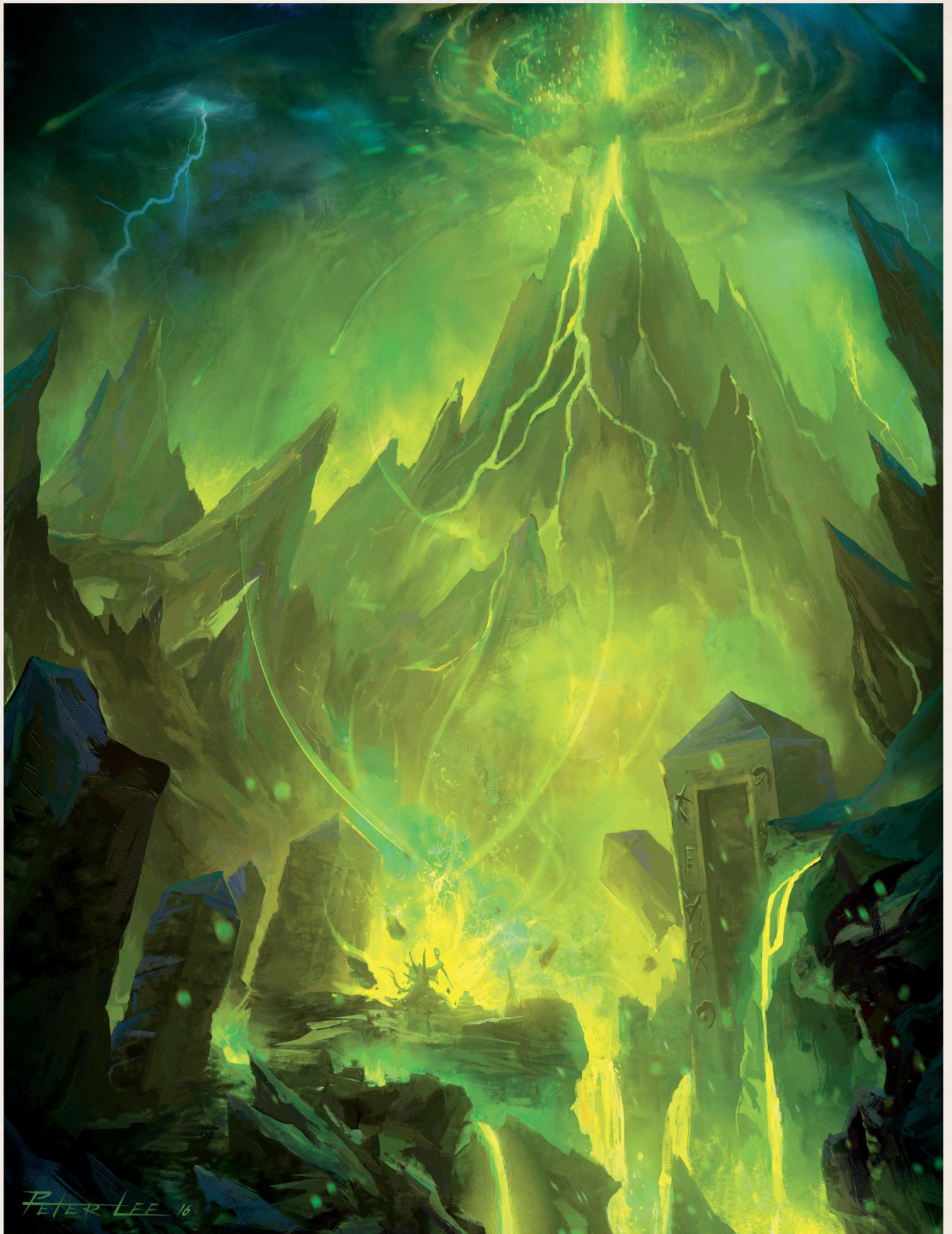
The Horde met little resistance as it approached Karabor. All seemed well as the orcs camped near a volcano outside the temple. Then, without warning, the mountain erupted in fire.

Cyrukh took form in the heart of the volcano. The Firelord unleashed his elemental wrath on the orcs, and a roaring firestorm swept down the mountain and tore through the Horde's ranks. Cyrukh's appearance stunned and terrified the orcs, especially former shaman. Many of them saw the attack as a sign that they had angered the elements by embracing fel magic.

Gul'dan scrambled to forestall catastrophe. If the warlocks abandoned the Horde, the orcs would never conquer the draenei. In Cyrukh, Gul'dan saw a golden opportunity. The elements had gathered all of their power in one place. They had made themselves *vulnerable*. Gul'dan would make them pay for that. He would steal Cyrukh's power for himself and for the rest of the Horde, and he would destroy the connection between the orcs and Draenor's elementals once and for all.

Gul'dan gathered his Shadow Council followers on the volcano's slopes. None of them—not even those who had once been shaman—hesitated to perform the task at hand. The Shadow Council warlocks had given themselves entirely to the pursuit of fel magic. Together, they wove an immense spell that flooded Cyrukh with fel power and shattered the being's physical form. The mountain roared in protest. Chasms tore through the earth and spewed forth rivers of fel and elemental energies. Gul'dan and his warlocks used these energies to infuse the other orcs with strength.

Gul'dan had succeeded. The Horde's soldiers were now more powerful than ever before, and the last connection between the orcs and the elemental spirits had been severed. The fel volcano in Shadowmoon Valley would come to be known as the Hand of Gul'dan.



GUL'DAN DESTROYS DRAENOR'S ELEMENTAL MIGHT

THE DARKENING OF KARABOR

For weeks, Prophet Velen and the exarchs had watched the massive Horde army march through Shadowmoon Valley, trampling everything in its path. The draenei did all they could to prepare for the siege. Artificers strengthened the temple's defenses. Vindicators and Rangari from Shattrath City streamed into Karabor's harbor, eager for battle.

When the volcano in Shadowmoon Valley erupted in a gout of fel energy, fear raced through Karabor's defenders. Many draenei had heard that the orcs were in league with the Burning Legion, but few had actually seen evidence of it. Now, the proof was right before their eyes.

Velen walked among Karabor's draenei, imbuing his people with the Light and inspiring them with courage. Even as the Horde reached the stronghold and unleashed its siege engines, he remained on the front lines.

The Horde's bombardment was relentless. Siege engines hurled boulders imbued with fel energy against the temple's walls until they crumbled. Thousands of howling orcs stormed through the breaches and clashed with Rangari and heavily armored Vindicators. Karabor's defenders fought with a ferocity that the orcs had never witnessed in the draenei before. Against all odds, Velen and his outnumbered forces pushed the Horde back and held the army at bay.

For a moment, victory seemed within reach for the draenei. Then it slipped away.

Behind Horde lines, Gul'dan and his Shadow Council had found a way to break the stalemate. They had turned their attention to the Dark Star that drifted over Shadowmoon Valley. Unbeknownst to the orcs, this strange celestial object was the decaying naaru named K'ara. The being had succumbed to shadow, and its body exuded potent Void energies.

The Shadowmoon orcs had long known that the Dark Star pulsed with extraordinary power, and they had treated the object as sacred. For generations, the clan forbade anyone from tapping into its energies. Gul'dan and his warlocks cared little for such ancient laws.

As one, the Shadow Council conducted a ritual that drew out the Dark Star's power and channeled it on Karabor. A pillar of Void energy ripped through the heavens and slammed down atop the draenei positions in the temple. Many of the defenders died instantly. Others were driven to madness by the waves of shadow magic that engulfed the city.

Calling on every ounce of his willpower, Velen narrowly held the Void at bay. He rallied what survivors he could and led them on a daring escape toward Karabor's harbor. As the Horde renewed its assault on the temple, the Prophet and his people sailed out of harm's reach.

Though Velen survived, Karabor was lost. The influx of Void energy forever darkened the once-glorious stronghold. It would become known as the Black Temple.

The victorious Horde stormed through Karabor's streets and celebrated its triumph by desecrating the draenei's holy relics. The orcs rooted out the defenders who remained. Few were shown the mercy of a quick death. The Horde took many of them prisoner.

Gul'dan immediately claimed the Black Temple. Publicly, he stated that it would serve as a fortress to hold draenei prisoners, where he and a handful of warlocks could interrogate the captives. In truth, the Black Temple would act as a new base of operations for the Shadow Council. Gul'dan convinced Blackhand that separating his clandestine order from the Citadel would allow the Shadow Council to remain unseen by the rest of the Horde. The reality was that Gul'dan also wanted to distance himself from the warchief so that he could work free from Blackhand's ever-watchful eyes.

Gul'dan and his Shadow Council took charge of the draenei prisoners. They subjected the captives to brutal torture to gather what information they could about Shattrath's defenses. In time, they discovered much about the city. Shattrath boasted a larger garrison than Karabor, and it would be much harder to conquer. It would be the greatest challenge the Horde had ever faced.

MANNOROTH THE DESTRUCTOR

3 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

Kil'jaeden was pleased with the Horde's victory, despite Velen's escape. He would have preferred to see the Prophet dead. Better yet, he would have preferred to see Velen captured so that the demon lord himself could humiliate and torture him.

But it was only a matter of time before the Prophet met his end. Of greater concern to Kil'jaeden was the task of conquering Shattrath. The Horde had seized Karabor, but only by harnessing the Dark Star's power. That was a trick they couldn't use again. Moreover, the warlock technique of infusing young orcs with fel magic to make them more powerful was not as promising as it had once seemed. Kil'jaeden knew that Gul'dan and his followers needed something more—something *greater*—if they were to take Shattrath.

Gul'dan and his warlocks had previously empowered their kin with fel energies, but this process only granted them limited strength. Drinking the blood of a demon was a far superior method that would give the orcs otherworldly power. This act would also complete their corruption and shackle them to the Burning Legion's will forever. Kil'jaeden revealed these plans to Gul'dan, reminding him of the power he would be granted if he continued loyally serving the demon lord. The warlock had not forgotten that promise. Orchestrating the corruption of his race was a small price to pay for godhood.

Gul'dan convinced Blackhand to arrange a gathering of the clans atop a mountain near the Citadel, where he would empower the orcs. He never told Blackhand what the source of this power would be; he told him only that he had discovered a new way of wielding fel magic.

As Blackhand ordered the clans to assemble, Kil'jaeden called upon his great power and opened a temporary gateway to the Black Temple. Through it, a pit lord known as Mannoroth the Destructor emerged. This monstrous horned demon was one of the Legion's greatest generals, and he had led countless assaults against its enemies. Mannoroth radiated a power and malevolence that Gul'dan had never experienced. Even the warlock, who feared little, cowered in the demon's presence.

Gul'dan went to great lengths to keep Mannoroth a secret, informing only his most trusted Shadow Council warlocks of the demon and the reason for his appearance on Draenor.

Yet Ner'zhul learned the truth. In their arrogance, Gul'dan and his Shadow Council had often kept the elder shaman close by so that he could witness the gradual corruption of his race. They believed he was too broken and cowardly to ever act on what he saw. They were wrong.

Ner'zhul had spent years lost in the depths of self-loathing and regret, but when he discovered the plans to have orcs drink demon blood, something changed. If he didn't act, he knew that his

entire race would be doomed. Ner'zhul mustered his courage and set out to warn someone about Gul'dan's intentions. He was aware that most of the orc chieftains would ignore his words. They were too loyal to Blackhand and the Horde, too drunk on the intoxicating might of fel power.

However, there was one who was not like the others: Chieftain Durotan. He'd become increasingly reluctant to wage war against the draenei, and this news had reached Ner'zhul. If there was anyone who would heed the shaman's warnings, it was the Frostwolves' noble leader.

As Gul'dan and his warlocks prepared for the meeting of the orcs, Ner'zhul planted an anonymous missive to Durotan among Shadow Council orders that were bound for the Frostwolf clan. In the message, he urged the chieftain not to follow Gul'dan's command at the upcoming gathering, or Durotan and his people would suffer a fate worse than death.

The Shadow Council would never know of Ner'zhul's actions.

SHACKLES OF SERVITUDE

Atop the mountain that loomed near the Citadel, Gul'dan addressed the gathered chieftains. He unveiled a pool of Mannoroth's smoldering blood, but he did not reveal its true source. Gul'dan simply announced that the green liquid was a gift from the gracious beings who had taught the orcs fel magic. Now, these same benefactors wanted to give the clans something more. By drinking from the pool, the orcs would be granted a strength akin to that of gods.

Gul'dan challenged the chieftains to accept this gift, and Grommash Hellscream was the first to step forward. Always one to show his fearlessness, the Warsong chieftain drank deep of Mannoroth's blood. A hush fell over the orcs at what happened next. Grommash grew taller, and his muscles bulged as power flooded his veins. A hellish red glow blazed bright in his eyes. With a mighty war cry, the Warsong chieftain howled for the blood of the draenei.

The other orcs in attendance would not be denied this power. Nearly all clamored to drink and experience the rush of might that Grommash had. Only a few would hold back, including Orgrim Doomhammer and Chieftain Durotan.

Durotan had received Ner'zhul's anonymous missive, and he had taken the warning to heart. Knowing that speaking out against the Horde at this time would mean death, he stayed silent. Yet he would not allow his clan to partake of Gul'dan's "gift" under any circumstances. Durotan simply refused to drink, claiming it was his choice to make.

This act of defiance infuriated Gul'dan. He was already suspicious of the Frostwolf chieftain. Now he wondered if Durotan had discovered something about the Burning Legion and its plans to enslave the orcs. Gul'dan's patience with Durotan was wearing thin, but with the assault on Shattrath approaching, he could not afford killing the chieftain and upsetting the Frostwolves.

Orgrim also rejected the offer to drink. Much like Durotan, he'd grown concerned with the Horde's bloodthirsty nature and its rampant use of fel energy. The Blackrock warrior had looked on with horror as the magic dried up Draenor's pristine rivers and killed its bountiful forests. Deep down, Orgrim knew that something was amiss with Gul'dan's gift.

To avoid drawing suspicion, Orgrim claimed that he was not worthy to drink from the same cup that Blackhand had; after all, he was but a servant of the warchief. Orgrim's plan worked. Both Gul'dan and Blackhand saw his refusal to drink as a sign of servitude.



HELLSCREAM DRINKS DEMONIC BLOOD

The orcs who drank Mannoroth's blood reveled in power as their bodies twisted and swelled with might. All hesitation, fear, and uncertainty faded from their minds. These same effects would gradually spread throughout the rest of the Horde. Though not every orc had drunk Mannoroth's blood, those who had would radiate an invisible aura of fel energy. It would slowly seep into the skin and bones of nearby orcs. Eventually even Durotan, Orgrim, and others who had not tasted demon blood would find their skin turning *completely* green.

At the gathering place, the orcs who had consumed Mannoroth's blood beat their chests and screamed for the heads of draenei.

Warchief Blackhand would give them what they wanted. That very night, he ordered the Horde to march on Shattrath City en masse.

The orcs set out, and Gul'dan infused the mountain at their backs with fel energy. The earth groaned and split, and gouts of fire erupted from the ground. Gul'dan claimed it was a sign of their impending victory, just as the erupting volcano had heralded their conquest of Karabor. The sight of the trembling mountain filled the orcs with unbridled courage. In time, this broken mountain would become known as the Throne of Kil'jaeden.

THE MAG'HAR

One group of orcs would remain unaffected by these fel energies. They were individuals who were infected by the red pox and quarantined in Garadar. Among them was Grommash Hellscream's own son, Garrosh.

Due to their isolation, the infected would not turn green like the rest of their race. These orcs would eventually become known as the Mag'har, or the "Uncorrupted."



THE SIEGE OF SHATTRATH

Shattrath was doomed. Velen had foreseen it.

In the weeks after Karabor's fall, the Prophet had suffered from visions of apocalypse. He had seen a blood-red sky over Shattrath, weeping poison that twisted his people into monsters. He had seen thousands of brave draenei males, females, and children cut to pieces by the orcs. And he had seen Shattrath, their beloved refuge, consumed in a roaring inferno of fel fire.

Though Velen still questioned the certainty of his visions, he would not take any chances. The draenei could not hold Shattrath forever. That much was clear.

At first, Velen called for the full evacuation of Shattrath, but that would only momentarily forestall the Horde. The orcs would continue hunting the draenei until they were sure they'd destroyed them all. Velen and his followers agreed to another plan. Many of the draenei civilians would flee to safety, but the bulk of their military would remain in Shattrath. They would sacrifice their lives to make the Horde believe it had destroyed them. It was a terrible burden to place upon Shattrath's defenders, but the draenei didn't shy away from this duty.

Velen vowed to be one of these defenders. He had abandoned Karabor to the Horde, and he would not do the same to Shattrath. He would die protecting the city if need be. The exarchs argued against this. In their hearts, they knew that Shattrath was doomed to fall. If their race had any hope of survival, it would be under Velen's wise leadership. After a full day of heated discussion, they finally persuaded the Prophet to leave Shattrath.

While the clans were setting out from the Throne of Kil'jaeden, Velen and the exarchs made their preparations. The Prophet led many civilians to Telredor, a remote temple built upon an island in the Zangar Sea. Meanwhile, Rangari scouts harassed the Horde lines, slowing their approach. In Shattrath itself, the Vindicators shored up their defenses.

As the clans approached Shattrath, Kil'jaeden's ethereal form appeared before them. He no longer saw the need to stay hidden now that the orcs had shackled their souls to the Legion.

Kil'jaeden revealed himself as one of the benefactors who had gifted the orcs with fel magic and other powers. To help them crush the draenei and topple their stronghold, he would once again give them weapons. He granted knowledge of new destructive spells to the warlocks—spells that would drive fear into their enemies' hearts.

Meanwhile, Gul'dan unveiled a devious weapon his Shadow Council had crafted for the siege. The warlocks had melded their magics with the red pox and created a volatile concoction that would spread the plague to the draenei. The Shadow Council loaded the mixture into crude bombs, which were then lobbed against Shattrath by siege engines.

The bombs exploded against Shattrath's walls and released a foul mist that burned the draenei's skin and choked the breath from their lungs. A thick red fog enveloped Shattrath's battlements and shrouded the approaching Horde army from sight.

As the mist wreaked havoc among Shattrath's defenders, the orcs flooded through breaches in the city walls. Using the spells Kil'jaeden had taught them, warlocks summoned fiery green meteors from the heavens and sent them crashing against Shattrath's ramparts. These smoldering rocks arose as enormous demons known as infernals.

Maraad, Akama, Nobundo, and thousands of Shattrath's other defenders stood firm against the Horde's onslaught. They knew they were doomed, and their only wish was to take as many orcs as they could with them.

Amid the brutal fighting, the remaining draenei refugees scrambled to flee from the city. Some of these groups were led by Maraad and his fellow Vindicators. Though the holy warriors did not wish to flee the fighting, they knew the importance of saving innocents. Many of the Vindicators did not succeed. Rivers of blood flowed through Shattrath's streets, temples, and courtyards. No one was spared from the marauding Horde.

It was not long before Shattrath fell. Many of the Horde's soldiers lay dead alongside the slain draenei. It had been the orcs' costliest battle yet, but they had won.

Despite the victory, Gul'dan was troubled. Velen had once again escaped. The warlock feared that Kil'jaeden would be furious about this development. Gul'dan had not yet been contacted by the demon lord, and he hoped to track down the Prophet before he was. He immediately dispatched Garona to hunt for Velen, and the Shadow Council assassin committed herself to the task. She would spend years scouring Draenor in search of the Prophet, but she would never find him.

THE DESTRUCTION OF AUCHINDOUN

Thousands of draenei perished in Shattrath, but their sacrifices had allowed many civilians to escape.

A number of Vindicators, priests, and Rangari also survived the initial attack. They retreated to the tomb city of Auchindoun in the hopes of defending it from the Horde. Auchindoun was the holiest draenei site in the world, and these defenders could not bear the thought of the orcs desecrating their ancestors or the naaru housed within.

Exarch Maladaar organized the military forces that came to Auchindoun. They fortified the tomb city's catacombs and awaited the inevitable Horde attack.

Gul'dan knew of the draenei presence in Auchindoun, and he feared that they might call upon the spirits of their ancestors to wage war against the Horde. The warlock dispatched Teron'gor and his most powerful Shadow Council agents to prevent this from happening.

Teron'gor and the other warlocks stormed Auchindoun and met fierce resistance from the tomb's defenders. Though the warlocks' powers were mighty, so were the draenei's Light-given abilities. Maladaar and his followers also received aid from Auchindoun's spirits. The draenei and their ancestors slaughtered many of the Shadow Council's agents.

Victory was slipping through the Shadow Council's grasp. As Maladaar and his forces closed in, Teron'gor called on his remaining allies. Using the new knowledge Kil'jaeden had shared with them, the warlocks pooled their powers and reached beyond the veil of reality. They hoped to summon a powerful demon into the world, one that would strike down their enemies.

In their wild desperation, the warlocks summoned something far different.

An otherworldly elemental creature known as Murmur materialized within Auchindoun, pulled to Draenor from a distant corner of the universe. The shockwave of its arrival ripped the earth asunder, killing many of the draenei and blasting apart the tomb city. Murmur's destructive energies rolled out from Auchindoun in waves and leveled the surrounding forests.



Bladespire Hold

Throne of Kil'jaeden

*Future Site of the
Dark Portal*

The Citadel

Throne of the Elements

Shattrath City

Highmaul

Oshu'gun

Auchindoun

Telmor

Hand of Gul'dan

Temple of Karabor

Skyreach

RISE OF
THE HORDE



Exarch Maladaar and a handful of his draenei used their magics to shield themselves from the blast. Though they survived, they no longer had the numbers to resist the Shadow Council. Teron'gor and his warlocks overwhelmed the draenei and bound them in chains. The Shadow Council then contained Murmur deep within Auchindoun. A few warlocks stayed in the tomb city to keep the creature from getting loose and wreaking havoc on the Horde.

In the years that followed, the charred, lifeless land around Auchindoun would become known as the Bone Wastes. It would serve as a bitter reminder of all that the draenei had lost.

THE BROKEN

2 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

Auchindoun's destruction signaled the death knell of the draenei on Draenor. Though Velen and some of his people had survived, their culture was no more. They were refugees once again, but this time they were trapped on a dying world filled with the Burning Legion's agents.

Velen ordered his Artificers to reinforce Telredor's defenses. The draenei smiths constructed a network of arkonite crystals that shrouded the temple's presence from the Horde.

As the months passed, Vindicator Maraad and other draenei survivors trickled into Telredor. They spoke little of the horrors they had witnessed at Shattrath. They would carry those memories with them in silence, their hearts and minds scarred forever.

Other survivors were burdened by more than just mental scars. Vindicators Akama and Nobundo were among the unfortunate draenei who had succumbed to the Horde's red pox. The vile concoction had twisted their bodies, causing them to become smaller and shriveled. These cursed draenei even found that their connection to the Holy Light had been severed. The *Krokul*, or "Broken," as some of these individuals were called, were not welcomed by the rest of their race. Telredor's populace feared that the mutants would spread their affliction to healthy draenei. Despite calls by Velen and Maraad to accept the Broken, they were eventually driven from the refuge.

Akama, Nobundo, and other Broken struck out into the wilds to fend for themselves. The red mist affected some of them in different ways. The unluckiest of the Broken degraded into creatures called the Lost Ones. They became even more physically deformed, and they gradually lost their grip on sanity. This was the eventual fate that awaited every Broken. All that the mutants could do was hope to find some means to cure themselves or slow their degeneration.

Other draenei survivors would found enclaves across Draenor. Velen would later travel among these different safe havens, both to prevent himself from being captured by the Horde and to help his people however he could. Despite his efforts, the draenei would live in constant fear of tomorrow. They never knew when the Horde might uncover their hideaways. Telredor would remain the largest and most important of these sites. As time passed and fel energy continued killing the world, the sea around the island would dry up and form a swampy mire called Zangarmarsh.



THE SCOURING OF DRAENOR

As the orcs were wiping out the draenei, Warchief Blackhand dispatched scouts to keep him apprised of Draenor's other civilizations. He planned to conquer them one day, but the destruction of the draenei was paramount. Once Shattrath had fallen, Blackhand turned his full attention to the rest of the world's inhabitants.

Chieftain Kilrogg led the Bleeding Hollow on a campaign into Farahlon, a lush island that served as the last bastion of the primals. Its isolated location also made it one of the few places on Draenor that were unsullied by fel magic. The forests there were dense, but Kilrogg and his followers were well adapted to fighting in such terrain.

Reaching the island proved difficult. The orcs were not seafarers, and they relied on ogre shipwrights to build vessels capable of crossing the ocean. Once in Farahlon, orc warlocks leeches life from the primals and used the stolen power to set the forests alight. As the wilds burned, Kilrogg and his army slaughtered every botani and genesaur they could find.

Meanwhile, the Warsong and Twilight's Hammer clans toppled the ogre bastion of Highmaul. Chieftains Grommash and Cho'gall both took part in the siege, and both relished the opportunity to slay ogres.

For Cho'gall, the siege of Highmaul was particularly gratifying. It was an opportunity to enact vengeance upon those who had exiled him from the city. He sought out and killed the stronghold's leader, Imperator Mar'gok. Both were two-headed ogres. Both were gifted sorcerers. Yet only Cho'gall had learned the secrets of fel magic *and* the Void. Armed with these powers, he bound Mar'gok to his throne and burned the rival ogre mage alive.

Elsewhere, Blackhand tasked the Frostwolf, Thunderlord, and Whiteclaw clans with wiping out the world's gronn, ogron, and magnaron, as well as many ogres.

Apart from the Highmaul, most ogres had already joined the Horde. However, there were a few holdouts. Blackhand had no interest in winning their loyalty. He had given them a chance to join him. Now he wanted the brutes dead.

The Frostwolves and the Whiteclaws saw no honor in hunting down the gronn, ogron, magnaron, and ogres. They held most of their warriors back. Yet Chieftain Fenris and his

REXXAR AND THE MOK'NATHAL

Blackhand also considered annihilating the mok'nathal, but he stayed his hand. One of the half-breeds, REXXAR, had joined the Horde and convinced the warchief to spare his people.

REXXAR was the son of the mok'nathal leader, Leoroxx. The young half-breed did not agree with his father's isolationist philosophies. REXXAR longed for glory in battle. He also believed that the Horde could help the mok'nathal find new sources of water and food. Though REXXAR would devote himself to the Horde, he would later learn that its purpose was not noble.



Thunderlords did not shy away from the task. They reveled in the slaughter of their ancient enemies.

One of the few gronn to escape the Horde's onslaught was known as Gruul. He lorded over a small number of ogres and gronn in Gorgrond. Gruul far surpassed the rest of his kind in brute strength and cunning. From his remote lair in the mountains, he fended off multiple Thunderlord assaults. Casualties grew so great that Fenris abandoned the attacks.

THE FALL OF SKYREACH

The high arakkoa in the Spires of Arak posed one of the greatest challenges to the Horde. This intelligent race had rediscovered ancient Apexis technology. From this knowledge, the high arakkoa had fashioned an immense cannon atop their lofty capital, Skyreach. The mechanism would harness the fiery power of the sun to defend their lands from the Horde.

Warchief Blackhand called on Kargath Bladefist to deal with these arakkoa. The vicious chieftain formed an invasion force from the Shattered Hand, Burning Blade, and Dragonmaw clans. The lightly armored but highly mobile army stormed the forests surrounding Skyreach, but the invaders were not prepared for the high arakkoa's weaponry. Upon seeing the orcs approach, Skyreach's defenders ignited their cannon. A searing beam of fire exploded from atop Skyreach and lanced across the forests, incinerating dozens of orcs where they stood.

Rather than mount another direct assault, Kargath sought allies in nearby Terokkar Forest: Outcast arakkoa. These wingless creatures hated Skyreach and its inhabitants. More importantly, they knew the high arakkoa's secrets. Kargath struck a bargain with the Outcasts. They would infiltrate the high arakkoa's city and destroy their weaponry. Once they'd succeeded, the orcs would join the fight and slaughter the remaining high arakkoa. The Outcasts could then claim Skyreach for themselves.

Enticed by the offer, the Outcasts snuck into Skyreach and waged war against the city. They did not have the numbers to defeat the high arakkoa, but that was not their purpose. Using their shadowy powers, the Outcasts stormed through Skyreach and destroyed the mechanism atop the city. A blinding explosion tore through the sky, setting the heavens aflame.

When Kargath and his forces finally arrived, they slaughtered the high arakkoa and cast their bodies from the city. But they did not stop there. The battle-crazed orcs also turned on their "allies" and cut down the Outcasts. Kargath saw these wingless arakkoa as a threat. They were cunning and intelligent creatures. He assumed that they would one day learn to wield the same powers that the high arakkoa had. That was not a risk Kargath was willing to take. What was more, he simply enjoyed betraying the wretched Outcasts.

Kargath's followers did not kill every high arakkoa they came across. Some, they took prisoner. Based on what the Outcasts had told him of Sethekk Hollow, Kargath ordered that these captives be cast into the region's cursed pools. The chieftain reveled in the sight of high arakkoa writhing in agony as shadow energy transformed them into withered Outcasts.

In the end, the Horde assault on the Spires of Arak destroyed high arakkoan civilization and killed nearly all of the Outcasts. Only a small number of the wingless arakkoa survived, including

those who were recently hurled into Sethekk Hollow. The Outcasts shrouded themselves in the shadows, and they took refuge from the Horde in the deepest corners of Terokkar Forest.

The high arakkoa who'd been transformed into Outcasts banded together under the leadership of a former Skyreach guard named Grizzik. He led his followers to Auchindoun, knowing that most orcs feared the haunted ruins. There, he nursed a bitter hatred of the Horde, and he awaited the day when he might exact vengeance on those who had spilled the blood of his people.

THE LONG SILENCE

During the attack on Shattrath, Kil'jaeden met with Sargeras and informed him of the orcs and his work corrupting them. The Legion's ruler was pleased by what he learned. The orcs were an unstoppable force, infused with demon blood and loyal to the Legion. Yet they were more than just another race conscripted into his army. Sargeras had been searching for the right weapon to weaken Azeroth's defenses in preparation for a full-scale Legion invasion. The Horde would serve as the perfect tool to do so.

Sargeras ordered Kil'jaeden to cut all communication with his agent, Gul'dan, and the other orcs. They were flush with victory, and that made them arrogant and unruly. Sargeras wanted the orcs to be on the brink of self-destruction, so desperate that they would embark on any quest if it meant saving themselves—so desperate that they would journey to *another* world.

Unaware of the Legion's plans, the orcs floundered on Draenor. They had conquered much of the world, but they were killing it in the process. Fel magic had transformed most of Draenor into a barren desert. Nowhere was this more apparent than in Tanaan Jungle. The region was now a cracked wasteland of red dust and bones. It became known as Hellfire Peninsula, and the Horde capital at its western edge was renamed Hellfire Citadel.

Warchief Blackhand knew that eventually the Horde would run out of water and food. He turned to Gul'dan for answers and demanded to know what orders Kil'jaeden had given him. Surely, the great benefactor had foreseen these events and would propose a solution.

Blackhand didn't know the terrible truth. Kil'jaeden had stopped communing with Gul'dan. The demon lord's silence had come suddenly and without warning. Panic and paranoia had seized Gul'dan. Kil'jaeden had promised him godhood if he destroyed the draenei, and the orc warlock had delivered his end of the bargain. Bitterness and anger consumed Gul'dan. He wondered if the demon lord had merely used him and the orcs as pawns to exterminate the draenei.

Gul'dan kept this development a secret from Blackhand. The warlock's connection with Kil'jaeden gave him influence. If Blackhand knew Gul'dan was no longer communing with the benefactor, he would see it as a weakness and kill Gul'dan.

For now, Gul'dan convinced Blackhand to wait while Kil'jaeden chose their path forward.

In the year that followed, hunger took its toll on the orcs. They hunted most of Draenor's native creatures to extinction. The Dragonmaw turned on their trained rylaks and used them as a source of food, while Warsong raiders did the same to their wolf mounts.

The threat of starvation only made the orcs more agitated and aggressive. Bloodlust still seared through their veins, but they had no other foe to fight. Many orcs turned on each other. They

clashed in short-lived battles that left hundreds dead. The Lightning's Blade, Whiteclaw, and Redwalker clans suffered greatly in these conflicts.

Some clans lost themselves completely to the depths of madness. These included the Warsongs, the Bonechewers, the Laughing Skull, the Shattered Hand, and the Thunderlords. To protect the rest of the Horde from these violent clans, Blackhand banished them from Hellfire Citadel. He drove these belligerent orcs into remote areas of Hellfire Peninsula, where they could fight among themselves. That way, Blackhand could preserve some of the Horde's dwindling strength.

But Blackhand and Gul'dan knew this was only a temporary solution to a much greater problem. Unless something changed, the Horde would devour itself.

From afar, Sargeras watched the orcs spiral into uncertainty. Soon enough, they would find salvation. He had corrupted a vessel on Azeroth, an extraordinary individual whom he could use to launch the Horde's invasion of the world.

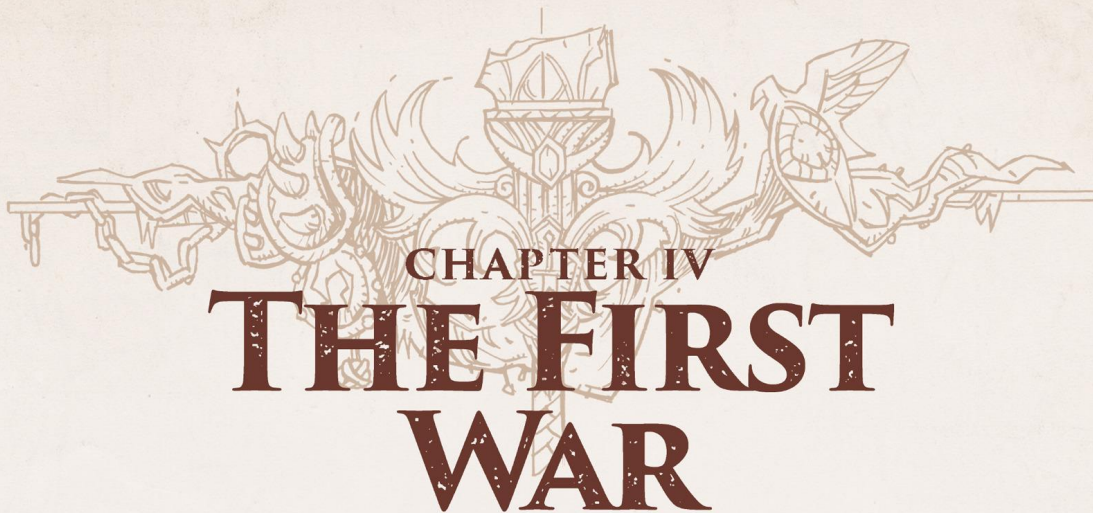
This vessel was a human named Medivh, one of the most powerful magi in history.





PART II
**HORDE AND
ALLIANCE**

CHAPTER IV
**THE FIRST
WAR**



CHAPTER IV THE FIRST WAR

MEDIVH'S ORIGINS

The corruption of Medivh was set into motion long before he was born.

Thousands of years ago, a secretive order called the Council of Tirissfal began watching over Azeroth, protecting it from intrusions by the Burning Legion's agents. The magi in this group channeled their powers into one member, who was known as the Guardian. This mighty individual single-handedly scoured the world for any sign of demonic activity.

While Sargeras was searching for a mortal on Azeroth whom he could use to initiate the Legion's next invasion, his attention turned to the current Guardian. Her name was Aegwynn, and she was one of the greatest magi who had ever lived. She was also proud and bold, two traits that Sargeras knew would make her ideal for corruption.

Sargeras infused a sliver of his vast power into a physical avatar, and then he opened a temporary gateway through which this vessel could reach Azeroth. In an icy region called Northrend, the fallen titan confronted Aegwynn. Just as Sargeras had hoped, the Guardian expended her strength to vanquish the avatar, leaving herself vulnerable. The Legion's lord took this opportunity to transfer a portion of his spirit to the mage's soul.

Unbeknownst to Aegwynn, Sargeras subtly darkened her thoughts. Though the strong-willed mage proved to be too powerful to fully corrupt, the Legion's ruler managed to turn her against her allies in the Council of Tirissfal. The order's members had always considered themselves as the Guardian's handlers, and they expected the mage to obey their commands and follow their advice.

Yet Aegwynn did neither. As time passed, she grew disillusioned with the council and its motives. Recently, the order had begun meddling in the politics of human kingdoms, which made the Guardian suspicious. When the time came for Aegwynn to relinquish her powers so another could take her place, she refused.

The council initially considered appointing a new Guardian, but the idea was abandoned for fear that the presence of two extremely powerful magi would draw unwanted attention to the secret order. A different approach would be taken. The council formed an order of mage hunters called the Tirisgarde to apprehend Aegwynn. One of these individuals was a human named Nielas Aran. He, too, came to loathe the council's political schemes. Rather than fight Aegwynn, he became her closest confidant.

THE TOMB OF SARGERAS

After vanquishing Sargeras's avatar, Guardian Aegwynn sought a place to bury the body so that its dark magic would not disturb the world. She settled on the sunken ruins of an ancient night elven temple—which some legends say was built upon an even older structure of mysterious origins. This site housed powerful seals that negated nearby fel energy. Aegwynn added her own magic, reinforcing the structure and creating defensive measures to keep intruders out. In time, this place would become known as the Tomb of Sargeras.

Aegwynn decided to bear a child with Nielas. She would bequeath her Guardian powers to this child, who would be free from the council's control. For the first time in Azeroth's history, the world's Guardian would be beholden to no one. When Aegwynn gave birth to Medivh, she had no idea of the darkness she had passed on to him. Sargeras had possessed Medivh while he was still forming in his mother's womb. For years, the Legion's ruler would hide in the shadows of Medivh's soul.

Medivh blossomed into a promising mage. He grew up in the capital of Stormwind, becoming friends with Prince Llane Wrynn and the knight-in-training Anduin Lothar. Nielas had taken on the position of the kingdom's official court conjurer, and he tutored his son in the ways of the arcane. Aegwynn, however, was not present. Centuries of acting as the Guardian had taken their toll on her. Now that her powers had passed on to Medivh, she was overcome with exhaustion. She retreated from the world to rest, but the gifted mage kept watch over her son from afar.

On the eve of Medivh's fourteenth birthday, his dormant Guardian powers awakened, and he accidentally killed Nielas. The trauma sent the boy into a coma that would last years.

AWAKENING OF MEDIVH

21 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

While Medivh was in a coma, Azeroth enjoyed a time of relative peace. However, that did not mean the world was safe. Conflict was a daily occurrence. Tribes battled with tribes, villages squabbled with villages, and kingdoms spied on kingdoms.

Yet by and large, Azeroth's inhabitants were prosperous. In the Eastern Kingdoms, humans engaged in rigorous trade with dwarves, gnomes, and high elves. Some nations, like Lordaeron, acted as regional leaders and trendsetters. They mediated disagreements between smaller kingdoms and used their strong militaries to impose order over the land. Others, like Dalaran,

made extraordinary advances in the study of the arcane arts and other academic fields. Still others focused their resources on defending themselves from old rivals. The elves of Quel'Thalas spent much of their time fending off encroachments from the Amani trolls.

In Kalimdor, the night elves continued their ancient traditions. Druids explored the Emerald Dream, a realm of wonder and power that guided the natural life of the physical world. For the most part, the night elves kept their attention focused outward, to the cosmos, ever vigilant for the Burning Legion.

The night elves still remembered the War of the Ancients, that dark time in history when demons invaded the world and nearly destroyed it. Many night elves believed that the Legion would eventually come back. They expected the demons' return to be dramatic, apocalyptic, heralded with fire and brimstone from the skies. None suspected that a mortal race from another world—a dying world—would soon seek to conquer Azeroth.

And none suspected that Medivh, a man born to protect Azeroth, would make it all possible. Almost ten years after slipping into his coma, he finally awoke.

In the days that followed, Medivh reunited with his old friends. Llane Wrynn was poised to become king of Stormwind. Anduin Lothar had risen in the ranks and was a highly regarded knight and military commander. They were both happy to see that Medivh had recovered from his strange illness, but they were preoccupied by new troubles brewing in the south.

Over the years, Stormwind's farmers and settlers had been pushing south, claiming more and more territory near the jungles of Stranglethorn Vale. That had brought them into conflict with the Gurubashi tribes. Blood had been spilled, and the conflict had escalated from small skirmishes to frequent raids by troll warbands.

Llane's father, Barathen, the elderly king of Stormwind, dispatched his forces in a defensive manner, commanding his soldiers to intercept raiding parties but forbidding retaliatory strikes into Gurubashi land. He had no interest in a full-scale war with the trolls. His son advocated for a sterner posture: Llane wanted to teach the trolls a lesson, even if that meant invading Gurubashi territory. The private debates between king and prince grew heated.

For months, Medivh took no part in Stormwind's politics. Since waking up, he had struggled to deal with his guilt over his father's death, an event he still did not truly understand. Unsettling dreams were also plaguing him. Sometimes he dreamt of a woman who urged him to travel to a place called Karazhan; other times he dreamt of a dark presence dwelling in his mind, twisting his thoughts.

He decided to ignore these dreams. Medivh felt most at peace when he was with his friends, so he focused his attention on helping them. He joined their efforts in dealing with the Gurubashi.



A SECRET MISSION

19 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

King Barathen's strategy against the trolls was effective for a time, but it could not stop every attack. A troll raiding party slipped through Stormwind's patrol lines and cut a path of destruction through Westfall, the kingdom's breadbasket. Three towns were burned to the ground. Stormwind's soldiers eventually caught and slew all of the raiders, but it was too late for dozens of humans. Their deaths had been slow, barbaric, and gruesome.

The atrocity became the talk of the kingdom. King Barathen met with Stormwind's lords and other nobles to discuss a response. Barathen was still focused on de-escalation. He declared that the armies of Stormwind would be bolstered but used only to strengthen their patrol routes. There would be no offensive against the Gurubashi.

Llane challenged him publicly, demanding that the blood of Stormwind's citizens be repaid in kind. Barathen was forced to rebuke his son in front of the royal court to end the protest.

Llane was furious, not just for the humiliation but for what he saw as his father's cowardice. Lothar and many others felt the same way. In particular, Stormwind's soldiers were itching for revenge. But they would obey the king. It would be unthinkable for any loyal soldier to do otherwise . . . But Lothar suggested that if anyone would escape the hangman's noose for insubordination, it would be Llane and Lothar. Their ties to the king were too strong. And if they managed to stop the trolls for good, they would be forgiven.

Llane loved the idea. A small, secret mission into the heart of Gurubashi lands might go unnoticed by both trolls and humans. But he also knew that mere steel would not be enough to carve out the heart of the Gurubashi's aggression. That would require something more: Medivh.

The majority of Stormwind's populace considered Medivh to be simply a powerful mage, but he had told Llane and Lothar the truth. He had revealed to them the secret history of the Guardian, the Council of Tirisfal, and his destiny. Llane and Lothar used this knowledge to pressure Medivh. Since he was the Guardian, wasn't he meant to protect the land from evil?

Medivh was reluctant at first. He still hadn't found the limits of his power, and his hazy memories of what had happened to his father haunted him. After much consideration, he agreed to assist Llane and Lothar.

It was not simply a matter of making his friends happy. Medivh had another motivation. He had never seen battle before. He had never slain an enemy. He wanted to see what his Guardian magic could truly do. In truth, he hungered for it.

The three friends set off in secret, forging beyond Stormwind's borders. They infiltrated Stranglethorn Vale without incident, shrouded by Medivh's magic. The humans targeted a Gurubashi warlord named Jok'non, who dwelled in a ziggurat in central Stranglethorn. Their plan was to kill him quickly and retreat, leaving the trolls without a leader.

The plan was anything but flawless. Jok'non and his followers had been experimenting with forbidden blood magic derived from one of their gods, a mighty and ancient creature known as Hakkar the Soulflayer. When battle erupted, it attracted a tremendous amount of attention. The three humans soon found themselves in a brutal fight for their lives. Medivh dueled Jok'non himself, facing a breed of magic he had never seen.

TERRITORIES OF THE EASTERN KINGDOMS



QUEL'THALAS

AMANI EMPIRE

LORDAERON

ALTERAC

WILDHAMMER CLAN

DALARAN

AMANI EMPIRE

STROMGARDE

STROMGARDE

GILNEAS

KUL TIRAS

WILDHAMMER
CLAN

GNOMEREGAN

IRONFORGE

DARK IRON CLAN

STORMWIND

GURUBASHI TRIBES

GOBLIN
STEAMWHEEL
CARTEL



Jok'non's dark power nearly overwhelmed Medivh. The Guardian was forced to abandon his apprehensions and unleash his full might. The resulting spell destroyed every single troll inside the ziggurat. Their howls of agony were heard in the darkest corners of Stranglethorn.

Llane and Lothar had both seen death before. Even so, they were rattled by Medivh's power.

The three men hurried back to Stormwind, but there was no joy in their victory. Llane and Lothar had seen Medivh's dark side, and they realized that their old friend was different in ways they could never understand.

Even Medivh himself did not fully understand what he had done. He had never been taught that spell. He had no idea where that knowledge had come from or if it had even been entirely powered by arcane magic. It disturbed him greatly.

THE GURUBASHI WAR

18 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

None of the Gurubashi who had witnessed Warlord Jok'non's death survived, but it took little imagination for the trolls to guess who was responsible. The Gurubashi came together under the banner of the slain warlord's son, Zan'non, and marched to war against Stormwind.

It had been centuries since the Gurubashi tribes had fought as one, and the humans were utterly unprepared for their fury. The trolls' numbers were frightening. Within days, Stormwind's southern defensive lines crumbled before the Gurubashi onslaught. Any civilians who could not escape were butchered in horrifying ways, their teeth, bones, and ears taken as trophies.

The Gurubashi's objective was clear: burn Stormwind City to the ground. King Barathen recalled all forces to the stronghold's gates. His kingdom's survival would depend on one colossal battle.

As the Gurubashi warbands approached, Llane told his father what he and his friends had done in Stranglethorn. Barathen was more disappointed than angry at his son. He did not punish the three young men. There was no need. The trolls would see to that soon enough.

When the Gurubashi arrived at the city walls, the soldiers of Stormwind trembled at the trolls' numbers. Zan'non had learned some of his father's forbidden tricks. He'd used them to transform a few Gurubashi into hulking berserkers possessed of otherworldly strength. These mutated giants climbed Stormwind's walls and proceeded to rip its soldiers to pieces.

The death toll on both sides mounted quickly. King Barathen knew that it would take a miracle to break the Gurubashi siege, so the old leader mounted a desperate counterattack with his personal guards. He stormed directly into the hellish front lines, seeking Zan'non's head. He almost succeeded, but the odds were against him. King Barathen died on the field of battle.

Llane mourned his father's death, overcome with guilt about his foolish mission into Stranglethorn. Yet he knew that the city was now looking to him for guidance. Stormwind's forces had fallen into disarray. All seemed lost. Llane pleaded with Medivh to unleash his power as he had done before, believing it was the only way to spare the city.

Medivh agreed. The thought of calling on his full might frightened him . . . but, in a strange way, it also excited him.



MEDIVH DESTROYS THE GURUBASHI SIEGE

STORMWIND'S ISOLATION

Barathen made no attempt to call on the northern human nations for help against the Gurubashi. The trolls were moving so quickly that reinforcements would never arrive in time. Yet even under different circumstances, the king would have been loath to ask for aid. Years ago, Stormwind had requested assistance from the other human nations to fend off attacks by gnolls, but it had received none. Ever since then, Barathen and his people had become more isolationist, believing that they could deal with any threat on their own.



He stood upon Stormwind City's ramparts and rained fire and ice upon the Gurubashi. He froze them in their tracks; he incinerated them from within; he blasted them to pieces with pure arcane force. Their screams of pain drowned out the sounds of battle.

Medivh soon realized that he was making sure their deaths were excruciating. He was even more horrified to discover that he *enjoyed* it.

When Medivh called off his arcane barrage, Stormwind City still stood. The Gurubashi and their leader were dead. Only a handful of trolls had escaped the maelstrom of magic.

The people of Stormwind mourned their dead and lauded their heroes. Medivh was seen as the realm's greatest defender. The kingdom welcomed Llane Wrynn as its new ruler. When Anduin Lothar was raised as one of the military's top commanders, there was nothing but approval from the citizens.

The secret mission that had sparked the war was not known to the public, but the consequences of it weighed heavily upon Medivh and his friends. Many innocents had died due to their recklessness.

Medivh understood that he did not have the will—the mental fortitude—to control his Guardian birthright. The woman in his dreams continued beckoning him to Karazhan in order to refine his powers. He now obeyed her; he was too terrified of what he might do if he didn't.

THE GUARDIAN'S BURDEN

When Medivh arrived at the tower of Karazhan, the woman in his dreams was waiting for him. It was Aegwynn, the mother he had never known.

And she was furious. He had taken too long to answer her call, and he had nearly destroyed a kingdom for it. Medivh accepted Aegwynn's ire; he was in no position to disagree with her.

For over a year, mother and son made up for the time they'd been apart. Aegwynn took this opportunity to teach Medivh what it meant to be a true Guardian. Her first lesson was to convince him of the need for secrecy. He could not trust anyone, particularly the Council of Tirisfal. The

secret order's original purpose had been to safeguard Azeroth against the Legion and empower a Guardian to confront demons directly. Over the centuries, its focus had drifted. The council now seemed more concerned with self-perpetuation than with Azeroth's preservation.

The council also loathed Aegwynn. It had given her the power of the Guardian; she had refused to give it back and instead had passed it to her son. Aegwynn knew that the council would eventually learn that Medivh now held her power. Its members would undoubtedly be suspicious of him, the first person to receive such power without their permission.

One of Aegwynn's closest friends, Moroes, agreed to stay with Medivh and help maintain the tower of Karazhan. Apart from interacting with this caretaker, she strongly urged her son to distance himself from the outside world. Other sorcerers would not understand his burden. In her view, not even the Kirin Tor, the magocrats of Dalaran, would have any knowledge that he needed.

Medivh told his mother about the strange darkness that seemed to dwell within him. It had shown itself multiple times now, and he was afraid. Aegwynn dismissed his concerns. She had felt the same thing during her tenure as Guardian. She had come to believe it was simply the burden of power and the weight of responsibility. She did not know the truth, that Sargeras's dark presence had influenced her mind and was now twisting Medivh's thoughts.

Aegwynn eventually returned to her exile. It was difficult to part from her son, but she knew the Council of Tirisfal would never leave Medivh alone if the magi believed she was still at his side.

Medivh retreated into the libraries of Karazhan and immersed himself in study. The responsibilities of a Guardian were many; the techniques, unlimited. He tried to make up for lost time as best he could.

As Aegwynn had suspected, the Council of Tirisfal discovered that Medivh was the new Guardian. The order had heard of the mage's exploits in Stormwind. After some investigation, they had tracked him to Karazhan. By this time, the council had abandoned any thought of creating a second Guardian. Aegwynn's rebellion had taught them that they could not control such an individual, no matter how hard they tried. The council also knew that trying to force its control over Medivh might only anger him, as it had his mother.

The council sent missives to Karazhan, politely asking Medivh for a meeting. He never replied. The council then tried something else: they convinced various mage orders and schools to send young magi to study under Medivh. None of these aspiring apprentices would know that their new mentor was the Guardian.

Medivh was not a friendly mentor, and none of these first would-be students stayed for longer than a day. He felt the darkness within him growing, and he thought his isolation was the cause. Moroes understood—he had always disapproved of the way Aegwynn insisted on detaching herself from the world. He suggested that, if Medivh could not trust the Kirin Tor or the Council of Tirisfal, he could invite people from surrounding regions for a banquet instead. Surely they would not have ulterior motives other than curiosity, and the company would do him good. Medivh allowed it. There was a great feast, and the guests were awed by the wonders of the enchanted tower. A grand time was had by all, and their happiness even lifted the Guardian's mood.

In the years that followed, Karazhan would host many more galas. Nobles from around Stormwind would come to regard Medivh's parties as exclusive high-society events. The Council of Tirisfal snuck a few agents into these festivities, but the magi were thoroughly confused by what their spies reported. By all accounts, Medivh was using his power and prominence to live a shallow life of luxury. It was not what they'd expected from the son of Aegwynn.

More potential apprentices showed up on Medivh's doorstep. He no longer made it a point to drive them away, but he accepted nothing less than excellence from them. If they made a single mistake, Medivh dismissed them. Few of these trainees remained in the tower for more than a week.

Medivh was no longer alone, but his inner darkness soon engulfed every corner of his soul. Any fleeting moments of happiness seemed to disappear beneath the weight of crushing depression.

THE DARKENING OF MEDIVH

10 YEARS BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

Between parties and galas, Medivh continued his studies. Aegwynn's words had a tremendous effect on him. He had fully embraced his destiny as the Guardian, and he was determined to learn how best to protect Azeroth.

His libraries were filled with books about demonic lore, tactics, and powers. He devoured these writings as fast as he could. Then he turned his attention to Azeroth's own rich history.

Medivh was inspired by the tales of the Legion's last invasion of Azeroth, the War of the Ancients. Different races and powerful creatures had come together to resist the unstoppable Burning Legion. He couldn't help but think of that war as the high-water mark for his world. Perhaps Azeroth would not—could not—match that glory again. The peoples of this world had spent millennia growing apart. Where once there had been purpose and unity, now there were only petty squabbles and bickering.

His own experience had shown him that much. Trolls and humans had gone to war for insignificant reasons. The tribes, nations, and clans of Azeroth were happy to spill one another's blood for meaningless gains. It was as if no one on this world remembered that the Legion had not been destroyed in the War of the Ancients; it had only been temporarily defeated.

If the demons invaded again, Azeroth would be too weak to throw them back. And they *would* invade again. Medivh had no doubts about that. Something radical needed to be done to prepare the world for their return.

Had Medivh known what dark force was leading him down this road of despair—had he known that Sargeras had once had a similar crisis of faith—he might have resisted. Instead, he embraced a final conclusion that mirrored Sargeras's own solution to the question of encroaching evil: Azeroth was fundamentally flawed. It would never change on its own. Never.

Someone needed to break everything that created divisions in the world—nations, cultures, governments, and kings. Azeroth was plagued with disorder. It needed a firm hand to change things. Medivh, the Guardian, would do what nobody else could.

Medivh concluded that he needed allies to accomplish his mission. He needed an army.

Medivh used his Guardian powers to venture beyond Azeroth and into the cosmos. He visited new worlds and unseen corners of the Twisting Nether. At first, he searched for signs of an imminent Legion invasion of Azeroth. He was relieved to find none. Azeroth would have *some* time to prepare, at least.

Sargeras subtly influenced Medivh to focus on a particular world: Draenor. Upon observing this place, the Guardian discovered a mighty and warlike people known as the orcs. They were truly fearsome to behold in battle, and they were under the Burning Legion's control.

For a number of years, Medivh watched the orcs. He took on the form of a raven to travel across the land. A few orcs noticed this strange, small bird, but it caused no alarm. Medivh saw how effectively the orcs defeated the draenei, and then he saw how the Legion suddenly discarded them. He saw how their world shriveled and died due to the effects of their fel power, and he saw how desperate they had become.

The Horde had been easily manipulated by the Burning Legion. Medivh knew he could do the same. The orcs would serve as the perfect army to transform Azeroth forever.

And even better, it would delight Medivh to use the Legion's own puppets against it.

As Medivh worked toward this purpose, he collected his thoughts in writing, documenting his most powerful discoveries and magical techniques in a volume that would come to be known as the Book of Medivh.

STRANGER FROM BEYOND

1 YEAR BEFORE THE DARK PORTAL

While Medivh was watching Draenor, the Horde edged closer to self-destruction. Blackhand continued pressuring Gul'dan for a way to save their people. The warlock had no answer. He knew the day would soon come when Blackhand would reach the limits of his patience and kill Gul'dan.

But that day never came. Medivh was ready to put his plan into effect. He showed himself to Gul'dan and the Shadow Council, disguised as a hooded stranger.

Gul'dan bristled at the intrusion, and he lashed out at the stranger with the full might of his fel powers. The hooded figure did not fall. He turned Gul'dan's powers back on the orc. Medivh made it a painful event; he knew the warlock had sold his entire race to the Burning Legion, and the Guardian saw no reason to treat such a creature gently.

Gul'dan's pride was severely wounded that day. The Shadow Council had watched him kneel before this mysterious stranger. It was an insult Gul'dan would never forget or forgive.

Medivh didn't care. He told the orcs he could help them escape from Draenor if they built a vast magical portal. This gateway would take them to a new world, a bountiful realm that the Horde could conquer for its own. Visions of this world appeared in the minds of Gul'dan and his Shadow Council. It was glorious to behold, a place brimming with game, pristine rivers, and verdant grasslands.

Its name was Azeroth. It was ripe for the taking, Medivh said.

Gul'dan sensed something demonic in the hooded figure. He believed that this visitor was a demon who spoke on behalf of Sargeras. This, Gul'dan realized, was the reason for Kil'jaeden's sudden absence. The Legion had been preparing to send another messenger to advise him about what to do.

In this instance, Gul'dan was correct. Medivh believed that he was laying the foundation to defeat the Legion once and for all, but he was instead bringing doom to his world.

Yet even with the knowledge that the Legion was working through the stranger, even with the orcs teetering on the brink of oblivion, Gul'dan demanded payment for his assistance. What would he personally receive for helping this stranger build a portal to conquer Azeroth?

If it was power Gul'dan wanted, Medivh would offer it to him. A new vision flared bright in the warlock's mind. It depicted ancient underwater ruins—a place known as the Tomb of Sargeras. Medivh had no compunction about telling Gul'dan of this location. The tomb was at the bottom of the sea, and Aegwynn had reinforced it with a Guardian's power. There was no chance, in Medivh's mind, that Gul'dan would ever be capable of finding it or entering it. Nonetheless, he told the warlock that if the Horde conquered Azeroth, he would reveal the exact location of the tomb and grant him access to its extraordinary power.

Gul'dan had little choice but to trust the stranger. He told Blackhand that he had found a new world for the orcs to conquer, one where they could find sustenance and also sate their battle lust. Yet to reach this place, they would need to create a massive gateway.

To begin this process, Gul'dan sought out a convergence of Draenor's magical ley lines. He settled on a region at the eastern edge of Hellfire Peninsula. There, he and Blackhand ordered the orcs to construct an enchanted stone frame. It would become known as the Dark Portal, and it would help stabilize the magical gateway between Azeroth and Draenor.

THE COUNCIL'S SUSPICIONS

YEAR OF THE DARK PORTAL

Medivh made occasional trips to Draenor to observe the orcs' progress in building the Dark Portal. His absences were noticed. At first, they resulted in complaints from the nobles and entertainers who had come to Karazhan for various festivities. When the host was not there, the night was seen as a disappointment.

Word of his disappearances eventually reached the Council of Tirisfal. Medivh was still a mystery to them. Years ago, they'd been concerned that he would be an enemy of the council, as Aegwynn was. Then he'd seemed to withdraw from the world, only emerging for parties and revelry. An immature young man who wanted to live a life of luxury and excess was not exactly who the council had hoped would be the Guardian, but it was far from the worst possible outcome. The order had called on the Kirin Tor's accomplished magi to keep watch over the world in the absence of an official Guardian.

But if he had no true interest in the materialistic lifestyle he had cultivated, what were his real intentions? Where was the Guardian spending his time and energy? The council was no longer content to wait and see what Medivh intended to do with his astonishing power.

At the council's behest, Kirin Tor magi covertly infiltrated Karazhan to find answers. Some disguised themselves as guests at Medivh's parties. Others sought ways to open portals directly into his libraries. Neither approach had any success. Medivh made sure that every one of their attempts failed and that the magi responsible returned home safe but disappointed.

Though these intruders were from the Kirin Tor, Medivh knew that the Council of Tirisfal was guiding their actions. He needed to stop the council's meddling, for he believed it would never approve of his plan to "save" Azeroth.

In the span of a week, four members of the Council of Tirisfal were found dead. There was no evidence of Medivh's involvement, no sign that arcane power had been used at all. In fact, during

that week, the Guardian had made appearances at Karazhan's parties every night. It did not seem possible for him to have committed the murders.

The council's remaining members had suspicions, but they couldn't rule out the possibility that someone else was targeting them. In truth, they found it hard to imagine that Medivh could have fallen so far as to murder fellow magi. They ceased their spying on Karazhan and focused their efforts on discovering who was slaughtering them like lambs.

Medivh was free to act once again.

THE DARK PORTAL

As the Dark Portal took shape on Draenor, Gul'dan urged Blackhand to strengthen the clans. The warchief staged mock battles and duels between the orcs to give them an outlet for their bloodlust. The Horde had grown feeble, and it needed every fighter at its disposal for the coming invasion of Azeroth.

Though many orcs reveled in combat, Durotan saw it as a disgrace to tradition. The Frostwolf chieftain could no longer stay silent about what was happening to his people. His world was dying. He had seen the orcs become bloodthirsty savages. Durotan began speaking out against Gul'dan and the use of fel magic. He urged the orcs to seek ways to heal their world. Most clans saw this as an act of treason and cowardice, and they lashed out at the Frostwolves.

Gul'dan kept a careful watch on Durotan, but his efforts were focused on other things. He and Blackhand convinced the clans that conquering Azeroth was the only way their people would survive. Most orcs, especially those who had drunk Mannoroth's blood, were delighted at the opportunity to slaughter once again. Draenor was dying; none could deny that. If the Horde did not take this chance to build a new home, everyone would perish.

Once the Dark Portal was built, Gul'dan worked with Medivh to open it. The warlock would conduct a ritual with his counterpart on Azeroth to tear a rift in the fabric of reality. The amount of raw power needed to do so was astonishing. It would require Gul'dan and Medivh to pool their magic together . . . but even that would not be enough on its own.

Nearly every draenei prisoner who still lived was brought to the base of the Dark Portal. At the moment the ritual began, Gul'dan drained all of their life essences in an instant. That massive spike of power created the spark needed to cross such a large distance.

Meanwhile, Medivh conducted his own spellwork on Azeroth. In an isolated swamp east of Karazhan known as the Black Morass, he called upon the full might of his Guardian energies to rip open a gateway. Due to his and Gul'dan's combined efforts, the Dark Portal shimmered and activated, forming a bridge between the two worlds.

Through the portal, Gul'dan and the orcs glimpsed Azeroth for the first time. The world that the hooded stranger had promised him was real.

Blackhand sent his most trusted scouts—members of the Bleeding Hollow and the Black Tooth Grin clans—to survey the other side of the portal. They emerged in the Black Morass and quickly established a camp. A number of warlocks accompanied these scouts. They oversaw the effort to build an enchanted stone frame around the portal on the Azeroth side, which would stabilize the gateway and allow it to stay open for extended periods.

As construction progressed, the orcs scouted more and more territory.

CLASH OF THE GUARDIANS

The sheer scale of magical power required to open the Dark Portal made the event impossible to hide. Medivh had concealed his activities as much as possible, but almost every creature attuned to magic on Azeroth felt ripples when the gateway roared to life.

Most could not detect where the disturbance had come from. One person could. Aegwynn immediately set out to investigate the source.

She was shocked to discover the Dark Portal and the green-skinned beings who had established a war camp in the Black Morass. They were clearly hostile, and they were laced with traces of the Burning Legion's fel power. Aegwynn had never seen orcs, nor had she heard of Draenor, but she was able to sense the bridge between the two worlds.

And then, in a moment that shook her to her core, she recognized that a Guardian's magic had been used to make this possible. There was no mistaking it: the only person on Azeroth who was capable of using *this* power in *this* way was her son, Medivh.

She also sensed the presence of fel magic intertwined with his. Aegwynn could not fathom what had happened, but she could only conclude that Medivh had somehow allied himself with the Legion.

With a heavy heart, she set out to stop him.

Accompanied by a blue dragon named Arcanagos—one of the few allies she had made during her long years of exile—she traveled to Karazhan to confront Medivh. The tower was crowded, filled with nobles who were expecting another exciting gala.

Aegwynn entered the tower alone at first, hoping she could convince Medivh to give up his power peacefully. It was not to be. The creature she fought that day was not Medivh but Sargeras. The lord of the Burning Legion seized full control of the Guardian's mind, suppressing his thoughts and memories, controlling his every action.

Sargeras revealed to Aegwynn that the darkness within her son was the same darkness she had felt as Guardian. It had nothing to do with her power or her burden. Sargeras had transferred a portion of his spirit into her when they'd fought long ago in Northrend, and he had remained hidden within the mage until she gave birth to her son.

Aegwynn was stunned as the truth set in. She had not bested Sargeras all those years ago; he had bested her. The darkness that had plagued her was not from the burden of Guardianship, but from her greatest nemesis lurking in her soul. Had she doomed her son to a life as a Legion slave? Had her entire tenure as Guardian been meaningless? These revelations might have broken a lesser human, but not Aegwynn. She did not lose herself to despair. No, she became *angry*. She would defeat Sargeras here and now, even if it meant striking down her beloved boy.

And with that, Aegwynn and Sargeras went to battle once again. The opening blows of the fight shook the tower to its foundations. The would-be revelers tried to flee. Arcanagos leaped into the fray just as one of Sargeras's spells temporarily incapacitated Aegwynn.

Despite being a dragon, Arcanagos was severely outmatched. Sargeras struck him down, burning the creature from the inside out, until all that remained was bone.

The loss of her friend sent Aegwynn even further into the depths of rage, and she drew on her anger to break free of Sargeras's spell. The Legion's ruler might have had the full weight of a Guardian's power under his control, but she had centuries of experience. As the great duel continued raging through the tower, Aegwynn slowly gained the upper hand.

Sargeras grew desperate. He reached out to power one final assault. In the same way that Gul'dan had drained the life from the draenei prisoners to activate the Dark Portal, Sargeras ripped the life out of the hundreds of humans who were fleeing Karazhan. Only one person, Moroes, was spared.

Sargeras pushed Medivh to destroy Aegwynn once and for all. A small part of the Guardian's mind resisted the command. His power, brimming with the life force of hundreds of people, instead banished Aegwynn from Karazhan and hurled her elsewhere. Medivh didn't know where he had sent her, but he could not sense her presence anywhere on Azeroth.

With the battle over, confusion rippled through Medivh's mind. At the moment of Aegwynn's defeat, Sargeras had retreated into the depths of the Guardian's soul. Medivh had no memory that the demon lord had controlled him, but he knew he had clashed with his mother. He feared that he had lost control of his power again, as he had all those years ago before he slipped into a coma. This time, instead of only killing his father, he had slaughtered some of the most important nobles in the kingdom of Stormwind.

The only survivor within Karazhan, Moroes, seemed to be driven half-mad by what he had witnessed. Medivh tried to ease his suffering by purging the memories of that day from Moroes's mind. Even so, the poor man was never the same.

Neither was Karazhan. It had grown darker, haunted. The spirits of many of the slain humans would wander its halls and grounds for years to come.

GARONA AND THE GUARDIAN

While Aegwynn battled Sargeras, more Horde forces poured through the Dark Portal. Garona had accompanied the first scouts who'd gone through the gateway, and she reported back to Gul'dan that the hooded stranger was nowhere to be found.

The warlock was furious. He had hoped to gain some clues as to Medivh's true nature; he still believed the mysterious figure was a demon in disguise.

As orcs fanned out across the Black Morass, they encountered a few human hunters and traders, but they offered little resistance to the Horde. Most of the humans were killed, but a handful were captured alive. There wasn't much reason for the Horde to question them at first; the orcs could not understand the human tongue.

But Garona had a talent for learning new languages, and she spent much of her time speaking with these prisoners. She did not ask them about Stormwind's patrol routes or other military secrets—questions the humans might have resisted answering. However, most of the prisoners were happy to teach their strange captor a few words in exchange for food and water.

Still, there was valuable information to be gleaned. One prisoner cursed at the orcs endlessly, telling them they were all doomed to die. He warned that Stormwind had a great mage champion who had single-handedly annihilated a troll army, and that he would make quick work of the green-skinned "beasts" who had taken over the Black Morass.

Garona listened to his furious ravings, and she came away with a name and a location: Medivh, who lived in the tower of Karazhan. The Shadow Council assassin set out alone, moving quickly, hoping to inspect the tower without being spotted. She could not have picked a worse time.

After the deadly battle inside Karazhan, Medivh was in a dark mood and was extra vigilant for intruders. He captured Garona the moment she stepped within sight of the tower.

Garona believed her captor would destroy her, especially when she laid eyes upon Medivh. She did not know that this was the stranger who had visited Draenor to make a pact with the Horde, but she recognized that there was a great darkness stirring within him.

Yet Medivh did not kill her. She had no information he needed, and she was a curiosity. He had not seen her during his visits to Draenor, and he made no mention of those sojourns to her. She was neither truly orc nor truly draenei. Garona was an outcast, and he sympathized with that. What was more, she was remarkably intelligent. Garona could already speak the human tongue fairly well. Medivh taught her new words and phrases. She picked them up quickly.

It was clear that Garona was no threat to him, and thanks to Gul'dan's endless cruelty, she had no real love for the Horde. Medivh decided that it would be more valuable to have an ally—or even a friend—among the orcs than another spirit haunting his home. He freed Garona, but he also extended an invitation to her: she could return to Karazhan whenever she liked.

Upon reaching the Dark Portal in the Black Morass, Garona told Gul'dan what she had learned. Unbeknownst to her, the warlock already knew what she had seen. Gul'dan had a firm grip on his assassin's mind, and he had been watching through her eyes when she had met Medivh. He had recognized what she had not: Medivh was none other than the mysterious stranger who had come to Draenor. He was a human? That was all? Gul'dan had expected something . . . more. A disguised Burning Legion commander, perhaps.

Gul'dan decided that once Medivh's usefulness had ended, he would kill the mage himself.

First, he needed to know the location of the Tomb of Sargeras. He told Garona that Medivh might be holding useful information in his lair. The warlock ordered his assassin to dig up whatever knowledge she could from the mage's tower.

FIRST CONTACT

As more and more orcs streamed into Azeroth, reports reached Stormwind of mysterious creatures lurking around the Black Morass. Rumors spread through the streets. Were they vengeful spirits? Trolls, armed with some new breed of power? Had some strange race from across the Great Sea launched a war upon humans? Nothing seemed to make sense.

King Llane dispatched Commander Lothar to uncover the truth. He led a small force of knights and scouted out the Black Morass. It was not long before Lothar ran across the Horde. For the first time, orcs clashed with Stormwind's knights, engaging in a series of bloody skirmishes.

Lothar's soldiers scored a number of small victories over their foes. Yet for every orc they killed, two more seemed to take their place. The humans found themselves more outnumbered in each subsequent battle, and Lothar was eventually forced to pull back. It shouldn't have been possible. How could the enemy replenish its troops so fast?

Lothar and his forces had not yet ventured deep enough into the Black Morass to find the Dark Portal. The region was heavily guarded by their foes. Lothar sent word back to King Llane that the invaders were bringing in reinforcements from somewhere. The kingdom needed to ready itself for a full-scale war.

Meanwhile, the orcs reported to Warchief Blackhand, telling him that the region's humans were now aware of their presence. The time for preparation and scouting had ended.

The First War was about to begin in earnest.

THE GUARDIAN'S APPRENTICE

The battle between Aegwynn and Medivh had gone unnoticed by the rest of the world—a fact that surprised the Guardian.

No witnesses had survived with their memories intact, and the deaths of so many nobles had not caused the stir that Medivh had expected. By now, all of the kingdom of Stormwind had heard stories about the barbaric “orcs” flooding out of the Black Morass. Karazhan was not far away; the mysterious disappearance of the nobles was easily laid at the orcs’ feet.

The Horde’s attacks on human settlements had thoroughly occupied the attention of the Council of Tirisfal and the Kirin Tor. The appearance of creatures never seen on this world—corrupted by demonic energies, no less—far outweighed their concerns about someone they saw as a childish, spoiled playboy.

Still, the council had not forgotten about the Guardian. Now, more than ever, they wanted him as an ally. They tried to make contact yet again by asking the Kirin Tor to send him one of their own mage apprentices.

The young trainee was named Khadgar. He had shown considerable promise in his studies with the Kirin Tor, but the last thing he wanted was to serve under an angry, isolated mage who had thus far driven away all other apprentices. Nevertheless, it was not his choice. The Kirin Tor commanded, and so Khadgar obeyed.

Upon starting his apprenticeship, Khadgar had his worst fears confirmed. Karazhan seemed to languish under a shadow of morbidity, and Medivh was subject to frightening mood swings. Worse, the tower appeared to be cursed in some way. Khadgar often caught glimpses of wandering spirits and disturbing visions of the past, present, and future.

Yet while other apprentices had failed Medivh’s tests, Khadgar did not. The young mage kept his wits about him, even when faced with dangerous tasks.

Medivh decided not to reject this new apprentice. It was a risk to keep the young man around, certainly. But Medivh was more alone now than he had ever been, and Khadgar was smart, clever, and hungry to learn.

Medivh revealed to Khadgar what his Kirin Tor masters had not: Medivh was the Guardian. The Council of Tirisfal was worried about him. That was why the Kirin Tor had sent Khadgar as an unwitting spy.

Khadgar was surprised but not deterred. In fact, he was intrigued. He had no intention of abandoning his apprenticeship now, not when he could study under a Guardian, the most powerful mage in the world.



SPECTERS AND SHADOWS

Not long after arriving in Karazhan, Khadgar received a strange and foreboding vision. He saw himself as an old, white-haired man, leading troops into battle against green-skinned enemies. He had heard of the orc incursion, but like most others, he didn't know what was true and what was rumor. Yet those creatures in his vision matched the descriptions of orcs that he'd heard.

Khadgar told Medivh what he had seen. The Guardian feigned ignorance, saying he knew little about the orcs. He claimed that he had been cooped up in Karazhan for so long that he hadn't heard much about the violence to the south. It was time to remedy that. The two magi rode gryphons over the Black Morass to scout out the region. The sight of the orcs gathering there stunned Khadgar. Their army was immense, and it was growing larger by the minute.

An orc warlock spotted the two magi from the ground and unleashed his fel powers on them. Medivh urged Khadgar to destroy their enemy. Khadgar struggled to defeat his foe, and only with the Guardian's help did he finally succeed.

Medivh and Khadgar also crossed paths with Lothar. The knight was leading his soldiers on a scouting mission in the region, battling any orcs they came across. Lothar knew that Medivh had been rattled by the power he'd unleashed against the Gurubashi years ago, but he urged the Guardian to rejoin the fray. Stormwind needed him to defeat the orcs. Medivh played along with his old friend's assumptions, telling Lothar he was concerned about tapping into his unwieldy magical powers. The Guardian's true motive was to buy time for the Horde to gain strength, nothing more.

Lothar spoke to Khadgar as well, telling him of Medivh's troubled past. He asked the young mage to act not only as his master's apprentice but also as his caretaker.

Khadgar did his best, but he quickly became frustrated. After the meeting with Lothar, Medivh became even more erratic than usual. For hours or days at a time, the Guardian would disappear from Karazhan. When he finally returned, he would be exhausted.

What troubled Khadgar even more was when a strange guest arrived at the tower: Garona. The young mage immediately regarded her as an enemy, but Medivh greeted her warmly. He insisted that Khadgar treat Garona with respect.

In the days that followed, Khadgar and Garona frequently sparred with words, but they soon developed a bond of friendship. The human came to believe, as Medivh did, that the half-orc was truly willing to turn her back on the Horde.

Yet Khadgar eventually realized something deeply troubling. Before their visit to the Black Morass, the Guardian had claimed he didn't know much about the invading orcs. And yet . . . it was clear he had befriended Garona long before Khadgar began his apprenticeship.

Medivh had lied.

That small breach of trust would widen over time.





THE TWISTED REALITY OF KARAZHAN

BANISHMENT OF THE FROSTWOLVES

The orcs had begun moving through the Dark Portal en masse. Yet not all clans came to Azeroth.

In the years after the Horde conquered the draenei, several clans had lost themselves to bloodlust and madness. These included the mighty Warsongs, the Shattered Hand, and the Bonechewers. Warchief Blackhand had sequestered the overly aggressive clans in different parts of Hellfire Peninsula, where they could do no harm to the rest of the Horde.

Blackhand believed that these clans would become liabilities if he allowed them to take part in the invasion of Azeroth. The last thing the Horde needed on a strange new world was to have its own allies attacking other orcs from behind.

Blackhand ordered the troublesome clans to remain on Draenor. He knew the idle days would weigh heavy on them. That was good. They would receive only stories of this lush new world, and see only scraps of its spoils. A few months of waiting would force these orcs to be on their best behavior. If they were still uncontrollable, they could stay on Draenor and rot, for all Blackhand cared.

Most of the remaining clans streamed through the Dark Portal: the Blackrocks, the Black Tooth Grin, the Bleeding Hollow, the Burning Blade, the Dragonmaw, and the Twilight's Hammer.

The Frostwolf clan also came through. Over the past year, Chieftain Durotan had continued questioning Gul'dan's motives and protesting against the use of fel magic. Despite his disgust with the Horde's leadership, he had brought his people through the Dark Portal. There was no future on Draenor; only on Azeroth could they survive another generation.

The Frostwolves initially fought against the humans alongside the other clans, but their destiny did not lie with the Horde. Gul'dan later confronted Durotan in secret. The warlock told him that his clan was no longer part of the Horde and that the Frostwolves had to leave the Black Morass immediately. If they ever returned, if they ever contacted *any* member of the Horde, Gul'dan promised to destroy every Frostwolf male, female, and child.

Durotan was loath to part from his fellow orcs, but he had just learned that his mate, Draka, was pregnant. He did not want to risk her, or their unborn child, by testing Gul'dan's wrath. And he knew why Gul'dan was letting them live—if Durotan were killed, it would make him a martyr and give his warnings weight among the rest of the Horde.

Durotan and his clan struck out north. The journey was frightening. Azeroth's terrain was unfamiliar, and Stormwind's humans treated every orc as an enemy. Yet the Frostwolves had an advantage—elemental spirits dwelled on Azeroth, and they were strong.

Discovering Azeroth's native spirits shook one of the clan's former shaman, Drek'Thar. It reminded him of the heritage he'd abandoned on Draenor. Drek'Thar renounced his use of fel magic and asked the elements for aid, and he received a small gift. The spirits showed him a path to remote, frost-lined mountains far to the north. It was a climate that was similar in some ways to that of Frostfire Ridge. The clan immediately set out to find these mountains.

THE HORDE INVADES

The Horde's war of conquest had truly begun. Warchief Blackhand ordered raiding parties to go north and west, cutting deep into Stormwind's lands. There was no more need for secrecy; Blackhand wanted to provoke the humans to anger, believing that these smaller creatures would be ineffective in their fury.

Blackhand's first assaults were meant to drive the human populace to panic. Entire villages in Brightwood, Westfall, and the southern Redridge Mountains fell to the Horde, their inhabitants either killed or forced to flee. Whenever Stormwind's patrols rode in to fend off the orcs, they were already gone. They were unlike any enemy the humans had ever faced.

Stormwind's leaders understood that the war had entered a new phase. King Llane quickly discarded any thoughts of approaching this fight the way his father, Barathen, had wanted to deal with the trolls. There was no chance of de-escalation. The orcs meant to conquer.

King Llane named Lothar the "King's Champion," the highest military rank in the kingdom, and he charged him with ending the orcish threat. Lothar decided to use his enemy's mobility against them. From scouting reports, he saw patterns in the ways the Horde would strike its targets. He set up ambushes along the orcs' paths of retreat, placing large numbers of troops under the command of a loyal knight known as Gavinrad the Dire. Sometimes, small units of these human knights were able to bring down entire orc raiding parties without any casualties.

The orcs soon learned that the humans were unlike any enemy they had faced, either. Stormwind's clerics called upon the Holy Light to mend the wounded, while magi wreaked havoc on the Horde with their command of the arcane arts. Though the orcs had encountered these powers when they'd fought the draenei, the humans used their abilities in different ways.

Then there were the knights on horseback. The swift and heavily armored soldiers were capable of running down orc raiders and fleeing from ambushes. Faced with these resilient and highly mobile enemies, the orcs were forced to adapt in ways they never had before.

In Stormwind City, King Llane had sounded the alarm. He dispatched messengers to the other human kingdoms, warning them of fearsome green-skinned invaders who had mysteriously appeared in the world. He asked for help, but received none.

Llane's reports were not believed by any other leader on the continent. Lordaeron, the nation most likely to offer aid, had received contrary information. A visiting noble from Stormwind had attracted much attention in Lordaeron's court when he openly mocked King Llane, claiming that the fighting was actually a war of rebellion by disgruntled citizens. Lordaeron sent a polite response to Llane, wishing him luck against "whoever was causing him such troubles." No soldiers were dispatched to aid Stormwind.

It did not help that Stormwind had developed a reputation for isolationism in recent decades, which many other nations saw as arrogant. The kingdom had prided itself on standing alone.

Now it had no choice.



GURUBASHI RESISTANCE

Most of the Horde's attacks were directed north, toward Stormwind. Yet a few raiding parties forged into the western jungles of Stranglethorn Vale. Chieftain Kilrogg Deadeye and his Bleeding Hollow led these efforts—the region reminded them of their ancestral home, and they had aims of claiming it for themselves.

Unbeknownst to the orcs, Stranglethorn was Gurubashi territory. Just as when the humans had violated their land years earlier, the trolls united to fight back this new threat. In the thick jungle, the fighting was unspeakably vicious. The trolls knew ways to strike fear into the hearts of their enemies . . . but so did the Bleeding Hollow. Generations of surviving in a jungle beset by the remnants of the Evergrowth had instilled a savage instinct into the orcs' warfare.

Even so, the Bleeding Hollow were at a severe disadvantage. They seemed to outnumber the Gurubashi in every skirmish, but the trolls knew the land too well. They were willing to give up vast swaths of jungle to draw the orcs deeper into Gurubashi territory. The trolls would then launch bloody ambushes from all directions, resulting in horrific losses for the Bleeding Hollow.

Had the Gurubashi not been so weakened by their attack on Stormwind—and by Medivh's defense of the city—they might have matched the Horde in strength. Yet the trolls could not muster the numbers to do anything but wage a guerrilla campaign in the jungles.

But that was enough. When Warchief Blackhand found out how many orcs were dying in Stranglethorn Vale—for no apparent gain—he ordered the Bleeding Hollow to retreat and join the fight against the humans. The Horde would deal with the troublesome trolls later.

The Gurubashi did not pursue the orcs out of the jungle. The trolls remained inside their own territory, ever on alert for another invasion.

THE HOLY ORDER OF NORTHSHIRE CLERICS

1 YEAR AFTER THE DARK PORTAL

Combat against the Horde was a brutal affair for Stormwind. The wounds inflicted by the orcs' mighty weapons could cause a human to bleed out within minutes.

One of the great sources of hope on the battlefield was the group of clerics who risked their lives to heal soldiers wounded in combat. The Holy Order of Northshire Clerics had its members accompany every Stormwind patrol and battalion into the fray, just as they had in wars past.

These clerics traced their roots to the Church of the Holy Light in Lordaeron. Long ago, they had established the Northshire Abbey in Stormwind and become a critical component of the kingdom. The clerics had been present on the battlefields of various conflicts, including the Gnoll War and the war against the Gurubashi. In some cases, their compassion had even granted them safety on the battlefield. The clerics were known to heal wounded gnolls and trolls in the past.

Such was not the case with the Horde. The orcs ruthlessly targeted every cleric they found, knowing that these healers could return a wounded human to battle. Many of the clerics died; without armor or weapons, they could do nothing against the Horde's fury.

Despite mounting losses among their ranks, the clerics never hesitated from joining the battle. Their bravery became legendary among Stormwind's forces.

HUMANITY AND THE HOLY LIGHT

Sacrifice and courage were among the founding principles of the Church of the Holy Light. The church traced its origins back more than two thousand years ago, all the way to the chaos of the Troll Wars. A human general, Lordain, selflessly gave his life to hold off an overwhelming force of Amani trolls that threatened to destroy a united human army. One of the people he saved was his sister, a renowned warrior named Mereldar.

When the war ended, Mereldar dedicated her life to caring for humanity's wounded veterans. It was she who first spoke to other humans about visions of the Light. In her dreams, Mereldar saw five strange forms, not human, thrumming with holy power. They filled her mind with the wisdom of holiness, protection, justice, retribution, and compassion. When she put their wordless teachings into practice, power seemed to flow through her. The patients under her care would see their wounds disappear and their illnesses vanish.

Other humans also reported seeing these visions. Mereldar met with them, and together, they codified the radiant wisdom of this higher power into the written word. From the teachings in these books, a religious movement formed. It was based on the tenet of selflessness, and a belief that the Light dwelled in all things. The movement sparked widespread faith in the Holy Light and became the predominant human religion.

Centuries later, Lordaeron's leaders codified the different Light-based traditions and belief systems. From these efforts, the Church of the Holy Light came to be. Lordaeron served as the home of this church. It became a popular destination for travelers seeking healing, wisdom, and inner peace.

Humans were not the first race on Azeroth to wield the Holy Light. Yet they had a great affinity to it, likely due to their heritage. Humanity traced its origins to the vrykul, half-giants forged by the mythical keepers. The extraordinary keepers had shaped Azeroth, and some of them had commanded the Holy Light.

The church constructed temples and shrines throughout the far-flung human lands, and it created a hierarchy of religious leaders to oversee its followers. The most important places of worship were located in the verdant Eastweald. Among the oldest and most revered of these holy sites were Light's Hope Chapel, Stratholme, Andorbal, and Tyr's Hand.

THE TWILIGHT CANTICLE

As the war against Stormwind unfolded in earnest, the Twilight's Hammer clan became a source of irritation for Warchief Blackhand. The clan's warriors were prone to disobey orders, and too many of their number wandered off, never to be seen again.

Blackhand considered "making an example" of them and erasing the entire clan from existence. The ogre mage Cho'gall intervened. He had been acting as the Twilight's Hammer's de facto leader, and he offered to become their official chieftain in order to keep them in line. The warchief let him try, and he was pleasantly surprised to discover that Cho'gall was able to end their disciplinary problems almost overnight. The Twilight's Hammer became obedient, effective soldiers, and Blackhand put their past mistakes out of his mind.

Cho'gall's success lay with his deep understanding of the Twilight's Hammer and their beliefs. They were a clan attuned to dark energies, a people who worshipped the powers of the Void. The moment they'd arrived on Azeroth, they had heard the Void's call louder and clearer than they ever had. There were creatures of shadow here, terrible beings of chaos and entropy, imprisoned in different locations but still alive and yearning to corrupt Azeroth.

The Twilight's Hammer were hearing the whispers of the ancient Old Gods. These beings dwelled in enchanted prisons deep below the earth. Discovering them had overwhelmed the Twilight's Hammer, driving the orcs into a state of sheer ecstasy.

This was seen by the clan as a sign of destiny. The Twilight's Hammer had found the place where they belonged—the place where they would bring about the Hour of Twilight.

The presence of the Old Gods had a profound impact on Cho'gall. Though he had believed the Void was a powerful force, he had cared little for the Twilight's Hammer's mad ravings about dark gods. Now, he had proof of their existence.

THE OLD GODS

Long ago, the void lords launched physical manifestations of their power throughout the universe. These monstrous creatures were known as the Old Gods, and their purpose was to find and corrupt a nascent titan. Most of the void lords' minions failed, but there were a few who almost succeeded.

A number of Old Gods landed on ancient Azeroth and began shrouding its sleeping titan spirit in shadow. They enslaved the world's native elementals and lorded over much of the primordial terrain. Before the Old Gods could finish corrupting Azeroth's world-soul, Aggramar and other titans discovered their presence.

A cataclysmic war soon raged for control of Azeroth. The titans and their servants narrowly triumphed, and they shackled the Old Gods in tombs beneath the earth. Yet these entities would not stay contained forever. The Old Gods' influence seeped out into the world, and many creatures fell to their control. Perhaps the most powerful of these servants was the black Dragon Aspect, Deathwing.

Cho'gall agreed to help the fanatical clan enact its apocalyptic prophecy, and he brought its members under control with one simple notion. He told them that the Hour of Twilight was not far off, and that the Horde's success would be the best way to bring that moment to fruition.

Until then, they needed to keep up appearances with Warchief Blackhand and obey their *true* masters in secret. The clan agreed. The Old Gods seemed pleased with the Horde's lust for war and destruction, so it was no great sacrifice to proceed with the conquest of the world.

As the weeks passed and Cho'gall attuned himself to the Old Gods, he branded the Twilight's Hammer's prophecies onto the skin of Pale orcs. He then cut off their flesh to form pages, creating a book that codified teachings about the Void. This book, the *Twilight Canticle*, would become a source of power and motivation for the followers of the Old Gods for decades.

FROSTWOLF DEFIANCE

While the Horde waged its war, the exiled Frostwolves moved north. They avoided almost all contact with humans thanks to the aid of the elements. Shortly after the Frostwolves arrived at their new home, the Alterac Mountains, Draka gave birth to a boy whom she would name Go'el.

This should have been a beautiful moment for Draka and Durotan. Instead, it filled them with horror. Their son's skin was green. He was infected with the orcs' blood-curse. For Durotan, this was the last straw. Gul'dan's pact with his masters had damned the orc race for all generations.

He decided he could no longer stand by and do nothing about the dark forces controlling the Horde, no matter the consequences. Neither could Draka.

Durotan and Draka told the Frostwolves to remain in the mountains and carve out a new life while they went back to the Horde to reveal the truth. The chieftain, his mate, and their new son, Go'el, made the treacherous journey south.

Drek'Thar called on his shamanic powers to send word to Orgrim Doomhammer. The elemental spirits whispered in the Blackrock warrior's dreams, revealing to him that Durotan was coming south and that he wished to meet at the edge of a land known as Loch Modan.

Orgrim did not tell Blackhand of the meeting. Like Durotan, Orgrim had become wary of fel magic, Gul'dan, and Warchief Blackhand. He deplored the banishment of the Frostwolf clan, seeing it as further proof that the Horde's leadership was corrupt. He had also learned of the Shadow Council's existence, and he considered the order dishonorable and manipulative.

Orgrim pretended to set up a scouting mission and took only a few trusted guards to Loch Modan, where Durotan was waiting. The Frostwolf chieftain showed him Go'el and explained everything he had uncovered: the mysterious warning he had received before the orcs had gathered at the Throne of Kil'jaeden, his theory that Gul'dan was in league with some dark force that was bent on manipulating the Horde—all that he knew.

Orgrim was shaken, but he was not entirely surprised. He told Durotan about something he had seen in recent weeks: the fel energies from Draenor were creeping out from the Dark Portal and into the Black Morass. Soon, this world would be as dead as the one they had come from.

Durotan, Draka, and Orgrim agreed that Gul'dan and Blackhand needed to be dealt with at all costs. Orgrim would return to the Horde alone and play along with the leadership's plans for

the moment. He urged Durotan and Draka to take shelter in the north until he sent word to them. Orgrim commanded his guards to accompany the Frostwolves on their journey home and keep them safe.

That was a mistake Orgrim would regret to his dying day. His guards were not loyal to him, but to the Shadow Council.

The guards had heard every word between Orgrim and his visitors. They decided they didn't need Gul'dan's permission to eliminate the Frostwolves—clearly he would want Durotan, Draka, and their child dead. After traveling north for several days, the guards fell upon Durotan and Draka. The Frostwolves fought bitterly against their attackers, killing one of them. But the remaining guards struck down Durotan and Draka, and Go'el was left to die in the frigid cold.

Miraculously, the child survived. A day after his parents were murdered, a hunting party led by Aedelas Blackmoore—a human noble from the northern stronghold of Durnholde Keep—came upon the grisly scene. It was rather shocking proof that the war reports out of Stormwind were credible; the dead creatures looked exactly like the descriptions of the beasts known as “orcs.”

The sound of crying drew Blackmoore's attention, and he found Go'el, starving and freezing but alive. He decided to take him back to Durnholde and have him examined. There was no telling what secrets Blackmoore might glean about his new enemies by observing one of their young. Go'el would spend his entire adolescence under Blackmoore's watchful eye.

When a few more days passed and Orgrim's guards hadn't returned, the orc grew suspicious. He sent other warriors north to find out what had happened. These scouts made a grim discovery.

Orgrim's friends and one of his “trusted guards” were dead. His scouts took it upon themselves to find the other assassins. They tracked down the Shadow Council servants before they made it back to the Horde lines in the south, and a fierce battle erupted. Orgrim's warriors returned victorious, reporting back to their commander in secret.

It was a stroke of luck. If Gul'dan had heard about Durotan and Orgrim's rebellious intentions, he would have had the Blackrock orc's throat slit in the night. Orgrim was determined to avenge his friends and his people, but he bided his time, waiting for an opportunity.

CONQUEST OF REDRIDGE

3 YEARS AFTER THE DARK PORTAL

Over the course of months, the orcs' brutal slash-and-burn raids on the countryside had razed farms, towns, villages, forges, and trade houses. Stormwind's economy was in ruins. More critically, many sources of food either had been destroyed or had fallen into the Horde's hands. Stormwind City's supplies would run dry within a few months.

Knowing this, Warchief Blackhand initiated the next phase of his war. He would bring the Horde north and conquer a region called the Redridge Mountains. From there, the orcs would then launch an invasion into Stormwind City itself.

The foothills of Redridge fell to the Horde with little resistance. It was so easy, the orcs believed the humans would not challenge them at all before they reached Stormwind City.

That was exactly what Commander Lothar hoped they would think.

THE FIRST WAR

A detailed map of the Eastern Kingdoms region, showing various geographical features and locations. The map is color-coded: orange for land, blue for water, and purple for specific regions. The title 'THE FIRST WAR' is on the left. The map includes labels for 'WETLANDS', 'LOCH MODAN', 'BURNING STEPPES', 'REDRIDGE MOUNTAINS', 'BLACK MORASS', 'STRANGLETHORN VALE', 'ELWYNN FOREST', 'BRIGHTWOOD', 'WESTFALL', 'Stormwind City', 'Blackrock Mountain', 'Karazhan', and 'Dark Portal'. A compass rose is in the bottom right corner.

WETLANDS

LOCH MODAN

Blackrock Mountain

BURNING STEPPES

Stormwind City

ELWYNN FOREST

BRIGHTWOOD

REDRIDGE MOUNTAINS

BLACK MORASS

WESTFALL

Karazhan

Dark Portal

STRANGLETHORN VALE



Blackhand led a small orc raiding party into the mountains, seeking to claim the township of Lakeshire as a Horde stronghold. Without warning, Lothar and his knights roared down the slopes, surrounding the orcs in an expertly executed ambush. The Horde raiders fought hard, but nearly every one of them died in the attack. Lothar almost collected Blackhand's head that day as well, but the warchief was accompanied by two Shadow Council warlocks. Their fel fire turned the tide of battle, forcing Lothar to retreat before he could draw Blackhand's blood.

Blackhand and the other survivors limped back to the Horde encampments. In the coming weeks, a much larger force would go on to take Lakeshire and the surrounding land. Blackhand had little gratitude for the warlocks who had saved his life. His brush with death had humiliated him. He blamed the Shadow Council for not sensing the impending ambush, and he personally executed the two warlocks for incompetence.

Gul'dan was less than pleased by this development. The warlocks were *his* subordinates to discipline, and he did not have an unlimited supply of them to spare.

Blackhand ignored Gul'dan's anger. As warchief, he was above being questioned.

BLACKROCK MOUNTAIN

The ambush on Blackhand gave Gul'dan something to think about. He had seen that humans would fight hard when outnumbered, and he suspected that a siege of Stormwind City would be more difficult than the Horde believed. Though the orcs had destroyed Shattrath City, that had been under much different circumstances. The Horde was now divided—some of its most powerful clans still remained on Draenor. Years of war, famine, and hunger had also weakened the armies.

What was more, Gul'dan had learned about Medivh's defense of Stormwind City against the Gurubashi trolls in years past. He had also discovered fragments of knowledge about the history of the Guardian and the Council of Tirisfal. All of this only deepened the mysteries surrounding Medivh. Was he sincere in wanting the Horde to conquer Azeroth? Was he truly a puppet of the Burning Legion? Or did he have some ulterior motive in mind? If so, Medivh might find a reason to wipe out the orcs just as he had done to the Gurubashi.

Gul'dan recalled how he had empowered the Horde before its conquest of Karabor: he had broken the world's elements and infused their energies into the orcs. Azeroth teemed with elemental spirits, and they were much stronger than those on Draenor.

Shadow Council spies reported sensing massive elemental activity to the northwest of Redridge, near a smoldering volcano called Blackrock Mountain. Cho'gall confirmed those reports, but he kept some information to himself. Not only did the two-headed ogre sense elemental power in the mountain, but he had also discovered that the local spirits were in league with the Old Gods.

The Shadow Council secretly traveled to Blackrock Mountain, planning to subjugate its inhabitants. It was a disaster. No orc had ever dealt with this level of raw elemental might on Draenor. The first few Shadow Council warlocks who tried dominating the elements faced a grim fate: they were burned from the inside out by gout of flame.

Deep beneath Blackrock Mountain lived Ragnaros, the elemental lord of fire. He commanded innumerable lesser elementals as well as an entire nation of mortal slaves. For centuries, the Dark Iron dwarves had served as Ragnaros's loyal subjects. Whenever a warlock tried to trespass too deep into the mountain, the Dark Irons would attack, their forces bolstered by raging fire elementals.

Before the Shadow Council incited Ragnaros and his minions to all-out war, Cho'gall mediated peace. His fledgling connection to the Old Gods allowed him access to the mountain's depths, and after extensive conversations with the Dark Iron dwarves and Ragnaros's elemental lieutenants, an accord was reached. The Old Gods were delighted with the work the Horde was doing, and they wanted to help, but they had no intention of giving even a scrap of power to Burning Legion puppets like the orcs. After all, Sargeras and his armies stood in direct opposition to the powers of the Void. Yet they did grant the Shadow Council a small refuge—called Blackrock Spire—high in the mountain. If the warlocks remained there, they would not be disturbed by Ragnaros or his followers.

Gul'dan was disappointed that his quest to seize the mountain's power had failed, but he was pleased that Cho'gall had proved to be such an effective diplomat. Had he known about the ogre mage's true motives and his newfound reverence for the Old Gods, he might not have been so glad. Yet for now, a secret haven was something the Shadow Council desperately needed. Tensions between Blackhand and Gul'dan were rising. A refuge was a priceless thing.

The mountain's power could wait until later.

THE FIRST SIEGE OF STORMWIND

Brightwood, Westfall, and the Redridge Mountains were now under Horde control. The time to strike at Stormwind City had come.

Warchief Blackhand scoffed when Gul'dan told him his mission to Blackrock Mountain was a failure; he had expected nothing less. He was prepared to crush Stormwind City without the help of borrowed elemental power.

Thousands of Horde soldiers flooded through Elwynn Forest and established siege lines outside Stormwind City. They encircled the stronghold, cutting off all access except for the sea. Blackhand ordered Kilrogg and Cho'gall to lead the Bleeding Hollow and Twilight's Hammer clans in an assault against Stormwind.

To soften the city's defenses, the Horde bombarded the walls with siege engines through the night. At dawn, Kilrogg and Cho'gall launched their attack. Orcs charged the battlements, while warlocks engulfed Stormwind's soldiers in fel fire. The losses among the city's defenders were staggering.

It seemed to Blackhand that Stormwind would fall by midday. No one was more astonished than him to hear cries of an attack on the Horde's rear lines.

Lothar had led the lion's share of Stormwind's knights around the Horde by sea, and he was now leading a charge through Elwynn Forest. The orcs in the rearguard were caught utterly by surprise, and the knights carved a massive gash into their lines.

The Horde attack soon collapsed. The Bleeding Hollow and the Twilight's Hammer broke off their aggression and tried to push back the knights. Stormwind's enormous gates opened, and soldiers poured out of the city in a counterattack, acting as a hammer to Lothar's anvil.

The orcs had no way to fight off the two-pronged assault. They could only run. It was the biggest disaster the Horde had ever suffered.

The defeat infuriated Blackhand. He barely restrained himself from executing Kilrogg and Cho'gall, but only because he suspected their clan members would revolt.

The Horde withdrew to its holdings in Redridge to draw up a new plan of conquest.

THE CURSED TOWER

Stormwind's victory over the Horde had not been a matter of luck. Lothar and King Llane had been acting on very specific information. Many of the Horde's battle plans had been provided by Khadgar, who had learned them from Garona.

Gul'dan knew that Garona was revealing information to her human friends about orcish culture and the Horde's movements, but he did not order her to stay away from Karazhan. The details Gul'dan had learned through her about Medivh and his mysterious home were too valuable to give up, despite the risk posed to the orcs' war effort.

Garona and Khadgar conversed frequently when they were together in Karazhan, especially about their growing concerns for Medivh. In recent months, Karazhan had become darker and more twisted. Tormented spirits floated through the hallways in greater numbers than ever before. From time to time, Khadgar and Garona were subjected to vivid, horrific visions of the past, present, and future.

Khadgar suspected this was all due to Medivh. The Guardian's mood swings had vanished entirely. That was a relief, but only at first; his rage had disappeared, but it seemed to have been replaced with nothing at all. It was as if Medivh had simply lost the ability to feel *anything*. As he withdrew from his humanity, the fabric of reality in Karazhan seemed to unravel.

Khadgar searched through the books in the tower's libraries, desperate to find any clue that would explain what was happening. An obscure tome seemed to hold answers. There was an ancient technique that allowed a skilled mage to evoke visions of specific memories. Unfortunately, the spell proved unreliable. Khadgar was rarely able to summon a vision of the moment he wanted, and questions about Medivh did not work at all.

After much trial and error, Khadgar decided to use the spell in a different manner. Perhaps he could see the origin of the rift connecting Azeroth with the orcish homeworld.

This latest effort succeeded, but the answers it provided were almost beyond belief.

Both Khadgar and Garona watched in horror as a new vision unfolded around them. They saw a mysterious stranger confronting Gul'dan on Draenor. The hooded man convinced the Shadow Council to create the Dark Portal and invade Azeroth by showing that the world was ripe for plunder.

Then they saw the stranger's face up close; it was none other than Medivh. The person who had unleashed the Horde upon Azeroth was the Guardian of Tirisfal.

FALL OF THE GUARDIAN

Scarcely had the troubling vision faded when Medivh learned of what Khadgar and Garona had discovered. The half-orc and the human narrowly escaped the Guardian's wrath. They fled to Stormwind City, hoping to warn King Llane and Lothar of Medivh's treason.

Khadgar insisted that Garona be allowed to enter the city, and she accompanied him when he met with the king. Gul'dan was watching through her eyes, and when he realized she was in the same room as Stormwind's ruler, he tried to compel her to murder Llane. Garona resisted the strange urge to commit violence, not realizing that it was coming from the warlock.

Llane could not believe that Medivh was responsible for such treachery, but Lothar did. He trusted Khadgar. As hard as it was to admit, he knew now that Medivh was a great threat to Azeroth, even more so than the Horde.

Lothar charged the knight Gavinrad with commanding Stormwind City's defenses. Then he led a war party to Karazhan, accompanied by Garona and Khadgar. With a heavy heart, Lothar vowed to capture or kill his childhood friend.

Observing this all through Garona's eyes, Gul'dan panicked. He had not yet found the location of the Tomb of Sargeras, and he could not allow Medivh to die before he learned it. As Lothar and his allies arrived at Karazhan and began their attack, Gul'dan reached out to the Guardian's mind.

At first, Medivh's mental defenses were too strong to penetrate. Yet as the battle commenced, he grew distracted. Gul'dan frantically rummaged through the Guardian's memories, searching for any useful information.

Just as he had done during the fight with Aegwynn, Sargeras assumed control over the Guardian's thoughts and actions. He unleashed the full might of his powers on the intruders. The battle at Karazhan was a maelstrom of fire, steel, and magic. Garona's mind was assailed by the Guardian's spells—Sargeras tried to take control of Gul'dan's mental chains and use Garona against her allies, but it was only partially effective. Confusion rippled through the half-orc. She soon found it impossible to differentiate between friend and foe.

Khadgar was nearly killed in the assault; Sargeras tried to rip his soul from his body, and when that failed, he drained part of his life force. The apprentice was prematurely aged, a young man who had become old and wizened.

In the end, it was Khadgar who buried a blade in his mentor's chest, fatally wounding him. Striking down the Guardian forced Sargeras's spirit from his body, banishing the Legion's lord into the depths of the Twisting Nether.

In Medivh's last moments, his thoughts became clear for the first time in his life. The full realization of what he had done, of the untold deaths he had caused, pressed down on him. He had utterly failed as Guardian, but Khadgar and his allies had accomplished what Medivh could not. They had defeated Sargeras and thwarted his plans. Medivh's last words were of thanks—he had only gratitude for Khadgar, Lothar, and their companions.

Garona was not there to see Medivh draw his last breath. She had already fled Karazhan. No one knew where she had gone, and there was no time to search for her.

It had been many centuries since a Guardian had died in combat, and never before had one been possessed by demonic power. Medivh's death had drastic consequences. Fel energy exploded outward from the tower of Karazhan, turning the surrounding land into a dangerous, thorny blight. The region west of the tower—Brightwood—would become known as Duskwood.

There were repercussions for the Horde as well. Gul'dan had succeeded in finding what he wanted—he now knew the location of the Tomb of Sargeras. Yet when Medivh was defeated, the warlock had still been scouring his memories for information. The shock of the Guardian's death slammed into Gul'dan's mind and threw him into a deep coma.



RELICS OF POWER

When Gul'dan was prying into Medivh's thoughts, he learned more than just the Tomb of Sargeras's location. The orc also gleaned valuable knowledge about Azeroth's history and artifacts of magical power that lay scattered throughout the world.

THE SECOND WARCHIEF

Far from Karazhan, Gul'dan's sudden coma sent shockwaves through the Shadow Council. They did not understand what had happened or why. Warchief Blackhand was also confused, but not terribly unhappy. He had not been pleased with the Shadow Council's recent efforts, and he knew that Gul'dan had been trying to assert more and more control over the Horde.

Orgrim Doomhammer believed that his time had come. The Shadow Council was in disarray, and Blackhand was still reeling from the recent failed attack on Stormwind City. Orgrim would have no better chance to erase the corruption that had damned the orc people.

He challenged Blackhand to a mak'gora, a duel to the death, calling the warchief a traitor who had sold his people into servitude to dark forces.

It was not a challenge Blackhand could refuse. No orc could, not without losing the Horde's respect. He could not even have Orgrim assassinated in secret—Blackhand had relied on the Shadow Council for such tasks.

Painted with clan symbols and adorned in oil, the two orcs dueled for hours. Orgrim ended the contest when he crushed Blackhand's skull with his family's weapon, the Doomhammer.

The watching orcs knelt before the victor, proclaiming their new leader *Warchief Doomhammer*. Orgrim spoke to the Horde, telling them that Gul'dan and his warlocks were not what they seemed. Their fel powers were what had killed Draenor. Orgrim declared that he would cleanse the Horde of the foul darkness that had poisoned it. His first step was to outlaw the practice of using fel magic, on pain of death. Azeroth would not suffer Draenor's fate.

Yet the full measure of Orgrim's vengeance would have to wait. After Blackhand's death, the Shadow Council had fled. Orgrim did not know where they had run to.

For now, Orgrim focused his attention on the war with Stormwind. He did not relish the prospect of more battle, but he had no choice. To return to Draenor meant a slow death. The only way the orcs would survive was by conquering Stormwind and making it their new home. If they did not defeat their enemies, they would be at the mercy of a strange world.

Warchief Doomhammer ordered the clans to prepare for one final assault. They were moving before the sun had set.

THE SECOND SIEGE OF STORMWIND

Warchief Doomhammer would take no chances with the second attack on Stormwind City. He unleashed the full might of the Horde against the stronghold. He had briefly considered calling on the Warsongs, the Shattered Hand, and other clans that were still on Draenor to reinforce them, but there was no time. Every day that passed was another day that Stormwind had to regroup.

As the battle commenced, both sides knew that this day would decide the fate of Stormwind. There would be no quarter, no mercy, and no retreat. The Horde breached the city's walls and stormed into the streets, but Stormwind's defenders held them at bay. At least, for a time.

King Llane was convening with his military commanders in Stormwind's keep when he received word that Garona had arrived from Karazhan. Lothar and Khadgar were still gone, and the king was worried about their fate.

Eager to learn what had happened, Llane allowed Garona into his presence. She was going to tell him about the battle with Medivh. Before she could, something snapped in her mind.

She had resisted Gul'dan's order to kill King Llane before, but her encounter with the Guardian had scrambled her thoughts. The line between friend and foe blurred. Her willpower faltered. The warlock's old command to kill the king flared bright in her mind. Deep down, she had no wish to slay Llane, a stranger who had welcomed her into his kingdom, who had treated her with more respect in recent months than the orcs had shown her in a lifetime.

Yet she could no longer disobey Gul'dan's order.

With tears streaming down her face, she plunged a dagger into Llane's heart. The young prince, Varian, witnessed the murder. His father's assassination deeply impacted the boy, and it would forever taint his perception of the orcs; he would view them as a deceitful and murderous people.

In the confusion that followed, Garona escaped the keep, vanishing into the chaos of battle. Word of the king's death spread quickly, and morale faltered. Fighting engulfed nearly every corner of Stormwind. The Horde's continuing barrage set fire to the city.

That was when Lothar and Khadgar returned from Karazhan. They saw the chaos, and when they learned the king was dead, Lothar took command of the remaining forces. There was nothing left to be done for his city. He could only save as many of its people as he could.

Lothar ordered a mass evacuation of the city. He, Khadgar, Gavinrad, and the remaining soldiers gathered Prince Varian and his mother, Queen Taria, along with any other citizens they could find. They fought street by street to Stormwind's harbor, losing many on the way. Among the casualties was Taria. When Lothar and the other survivors finally reached the docks, before they set sail, they destroyed nearly all of the city's remaining boats so that the Horde could not follow.

Stormwind City burned to the ground behind the refugees. The First War was over.

The Horde stood victorious. But its warchief was anything but happy.



LOTHAR AND OTHER REFUGEES FLEE STORMWIND

SCOURING OF THE SHADOW COUNCIL

4 YEARS AFTER THE DARK PORTAL

Warchief Doomhammer had no means—nor the inclination—to pursue Stormwind’s refugees. The Horde had taken heavy losses to achieve victory, and he knew he needed to secure his conquered land before facing any new enemies.

He sent messengers back to Draenor to call up the remaining clans. The Warsongs, the Shattered Hand, the Laughing Skull, the Thunderlords, and the Bonechewers would need time to reach the Horde’s new territory.

Orgrim used that time to consolidate his control of the Horde. His first priority was eradicating the Shadow Council. Though it was a powerful force, it was the root of the Horde’s corruption. Orgrim believed that the Shadow Council was in league with dark forces that were manipulating the orcs, and that the warlocks’ obsession with fel magic was what had killed Draenor. On a more personal level, Orgrim also wanted revenge. Members of the Shadow Council had murdered Durotan, Draka, and their infant child (as far as Orgrim was aware).

The Shadow Council’s whereabouts were unknown. Luckily, there was someone to interrogate. Gul’dan was still unconscious, but the Horde had captured his puppet, Garona, as she tried to escape from Stormwind City. Orgrim had her tortured until she revealed where the Shadow Council had built its secret refuge: Blackrock Spire.

A large force of Horde soldiers stormed the smoldering volcano. No fire elementals or Dark Iron dwarves barred their way. Ragnaros and the Old Gods kept their presence hidden, eager to see how the violent situation would play out.

The Shadow Council warlocks could do little to save themselves. Their fel power could only delay Orgrim’s wrath for so long, and they fell before the warchief’s loyal followers.

One of the few council members to survive was Cho’gall. The ogre made a very convincing case for why he should be spared. Without Cho’gall, the Twilight’s Hammer would succumb to madness again. Could Orgrim really afford to lose such a capable fighting force? Cho’gall swore his allegiance to the warchief, claiming that he had been manipulated into Gul’dan’s service.

Orgrim accepted his surrender reluctantly. He wasn’t sure whether the two-headed ogre was telling the truth, and he didn’t particularly care. He needed fighting power to protect the Horde’s new lands. Cho’gall also proved his usefulness when he introduced Orgrim to the Dark Iron dwarves who lived deep within the mountain. The rapport between the ogre and these creatures was an unexpected advantage. The dwarves agreed—at Ragnaros’s secret command—to allow the Horde to claim Blackrock Spire as its new headquarters. The Old Gods were delighted to see what chaos the orcs would sow on Azeroth in the coming years.

The warchief also spared Garona’s life. It was no secret that Gul’dan had been remarkably cruel to her, and her assassination of Llane had been very helpful. She, too, swore fealty to the Horde. Orgrim charged one of his most trusted lieutenants, Eitrigg, to act as her handler.

In time, Orgrim’s messengers returned from Draenor with bad news. The clans still on that world had descended deeper into bloodlust and had begun fighting with one another. Only a few skilled, disciplined orcs and a handful of ogres would be able to bolster the Horde.

It wasn't what Orgrim had been hoping to hear, but it was what he had to deal with. And soon, he would control a source of power that he could have never imagined, a weapon born from Azeroth's ancient past . . .

THE DEMON SOUL

Throughout the First War, Azeroth's mighty dragons were largely absent from the conflict. For many ages, these majestic creatures had protected the world under the guidance of the five Dragon Aspects: Alexstrasza, Neltharion, Nozdormu, Ysera, and Malygos. Yet they were no longer capable of safeguarding the world. They were still reeling from a betrayal millennia old.

Ten thousand years ago, during the War of the Ancients, the Aspects had joined the fight against the Burning Legion. Alexstrasza, Nozdormu, Ysera, and Malygos had willingly sacrificed a portion of their essence into a singular artifact that would channel their fury together. This weapon was known as the Dragon Soul, and it would be capable of annihilating Azeroth's demonic enemies.

Only Neltharion did not infuse the artifact with his power. He had crafted the weapon and presented it to his allies. On the surface, his intentions seemed pure. Yet, in truth, they were anything but noble. Unbeknownst to the other Aspects, Neltharion had fallen under the influence of the Old Gods.

After the other Aspects empowered the Dragon Soul, Neltharion wielded the artifact in battle. He destroyed scores of demons with the weapon, but he was not content to focus his wrath solely on the Legion. Neltharion also turned the Dragon Soul against his friends and allies.

This shocking betrayal broke the unity of dragonkind, and it earned Neltharion a new name: *Deathwing*.

The other Dragon Aspects eventually recovered the artifact from their brother. They were troubled to find that they could not destroy or reclaim the power they had infused into the weapon. The Aspects had little choice but to hide the Dragon Soul in a place where no one would think to look: a remote corner of the world that would become known as the Redridge Mountains. Enchantments were also placed upon the artifact, preventing Deathwing or *any* other dragon from ever touching it.

In the millennia that followed, the weakened Dragon Aspects largely retreated from the world. Deathwing's betrayal had changed them forever. The bronze Dragon Aspect, Nozdormu, occupied himself with the ancient task of safeguarding the past, present, and future. He rarely emerged from the swirling timeways. The green Aspect, Ysera, spent much of her time monitoring the health of Azeroth's wilds from the Emerald Dream. The blue Dragon Aspect, Malygos, had lost himself to madness due to Deathwing's actions, and he secluded himself inside his lair, the Nexus.

The red Dragon Aspect, Alexstrasza, did intervene in the activities of the world's mortal races, but only rarely. She also kept watch for any sign of Deathwing.

After the War of the Ancients, Deathwing had disappeared and settled into a deep slumber. The Dragon Soul had been too much for even the corrupted Dragon Aspect to wield in battle, and the artifact's power had nearly destroyed him. He had been forced to attach metal plates to his spine to keep his fiery body from tearing apart. Deathwing needed time to recover from his wounds and

regain his strength. During his long slumber, the other dragonflights hunted his corrupted children to the brink of extinction.

The incredible amount of magic that was used to open the Dark Portal finally roused Deathwing. He watched with fascination as Stormwind and the Horde fought, and he became convinced that the orcs might be the means by which he could restore his wounded black dragonflight to its full glory. Deathwing knew that more than just the other Dragon Aspects would oppose him if he ever came out of hiding; many of the mortal races would as well. If the Horde could break Azeroth's kingdoms—eliminating some of the strongest cultures in the world—it would allow Deathwing to devote his full attention to fending off his fellow Aspects.

During the First War, Deathwing's Old God masters had urged him to take small steps to aid the orcs. Nothing too drastic, of course, for he did not want to attract the attention of the other dragonflights. Yet the Old Gods saw Deathwing's intervention as a way to engulf the world in chaos.

The first thing he had done was to take on the guise of a human noble from Stormwind. He had visited Lordaeron and charmed the aristocracy with gossip. When stories of the Horde's invasion finally reached their kingdom, Deathwing openly scoffed at them. He told Lordaeron's upper society that the tales were fabrications meant to hide growing problems with human rebels. His lies were far more believable than the desperate pleas for help from Stormwind.

To win over those who stubbornly believed the reports from Stormwind, Deathwing turned to his sorcerous abilities. He subtly influenced the minds of Lordaeron's nobles, preventing them from taking any action against the Horde.

Once he was certain that Lordaeron would send no aid against the Horde, Deathwing had moved south. Taking on the form of a Blackrock orc, he had examined the orcs' society from the inside, living as one of them for months. It had been easy for him to sense the hidden power driving the Horde's actions, and before long, he had maneuvered himself into the good graces of various individuals. Gul'dan believed he was a loyal follower; Blackhand believed he was a proud Blackrock orc; even Orgrim Doomhammer believed he was a stalwart ally.

In the end, Warchief Blackhand had fallen to Orgrim, but that was not an issue. The Shadow Council served the Legion, and Deathwing served the Old Gods. Shattering the Legion's hold on the orcs only made them more vulnerable to his masters.

There remained only one problem. The Horde had been weakened by the First War. If the rest of the human kingdoms were to unite, the orcs would not have the means to destroy them. Even if they could, they would surely awaken too many enemies. If the other Dragon Aspects became aware of the threat the Horde posed, the orcs would not stand a chance.

Yet the Dragon Soul was still out there. Because it contained power from all of the Aspects except for Deathwing, it could be used against them, for the purpose of either destruction or control. No dragon could wield the artifact . . . but the orcs could. They would make very convenient allies.

Deathwing granted visions to one of the clan chieftains. He had learned much about the Horde and its ways, and he believed that Zuluhed, leader of the Dragonmaw, would be most receptive.

Zuluhed was bombarded with vivid dreams of his clan taming and riding strange, powerful winged creatures. In the human tongue, these beasts were called *dragons*. It was an intoxicating sight—the heritage of the Dragonmaw had been to tame *rylaks* on Draenor, to make them *nelghor*,

THE BLUE DRAGONFLIGHT

During the War of the Ancients, Deathwing's betrayal had killed nearly every blue dragon in existence. The entire flight would have gone extinct if not for the actions of Alexstrasza and her dragons. They gathered the remaining blue dragon eggs and did what they could to hatch and raise new whelps. For a time, some of Alexstrasza's followers also safeguarded magical artifacts and places of power on Azeroth. The task was normally reserved for blue dragons, but with the flight in disarray, there was no one else left to fulfill their ancient duties.

“loyal beasts.” To once again soar in the sky was an idea that could not be resisted. If properly tamed and broken, these dragons would make excellent *neighor*.

Once the hook was set, Deathwing coaxed Zuluhed to the Redridge Mountains. Hidden deep beneath the mountains, protected by wards, and guarded by a red dragon named Orastrasz was a featureless gold disc. This was the Dragon Soul, untouched since it was buried millennia ago.

Zuluhed and his clan immediately fell upon Orastrasz. They had never faced a red dragon in battle before. Over a dozen orcs perished in the fight, but they succeeded in killing the guardian.

Zuluhed then ordered his clan's greatest warlock, Nekros Skullcrusher, to recover the artifact. The orc shattered the relic's defenses. He sensed faint fel energies on it—a remnant of its use in the War of the Ancients—and he renamed it the Demon Soul.

Far from the Redridge Mountains, Alexstrasza sensed the breaking of the artifact's wards. When she heard no word from the relic's guardian, she grew concerned. Alexstrasza took several of her red dragons and hurried south. They believed that some foolish mortal had somehow stolen the artifact, and that Orastrasz was in the midst of trying to hunt it. They thought it would be easy to help him retrieve it.

In truth, they were flying into Deathwing's trap.



COUNCIL OF SEVEN NATIONS

As Lothar and Stormwind's refugees fled north, word of the city's destruction spread to other nations. Lordaeron's ruler, King Terenas Menethil II, was deeply shaken by the news. It had been difficult to sift fact from rumor. At first, the king had not even believed that the orcs were real. Now he knew they were a grave threat.

When Stormwind's survivors finally arrived in Lordaeron, Lothar told Terenas of the Horde's true might. He urged the king to gather the other human nations immediately. Without unity, he argued, the Horde would have no difficulty picking off each kingdom one by one.

In time, the leaders of all the human nations gathered in Lordaeron's Capital City. There had not been such a gathering in recent memory. Joining Terenas and Lothar were King Genn Greymane of Gilneas, Lord Admiral Daelin Proudmoore of Kul Tiras, Archmage Antonidas of Dalaran, King Thoras Trollbane of Stromgarde, and King Aiden Perenolde of Alterac.

This occasion was deemed the Council of Seven Nations. At the outset, unity seemed to be a distant dream. Terenas called upon his fellow rulers to join together and form an unstoppable *Alliance* of human nations, one that would eradicate the threat of the Horde and reclaim Stormwind for its survivors.

There was some interest. Archmage Antonidas, representing Dalaran's Kirin Tor, had heard firsthand accounts of the Horde from Khadgar. Proudmoore was friends with Anduin Lothar, and he believed that vengeance on behalf of a destroyed human nation was the correct course of action. Trollbane had a close relationship with Lordaeron, and he, too, was willing to fight.

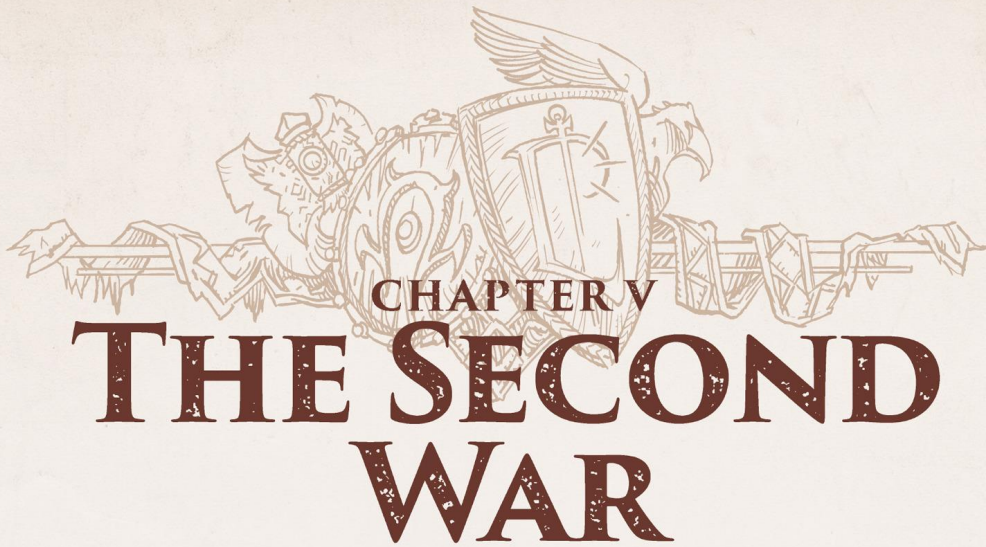
Yet Gilneas and Alterac were not so easily convinced. They openly expressed suspicion about whether creatures from another world had invaded at all; Deathwing's rumors had spread far beyond Lordaeron. They believed there must be some other explanation.

While the Council of Seven Nations continued its meetings, the Horde prepared for war.





CHAPTER V
**THE SECOND
WAR**



CHAPTER V

THE SECOND WAR

ARMING THE HORDE

4 YEARS AFTER THE DARK PORTAL

As the dust of the First War settled, Orgrim Doomhammer mulled over the future of his people. He dreamed of a time when the orcs could return to their old traditions and ways, free from fel magic and the other corruptive influences that Gul'dan and Blackhand had introduced to the clans.

Yet that dream would be long in coming. First, Orgrim would have to secure a home for the orcs on Azeroth. Conquering Stormwind was not enough. The other human nations would never make peace with the Horde. Not after Stormwind's destruction. Even now, Doomhammer's scouts reported that there was a gathering of human nations in a northern land called Lordaeron.

Orgrim knew that the Horde could not sit idle. If he and his people simply tried to defend their conquered territory, the human nations would muster the full might of their armies, march south, and eventually overrun the orcs. The only way for Orgrim to secure his race's survival was to strike first, before his enemies could fully prepare for war. After interrogating human prisoners taken from Stormwind, the orcs had learned that many powerful human nations existed in the north, but none compared to Lordaeron. It was the heart of human culture. If the Horde conquered its seat of power, Capital City, Doomhammer believed the other kingdoms would fall in turn.

But that was if the Horde conquered Lordaeron's capital. The war with Stormwind had depleted Doomhammer's army and sapped its resources. With only meager reinforcements coming from Draenor, the warchief sought other ways to strengthen the Horde. His followers scrambled to find new weapons. Blackrock orcs commandeered Stormwind's forges, but many of them were in ruins due to the fire that had raged through the city.

The Dragonmaw orcs had discovered a strange and mighty artifact known as the Demon Soul. Yet thus far, they had not unlocked its potential. The clan's leader, Zuluhed, had given the Demon Soul to his second-in-command, Nekros, and tasked him with unraveling its secrets.

The Horde had also befriended Azeroth's fearsome Amani trolls. They had a long and bitter history of conflict with humans, and they had rejoiced upon learning of Stormwind's destruction. The Amani saw the orcs as potential allies. Some of them indicated that they would join the Horde in exchange for Doomhammer's aid. The Amani ruler, Warlord Zul'jin, had been captured by humans

and shackled in a prison near the town of Hillsbrad. If the orcs helped them liberate Zul'jin, these trolls would agree to fight for the Horde.

Then there was Gul'dan. Not long after Stormwind's fall, the disgraced warlock had stirred from his coma. The warchief had kept Gul'dan under watch, intending to execute him when he woke. Yet when the time came to shed his blood, Orgrim stayed his hand. Gul'dan had an offer for his new master, a means to ensure the Horde's victory over the humans.

THE WARLOCK'S GAMBIT

Gul'dan awakened from his coma to find that the world had changed. Before, he had commanded immense power over the Horde. Now, he had none. His Shadow Council was destroyed, and Doomhammer was the new warchief. Gul'dan knew that if he did not win Orgrim's trust, he would meet the same grisly fate as his warlocks.

Gul'dan pleaded for his life, and he pledged his loyalty to the Horde. The warlock promised Doomhammer that he would no longer seek to manipulate the orcs. He disavowed his connection with the benefactors who had taught the orcs fel magic, claiming that they had betrayed and abandoned him.

The warlock knew that his word was worth little more than dirt to Orgrim. He needed something more to win the warchief's trust. Gul'dan saw that the Horde was desperate for power. Without it, the orcs would fail in the coming war against the humans. He told Doomhammer that he could create new warriors, ones who could stand toe-to-toe with humanity's spellcasters. Clerics and magi had proved to be troublesome opponents in the First War. From what human prisoners had told the orcs, nations like Lordaeron incorporated far more of these spellcasters into their armies than Stormwind had.

Doomhammer didn't trust Gul'dan, but the warlock was right. The Horde had no answer to human magic, especially after the warchief had outlawed the use of fel energy. The draenei had wielded similar abilities to those of the humans, but the armies of Lordaeron and the other northern nations were far greater in number.

Orgrim gave Gul'dan a chance to prove his worth. If he could produce something useful, he would live. If he could not, the warchief himself would be the one to end his miserable existence. Orgrim knew that leaving Gul'dan alive was a risk, but he believed that he could control the warlock rather than become his accomplice and puppet as Blackhand had.

Having forestalled his execution, Gul'dan entertained the thought of murdering Doomhammer. He abandoned his scheme when a familiar voice whispered to him—the voice of Kil'jaeden.

After years of silence, Sargeras had commanded Kil'jaeden to reconnect with his servant. The demon lord told Gul'dan to leave Doomhammer in charge of the Horde. He had sacked Stormwind, accomplishing what even Blackhand had failed to do. He was a leader the Legion needed—a leader who could conquer Azeroth's defenders. Kil'jaeden ordered Gul'dan to do whatever he could to help strengthen the Horde and ensure that it completed its goal. Once again, the demon lord promised the warlock power if he followed the Legion's will.

Kil'jaeden had every intention of making good on his promise, but Gul'dan did not trust him. He had grown tired of serving as the Legion's pawn. Though Gul'dan feigned obedience to the demon lord, he plotted betrayal. He now knew the Tomb of Sargeras's location. He could seize the power within the tomb for himself. What need did he have of Kil'jaeden or the Legion?

To reach the tomb, Gul'dan would require loyal allies. He would need an army to protect him from the Horde's inevitable wrath when it learned of his intentions. Gul'dan convinced Doomhammer to grant him permission to form his own clan, the Stormreavers. The warlock claimed that he would keep his activities visible to the entire Horde, unlike when he had ruled over the Shadow Council and shrouded himself in secrecy. He and his clan members would be forced to fight on the front lines alongside the rest of the army. In truth, Gul'dan planned to use the new clan as a means to expand his influence and power.

Doomhammer suspected as much, but he was confident he could stay one step ahead of Gul'dan. If the warlock wanted a clan of his own, so be it. Orgrim would plant spies among the clan to keep watch on Gul'dan and his activities.

There was another reason for Orgrim's decision. Opinion among the orcs had turned against Gul'dan and his use of fel magic, and no clan would accept him or his followers into its ranks. If the warlock was to make an impact in the war, he would need a clan of his own.

THE DEATH KNIGHTS

5 YEARS AFTER THE DARK PORTAL

Gul'dan contemplated many ways to deliver on his promise of making new warriors. It was paramount that they secretly pledge their loyalty to him, and so the warlock turned to his Shadow Council. Though its members were dead, their spirits remained intact. If Gul'dan could bring them back from the grip of death, he believed they would be forever grateful to him.

Gul'dan and Cho'gall gathered the Shadow Council's disembodied spirits and searched for a way to place them into physical shells. The warlock considered using the bodies of orcs—or even ogres—who had fallen in the First War. Yet he knew that the Horde would never stand for such desecration of its honored dead. It would cause an uproar among the clans and lead to swift retribution against Gul'dan.

No, orcs and ogres were out of the question, but humans were not. Gul'dan would meld the Shadow Council's spirits with the corpses of Stormwind's greatest knights.

Because fel magic had been outlawed, Gul'dan would transform these soldiers into powerful necromancers. He and Cho'gall conducted bloody ritual after bloody ritual to complete their work. After a series of bitter failures, they finally succeeded.

Gul'dan fused the spirit of his old ally Teron'gor to the corpse of a fallen Stormwind knight. Necromantic energies surged through the rotting body and raised it into undeath. This shambling skeletal horror became known as Teron Gorefiend.

He was the first of what Gul'dan would call the *death knights*.

FATE OF THE NECROLYTES

The orc necrolytes had been an interesting experiment, but they did not prove as effective in combat as Gul'dan had hoped. In the end, he did find a good use for them. Gul'dan and Cho'gall sacrificed the necrolytes, using their necromantic energies to reanimate the death knights.



These soldiers of darkness were the ultimate successors to warlocks. They had no need of food or rest. The death knights could summon necromantic energies to rip the life from their enemies and even raise the dead as reinforcements on the battlefield.

Having perfected his techniques, Gul'dan forged more death knights. The sight of them sickened Orgrim. They were unnatural abominations, and they had been created from the fallen members of the Shadow Council, the very organization that Orgrim saw as responsible for killing the orcs' homeland. Yet despite all of the warchief's misgivings, he could not deny the death knights' potential. They used a different breed of magic than fel sorcery, one that was immensely powerful but would not drain the land of life.

After weighing his options, Doomhammer accepted these unholy warriors into the Horde. The longer he waited, the more he risked losing the element of surprise in attacking the human nations. The death knights were the weapon he needed to crush Lordaeron, a means to strike fear into his enemies and counter humanity's magic. Orgrim ordered members of the Blackrock clan to keep a close watch on the death knights. Secretly, the warchief planned to destroy Gul'dan and his undead soldiers once the Horde had secured victory.

Orgrim was right to mistrust the death knights. Though they openly swore their allegiance to the Horde, they cared little for the warchief or his armies. The death knights were also not the subservient followers that Gul'dan had hoped they would be. They were loyal only to themselves, and they acted solely to preserve their own existence.

After the creation of the death knights, all that remained was to replenish the Horde's dwindling supplies and armaments. For that, Orgrim turned his gaze to Khaz Modan, homeland of the Bronzebeard dwarves.



INVASION OF KHAZ MODAN

The Bronzebeard dwarves were a proud and resilient people. For over two thousand years, they had dwelled in Ironforge, a grand city carved into the heart of a mountain. The surrounding region, Khaz Modan, was filled with dwarven blacksmithing forges, and the mountains were rich with oil and metal ores. Before moving against Lordaeron, the orcs would conquer the dwarves' homeland and use its resources to bolster their arsenals.

Amid a fierce blizzard, the Horde marched into Khaz Modan. The dwarves were ready. Demolition teams collapsed the mountain tunnels leading into the region, slowing the orcs' approach. Meanwhile, the dwarves called upon their old allies, the gnomes, for aid. The two races pooled their resources and set up defensive positions across Khaz Modan.

Despite these preparations, the dwarves and the gnomes were no match for the orcish army. The Horde swept into Khaz Modan with the fury of a winter storm. Hundreds of dwarves and gnomes fell before the orcs' hungry blades. One by one, the Horde conquered the small settlements, outposts, and armories that dotted the icy landscape.

Khaz Modan's defenders withered before the Horde's onslaught. The gnomes retreated to their capital, Gnomeregan, while the dwarves fled back to their fortress city, Ironforge.

Seeing the dwarves as the greater of the two threats, Doomhammer committed his forces to toppling Ironforge. Yet it would not fall as the rest of Khaz Modan had. Nearly all of the city's residents took up arms. They knew this might be their last stand, and they were prepared to die with battleaxe in hand before surrendering.

The Horde smashed against Ironforge like a battering ram, but to no avail. Every dwarf who died in battle brought ten orcs with them to the grave. The cost in lives grew so great that Doomhammer called off the siege. Ironforge was not his main goal, and he saw no need to throw

THE DEFENSE OF GNOMEREGAN

The orcs also made attempts to destroy Gnomeregan, but they never succeeded. The gnomes were a brilliant race, and they harnessed their advanced technologies to defend their lands. They rigged explosives throughout the forests and hills that surrounded Gnomeregan. Many orcs fell to these booby traps before they even reached the gnomish capital.

Gnomeregan itself was shielded by an impenetrable iron gate. After weeks of bombarding the entrance with siege engines, Doomhammer called off the attack. As he'd done with the dwarves in Ironforge, he commanded the Bleeding Hollow to keep the gnomes contained in their city. But the warchief made no further attempts to conquer Gnomeregan. It would escape the Horde's wrath.



his soldiers' lives away to conquer the stronghold. Doomhammer had what he needed. Khaz Modan and its bountiful resources were his to exploit.

To keep the dwarves contained, Doomhammer stationed the Bleeding Hollow clan outside Ironforge's gates. He then ordered his Blackrock orcs to mine the surrounding mountains and commandeer the dwarves' forges. Before long, thick smoke blanketed Khaz Modan. Blacksmiths distributed newly wrought armaments and siege weapons throughout the Horde.

The time to invade Lordaeron was drawing near.

TIDES OF DARKNESS

After conquering the bulk of Khaz Modan, Doomhammer plotted the next phase of his campaign. To reach the human kingdoms by land, the orcs would need to pass through a swampy mire to the north called the Wetlands. It was a perilous route. Transporting siege engines and an army through that terrain would be a long, grueling slog. Then the orcs would be forced to cross the narrow Thandol Span bridge that led into the northern lands—a site the humans could easily defend.

The humans would likely expect the Horde to cross north by land, but Doomhammer would not do the expected. He would build a fleet of ships and launch a surprise attack in the heart of humanity's territories.

Though few orcs publicly questioned Doomhammer's decision, many had reservations about his plans. The orcs were not a seafaring people. Most of the superstitious clans feared the open sea.

Much to Orgrim's surprise, Gul'dan and his Stormreaver clan proved to be instrumental in persuading the Horde to cross by sea. The warlock and his followers urged their allies that it was the best course of action, and that the voyage would be safe. Orgrim welcomed the assistance, but he remained wary of Gul'dan's motivations.

In a bay tucked in the southwestern Wetlands, Orgrim oversaw the construction of a vast yet crude fleet. Orcs knew little of shipbuilding, but they had allies who did. Some of the Horde's ogres had maritime knowledge, and they helped construct immense vessels called juggernaughts. The Amani trolls also instructed the orcs in the ways of building small but swift ships that could safely navigate the seas and rivers.

In addition, Doomhammer acquired aid from a completely new ally: the goblins. These ingenious and cunning creatures had witnessed the Horde's arrival and its conquest of Stormwind. More war was on the horizon, and they were determined to profit from it. Rather than avoid the orcs, the goblins of the Steamwheedle Cartel approached the invaders with an offer. The Horde was new to Azeroth, and it had much to learn about the world and its cultures. The goblins could provide new technologies, maps, and other useful information to the orcs . . . for the right price.

The warchief would not force the bold goblins into servitude; that was something Blackhand might have done. Orgrim saw more benefit in treating them as equals. If it was gold they wanted, gold they could have. The orcs had recovered a fortune from Stormwind's coffers, but they had no need of coin. Doomhammer paid the goblins handsomely for their aid. When he learned that they were also accomplished shipwrights, he hired them to oversee the construction of the Horde's fleet.

With help from the goblins and the Horde's other members, orc builders set to work. Doomhammer did everything he could to camouflage the construction from human scouts.

ALLIANCE OF LORDAERON

Far north of the Wetlands, the Council of Seven Nations continued debating the merits of unity. During these meetings, gnome and dwarf refugees arrived with dire news: the orcs had conquered Khaz Modan. This turn of events shocked the human leaders. The dwarves and the gnomes were mighty, and the speed with which their territories had fallen defied understanding. What was worse, the Horde was now encroaching north.

Even with this troubling development, King Greymane of Gilneas and King Perenolde of Alterac stubbornly resisted calls for creating the Alliance. They feared that by unifying, they would lose some of their regional power. Divisions widened between the gathered leaders. Their arguments grew so fierce that Gilneas and Alterac threatened to abandon the council.

One person in attendance could not stand by as the humans squabbled over meaningless issues. His name was Turalyon, and he was one of Lordaeron's most venerated priests.

Turalyon brought Stormwind's prince, Varian, to his side. The priest called on the leaders to forget their old differences. If they underestimated the orcs, every kingdom would suffer Stormwind's fate. Their cities would burn, and their children would become orphans much like Varian—if their children survived at all. The orcs were not a merciful people.

Turalyon argued that the kingdoms stood at a crossroads. If they failed to unite, history would know humanity as a people who were too proud to band together. A people who'd had a chance to save Azeroth but instead had thrown it all away over politics and illusions of power.

Yet if humans did unite into the Alliance, they could change history. They could arise as Azeroth's guardians. After all, no other race in the known world had humanity's resources, its strength of leadership, or its bravery.

The Council of Seven Nations erupted in applause after Turalyon's speech. His words even swayed Greymane and Perenolde. That very day, the human leaders voted unanimously to form the Alliance of Lordaeron.

Debates followed about who could best lead the Alliance military, and the rulers decided on Anduin Lothar. Because he was from Stormwind, he had no political ties to the northern human nations. He could command the armies fairly and act as a neutral party in disputes.

Lothar accepted this title with great humility. As supreme commander of the Alliance army, he wielded more power and influence than any human had since the days of the ancient king Thoradin.

Lothar immediately rallied the Alliance's forces and ordered them to gather in Hillsbrad Foothills, a region north of the Wetlands.

ORDER OF THE SILVER HAND

As the human forces amassed, Lothar made other preparations. The Alliance was composed of disparate nations, some of which were rivals. They all had different customs and ways of life. Lothar needed something to bind them as one. He needed champions whom every human could rally behind, no matter where they came from.

The clerics were the most obvious choice to fill this role, but they hadn't fared well in the First War. Though they were brave, they lacked martial training. Clerics were better suited to using the Holy Light to mend wounds off the battlefield. Lothar needed *something* else.



TURALYON RALLIES THE COUNCIL OF SEVEN NATIONS TO FORM THE ALLIANCE

The solution came from the Church of the Holy Light. Archbishop Alonsus Faol had recently learned of everything that had transpired in Stormwind, including how the clerics had fared. He met with Lothar and proposed forging a new order, one that would represent the best qualities of humanity. It would comprise soldiers who were skilled not only in wielding the Light, but also in leadership and the arts of traditional warfare.

With Lothar's permission, Faol recruited a handful of knights to form this new order. These individuals all showed an aptitude for the Holy Light, and they also exemplified the qualities of loyalty, bravery, and honor.

Faol called his students the paladins, and their group was named the Order of the Silver Hand.

The order's members were revered individuals from Lordaeron. There was Turalyon, the priest who had helped forge the Alliance at the Council of Seven Nations. There was Saidan Dathrohan, a mountain of a man who was gifted with immense physical strength. Then there was Tirion Fordring, a knight renowned for his zeal and resilience. Lastly, there was Uther. He had already apprenticed under Faol for some years, and he was an accomplished knight and a pious believer in the Holy Light.

Lothar also sent one of his comrades from Stormwind to undergo paladin training: Gavinrad the Dire, a battle-hardened knight who had fought in the First War. Faol welcomed this student with open arms.

The city of Stratholme would later serve as the paladins' base of operations. Yet for the time being, Lothar kept them close, ordering them to travel alongside the main Alliance army. Day and night, the holy warriors were trained vigorously. Faol taught them how to use the Light to comfort their allies and smite their enemies, and also how to lead by example. They would be more than just weapons. No matter how dire times became, the paladins would serve as lights in the darkness, as beacons of hope to guide the Alliance.

Faol instructed his paladins to live simple lives. They would seek no fortune or glory in war. Until the end of their days, they would put the needs of others above their own.

As training progressed, Faol presented a set of enchanted librams to the paladins. These holy tomes were some of the church's most ancient relics. Each libram represented what Faol saw as a core trait of the Silver Hand: retribution, holiness, protection, justice, and compassion.

Faol gave one libram to each of the paladins. He challenged his students to become living embodiments of what their holy tomes represented. Turalyon would hold the *Libram of Protection*; Uther would hold the *Libram of Justice*; Tirion would hold the *Libram of Retribution*; Saidan would hold the *Libram of Holiness*; Gavinrad would hold the *Libram of Compassion*.

Lothar often checked in on the emergent Order of the Silver Hand. He was so pleased by what he saw that he asked for Turalyon and Uther to serve as his lieutenants.

Faol was happy to accommodate the supreme commander, but he did not release the paladins from his care yet. It would be weeks before they were ready to set foot on the battlefield.



THE BINDING OF ALEXSTRASZA

South of Lordaeron, Alexstrasza the Life-Binder and her red dragons continued searching for who had stolen the Demon Soul. Their investigations eventually led them to the orcs.

Alexstrasza and her kin arrived just in time to witness the Horde's brutal assault on Khaz Modan. Though the Life-Binder longed to aid the dwarves and the gnomes, finding the Demon Soul was paramount. The artifact contained the powers of every Dragon Aspect except for Deathwing. If it fell into the wrong hands, it could spell the doom of not only dragonkind but the whole world.

Alexstrasza soon discovered that the Demon Soul was in the care of an orc known as Nekros. He and his Dragonmaw clan were experimenting with the artifact and abusing its power. Alexstrasza and her followers descended on Nekros, expecting little resistance. Such a primitive creature could never unlock the Demon Soul's secrets.

The dragons were wrong.

Unbeknownst to Alexstrasza and her allies, Nekros had learned much about the artifact from dreams and visions sent by Deathwing. The black Dragon Aspect had taught the orc of the Demon Soul's true power, and he had instructed him in how to wield it. The greatest knowledge Deathwing had shared with Nekros was that the relic could be used to enslave Alexstrasza and other Dragon Aspects.

Nekros called on the Demon Soul's fury, and the artifact seared the Life-Binder with excruciating pain. Alexstrasza plummeted from the sky and slammed into the mountains outside Khaz Modan. Nekros then bent the Demon Soul's power to enslave the Life-Binder, and the rest of the Dragonmaw orcs swarmed over the enormous creature and bound her in chains.

Though the Demon Soul could also be wielded against other dragons, Nekros was but one orc, and his knowledge of the artifact was limited. He knew he would never be able to use the relic's power on Alexstrasza and her followers at once, and so he focused his attention on the Life-Binder. The red dragons could do little to help their queen. Every time one of them swooped down toward the orcs, Nekros lashed Alexstrasza with the Demon Soul's extraordinary power. He did not speak the language of dragons, but his message was clear: when the dragons attacked the orcs, Alexstrasza suffered great pain.

By enslaving Alexstrasza, Nekros effectively bound the red dragons to his will. The creatures feared that if they did not obey the Dragonmaw, Alexstrasza would be tortured or even killed.

GRIM BATOL

Word of the Dragonmaw's feats spread throughout the Horde. No one was more pleased by the news than Warchief Doomhammer. He now had another potent weapon in his arsenal. Yet it would take time to reliably control the dragons and use them in the heat of battle.

Doomhammer commanded Nekros and the Dragonmaw to take control of Grim Batol, a remote fortress in the mountains east of the Wetlands. This dilapidated stronghold had once belonged to the Wildhammer dwarves, but the clan had abandoned it long ago.

Nekros and his followers chained Alexstrasza in Grim Batol's depths. They also forced the other red dragons who had been with the Aspect to accompany them, threatening to hurt the Life-Binder if they disobeyed. On Draenor, the Dragonmaw had mastered the art of training winged rylaks as battle mounts. They would do the same with their fearsome captives in Grim Batol.

THE CURSED STRONGHOLD

Grim Batol was a haunted place. Centuries ago, a war between the Dark Iron and the Wildhammer dwarf clans had raged deep within the city. The Dark Iron sorceress Modgud called upon dark powers to overwhelm Grim Batol's defenders. Though the Wildhammers eventually killed her and drove out the Dark Irons, their home was never the same. Modgud had cursed the city upon her death, leaving it corrupted forever. The Wildhammers established a new home in a majestic region called the Hinterlands.



While the orcs set to work crafting harnesses and saddles, Nekros kept watch over Alexstrasza. The Life-Binder vowed to destroy the orc for what he was doing, but her threats were hollow. As long as Nekros had the Demon Soul, he was untouchable.

During her imprisonment, Alexstrasza began laying new clutches of eggs. Nekros was quick to see this development as a golden opportunity. If his clan could successfully hatch the eggs, the orcs could raise the dragon whelps as the Horde's loyal servants.

From afar, Deathwing rejoiced in Alexstrasza's enslavement. He continued subtly advising Nekros on how best to use the Demon Soul to control the red dragons. Giving the Horde such powerful weapons served Deathwing's plans to restore his black dragonflight, but there was an added benefit. He knew that it would break the Life-Binder's heart to see her kin used as tools of war.

And he would relish every moment of Alexstrasza's torment.

THE ARATHI BLOODLINE

As the Horde was bolstering its forces, so, too, was the Alliance. Lothar had the full might of the human nations at his command, but he would take no chances against the Horde. He sought help wherever he could, including from the ancient and powerful high elves of Quel'Thalas.

Long ago, humans and elves had fought a bloody war against the Amani trolls. Only by uniting had Quel'Thalas and Lothar's ancestors triumphed over their enemies. Following the victory, the high elves swore an oath to the human king Thoradin: if he or any of his bloodline ever required aid in the future, Quel'Thalas would give it without question. Lothar carried Thoradin's blood, and he beseeched the high elves to make good on their ancient pact.

Lothar's call to war was met with mixed feelings in Quel'Thalas. The high elf king, Anasterian Sunstrider, had heard rumors about strange creatures in the south, but he did not consider them a threat. He sent only a small elven fleet to the Alliance, commanding the rest of his forces to stay in Quel'Thalas. Not everyone did. The highly skilled ranger-captain Alleria Windrunner disobeyed her king's orders and brought a handful of her fellow elves south. She believed the Horde was a

much greater danger than most of her kin did, and she was determined to see what the orcs could do with her own eyes.

Though Lothar was disappointed with the small number of elves who joined the Alliance, he didn't show it publicly. He welcomed them with open arms. The rangers in particular would serve a much-needed role as archers, scouts, and mobile support troops.

The elves arrived in Hillsbrad Foothills by sea just as dire news reached Lothar. Like most members of the Alliance, he had expected the Horde to invade the north by crossing the Thandol Span, an effort that would have taken many more months. Yet human scouts reported that the orcs had constructed a fleet, and they were poised to set sail.

The invasion would happen much sooner than Lothar had anticipated.

Lothar urged the rest of the Alliance's armies to gather in Hillsbrad Foothills, the most likely place the Horde would make landfall. To waylay the orcish fleet for the time being, the supreme commander called upon Admiral Daelin Proudmoore and the Alliance navy.

SEAS OF FIRE

Warchief Doomhammer had not expected to keep his fleet a secret forever. When he learned that human scouting ships had spied his vessels, he made no change to his plans. Construction on the Horde fleet had finished, and he commanded his troops to board. Orgrim believed the Horde would reach southern Lordaeron before the humans could muster a proper defense.

The advantage would be small, but Orgrim had learned from a lifetime of warfare that small advantages often meant the difference between victory and defeat.

Hundreds of orcish ships, laden with supplies and thousands of soldiers, sliced through the roiling sea. Their journey was not uncontested. Near the island of Zul'Dare, Admiral Daelin Proudmoore and the Alliance navy intercepted the Horde fleet.

When Proudmoore found the crude Horde ships, it was akin to a wolf crossing paths with an injured lamb. The admiral hailed from the island nation of Kul Tiras, and he'd spent his entire life on the high seas. His experience in maritime warfare had no equal in the world.

Proudmoore's sleek vessels outmaneuvered the Horde fleet even quicker than he'd anticipated. The first Alliance cannon volley blew orcish ships to pieces. Dozens of transports sank, and the churning waves swallowed their crews. Proudmoore soon realized that he could destroy the entire Horde army at sea. He could end the war against the Alliance before it even started.

Perhaps he would have, if not for the arrival of dragons.

Doomhammer had known that the humans were better equipped for battle at sea. That was why he'd ordered Nekros and the Dragonmaw clan to supply aerial support in the form of red dragons.

At first, Nekros had protested. His orcs had not yet trained the dragons to be suitable battle mounts. Yet after Doomhammer pressured him, Nekros relented. He dispatched three red dragons to guard the Horde fleet, threatening to torture Alexstrasza if they disobeyed.

Reluctantly, the dragons had followed the orcish ships from a distance. When Proudmoore's navy attacked, they finally revealed themselves. The enormous creatures dove from the sky and bathed the Alliance fleet in fire.

Proudmoore had no means to fend off the dragons, though small in number they were. The admiral called for a full retreat, and his ships scattered.

BATTLE OF HILLSBRAD FOOTHILLS

6 YEARS AFTER THE DARK PORTAL

With Admiral Proudmoore's fleet scattered, the Horde continued to Hillsbrad Foothills and made landfall uncontested. The Alliance's defenses were sparse. Though the majority of the Alliance forces had reached Hillsbrad, they were in disarray.

The orcish army stormed ashore, but the red dragons who guarded the Horde's fleet refused to follow them. Nekros had stayed in Grim Batol to watch over Alexstrasza, and he was not present to give the creatures new commands. He had ordered them only to protect the ships, and they would not kill any more humans than necessary. It was a small act of defiance, but it was all that the dragons could do without endangering Alexstrasza.

Orgrim did not press the issue. He left the dragons where they were and marched inland. He planned to cross the Alterac Mountains to reach Capital City. It would be a difficult journey, but it was the quickest way to strike at Lordaeron.

Lothar anticipated this plan. From a military standpoint, Lordaeron's capital was a target that was too good to resist. Its fall would breed division and throw the rest of the Alliance into chaos. Lothar would not let that happen. He arrayed his tired troops across Hillsbrad to bar the northern and western routes to the capital. Lothar then rallied his soldiers as best he could, but his words had little effect. He could see the fear in their eyes. This was the first time most of the humans had ever seen the hulking orcs. They were things born of nightmare.

Fortunately for Lothar, the paladins had finished their training. The holy knights rode through the Alliance lines, their presence filling their fellow soldiers with hope and courage.

The Horde's war drums sounded, and the howling mass of green-skinned warriors charged north. They smashed into the human lines with war cries on their lips and oiled blades in hand.

For the first time in history, the full might of the Horde and the Alliance armies clashed. Alleria and her high elf rangers thinned the Horde's ranks with bow and arrow, while Lothar fought beside his paladins. Elsewhere, Khadgar and other magi unleashed their arcane powers on the approaching orcs.

The Second War had begun.

Amid the fighting, a corrosive fog crept over the battlefield. From the fetid mists, slain human soldiers rose from the dead and then launched themselves at their former comrades. At the head of this unholy army were a handful of hooded figures riding skeletal steeds.

The death knights had entered the field.

They charged through the stunned human army, inflicting pain and terror on their enemies. Orgrim watched the attack with a mix of displeasure and satisfaction. He was still uneasy about the death knights, but he now saw just how effective they were in combat.

The mere sight of the death knights horrified the humans, and the Alliance lines began to crumble. It was then that a blazing white light appeared from Uther, Turalyon, and the other paladins. Waves of holy energy rippled over the Alliance soldiers, striking down the reanimated human corpses and sweeping away the death knights' corruptive fog.



ALLIANCE PALADINS AND OTHER SOLDIERS BATTLE THE DEATH KNIGHTS

The paladins called upon their holy powers to mend wounded soldiers and ease their fearful hearts. Filled with renewed confidence, the Alliance regrouped and slammed down on the orcish front lines like a hammer.

Sporadic battles broke out in Hillsbrad. The Horde and the Alliance were evenly matched, but Doomhammer knew that would not last forever. The longer the orcs stayed in Hillsbrad, the more time the Alliance had to call in reinforcements from their far-flung territories.

The human army was protecting the quickest routes to Lordaeron's capital. Doomhammer's only course of action was to go east and find another way to the city. For this, he called on the Amani trolls. They knew the mountainous terrain well. The trolls agreed to guide the orcs, but they would not do so until Doomhammer made good on his promise to help them liberate their leader, Zul'jin.

THE AMANI PACT

Doomhammer had not forgotten his vow to free Warlord Zul'jin. Orc scouts had discovered the troll's whereabouts in a prison camp near the human bastion known as Durnholde Keep.

As battles continued across Hillsbrad, Doomhammer himself led a raiding party to rescue Zul'jin. The prison's defenders stood little chance against the warchief and his battle-hardened soldiers. After freeing Zul'jin, Doomhammer invited him and the rest of his people to join the Horde.

At first, Zul'jin balked at the proposal. He was warlord of the great Amani. He would answer to no one but himself. Doomhammer was quick to allay Zul'jin's fears about leadership. If the Amani pledged themselves to the Horde, they would not become servants. Zul'jin would retain full control over his people. He and Doomhammer would stand as equals against their enemies.

Doomhammer finally won Zul'jin's support with an offer: if the Amani committed their forces to the Horde, the orcs would help them annihilate their rivals, the high elves of Quel'Thalas.

Attacking Quel'Thalas meant moving farther north from Lordaeron's capital than Doomhammer wanted. It was a risk, but a necessary one. The battles at Hillsbrad had taught Doomhammer many things about the Alliance. For one, the paladins were a formidable force, equal to that of the death knights. To win, Doomhammer would need the Amani's support.

Doomhammer ordered the Horde to turn east. His trusted lieutenant Varok Saurfang commanded a rearguard of Blackrock orcs to waylay the Alliance. This gave the rest of the Horde precious time to cross Hillsbrad and funnel through a narrow mountain pass and into a region known as the Hinterlands.

Though the land was rugged, the Horde moved quickly with help from the Amani guides. The trolls led the orcs on a path that would take them over the northern mountains and into Quel'Thalas. En route, Zul'jin rallied the local Amani trolls to his side.

All seemed clear until winged shadows appeared over the Horde. These were not dragons; they were gryphons, ridden by the region's fearless Wildhammer dwarves.

From on high, they rained lightning and thunder down upon the Horde.

ON WINGS OF THUNDER

The Hinterlands had long been home to the Wildhammer dwarves. From their mountain stronghold called Aerie Peak, they kept watch over the land. The Wildhammers were a tenacious people famous for their kinship with gryphons. Many of these dwarves were adept shaman, and they infused the power of lightning into weapons known as stormhammers.

The Wildhammers were also a fiercely independent people. Due to their penchant for isolationism, they knew nothing about the Horde or the battles raging in Hillsbrad. Only when the orcs marched into the Hinterlands did the dwarves learn of their existence.

The Wildhammer leader, Thane Kurdran, took action to protect his homeland. He and his bravest gryphon riders barreled down from the skies. They bombarded the Horde with their stormhammers and then ascended back into the safety of the clouds. Kurdran continually launched these devastating strikes and whittled away at the Horde's strength.

The only battle-ready dragons currently at the Horde's disposal were guarding its ships in Hillsbrad, and so the orcs had no means of countering the troublesome gryphon riders. Doomhammer could not continue north with the dwarves harassing his lines. The warchief led his soldiers in an assault on Aerie Peak, forcing Kurdran and his gryphon riders to converge on the capital.

As battle erupted outside the city, Orgrim and half of the Horde pulled back. They would continue north while the remainder of their army kept the dwarves occupied. Kurdran and his forces paid little attention to the retreating orcs and trolls. They were concerned only with defending Aerie Peak, not with chasing down the rest of the Horde.

After Doomhammer slipped north, Lothar and his army arrived in the Hinterlands and came to the Wildhammer clan's aid. The combined might of humans, elves, and dwarves soon pushed the orcs away from Aerie Peak and sent them retreating into the forests.

The assault on Aerie Peak changed Kurdran and his people. They now knew of the threat posed by the Horde, and they were determined to help defeat the orcs.

Kurdran pledged his clan to the Alliance. The inclusion of the Wildhammers and their gryphon riders was a much-needed boon. Though the orcs had not used dragons since the naval battle near Zul'Dare, Lothar feared a day would come when they would return. If the Alliance was to match the Horde's aerial superiority, it would be through the gryphon riders.

From Kurdran, the Alliance learned that half of the Horde had slipped north. It was only then that Lothar realized he'd been outmaneuvered by Orgrim. The Horde contingent in the Hinterlands was but a portion of the orcs' full strength.

It was a bitter revelation, but Lothar did not wallow in defeat. He immediately dispatched Turalyon and a large part of his armies to track Orgrim down. Meanwhile, the rest of the Alliance remained in the Hinterlands to deal with the Horde there. The other potential routes to Lordaeron's capital seemed secure. The kingdom of Alterac was holding the line to the east. King Perenolde had set his garrisons to barricade those mountain passes, so if the Horde tried to march on the city through that route, the defenses would slow its approach.



GARONA'S ESCAPE

Throughout the Second War, Garona had lived under the watchful eye of the Blackrock warrior Eitrigg. She had served many functions, sometimes translating missives taken from captured Alliance messengers. She'd also fought alongside her fellow Horde soldiers.

Initially Garona viewed Eitrigg as just another mindless warrior, a fanatic who had sworn his life to Warchief Blackhand despite his tyrannical disposition. But over time, she had seen a glimmer of something in the orc, a fading ember of pride and honor.

Garona believed she could win Eitrigg's trust, and she told him everything she knew of Gul'dan and the Shadow Council. She also revealed her knowledge of demons and the true purpose of the Horde. The orcs were merely puppets of a terrible enemy. If the Horde destroyed the Alliance, the demons would transform Azeroth into a wasteland.

Eitrigg treated Garona's words as poisonous lies. After all, she had been Gul'dan's assassin. How could he ever trust someone who had committed such dishonorable acts?

After Eitrigg's rebuke, Garona abandoned any hope of helping him see the truth. She bided her time, patiently awaiting an opportunity to escape her handler.

That opportunity finally came in the Hinterlands. As chaos engulfed the region, Garona slipped into the forests and vanished. Eitrigg considered hunting down the half-orc, but waging war on the Alliance was far more important than recovering a single prisoner.

Eitrigg had other reasons for letting Garona go. Some part of him sympathized with the half-orc and her tortured past. She had not been born an assassin. Gul'dan had made her that way. As long as she did not turn her blades against the Horde, he would let her go.

Perhaps on Azeroth she would find something she'd never had on Draenor. Perhaps she would find a true home.

THE ELVEN RUNESTONES

With much of the Alliance bogged down in the Hinterlands, Orgrim led his half of the Horde toward Quel'Thalas unopposed. En route, Zul'jin visited the Amani capital, Zul'Aman, to gather allies. He whipped his people into a frenzy with the promise of spilling elf blood. Thousands of trolls, adorned in enchanted talismans and ritual tattoos, streamed out of Zul'Aman and took their place alongside Orgrim's Horde.

An army the likes of which the high elves had not faced in thousands of years soon loomed on Quel'Thalas's borders. The marauding Horde decimated the kingdom's outer holdings in short order.

As Orgrim advanced north, he found that many death knights and Amani witch doctors were unable to wield their magics. Gul'dan eventually discovered what was dampening their powers.

Thousands of years ago, after the War of the Ancients, Quel'Thalas had erected a powerful magical barrier around its kingdom. This was *Ban'dinoriel*, "the Gatekeeper." The shield was tied to a series of monolithic Runestones, relics that prevented the Burning Legion and other outsiders from detecting the arcane magics wielded by the high elves. They also weakened the powers of their enemies, such as the Amani trolls.

Gul'dan claimed that dismantling one of the Runestones would disrupt the barrier and restore the Horde's use of magic. Then he and his followers would use the relic to strengthen the Horde for the siege of Quel'Thalas.

After much consideration, Doomhammer agreed to the plans. He didn't trust Gul'dan. But thus far, the warlock had proved himself useful and loyal to the Horde. Orgrim's spies in the Stormreaver clan reported no mischievous activities. What Doomhammer didn't know was that Gul'dan had won these spies to his side with threats, promises of power, and other means.

Doomhammer still suspected a day would come when Gul'dan would try to betray him and take control of the Horde. He never could have imagined the truth: the warlock was planning to *abandon* the Horde.

In recent months, Gul'dan had nearly amassed the power to do so. Though the death knights had not proved to be as loyal to him as he had once hoped, he had the backing of two mighty clans: the Stormreavers and the Twilight's Hammer. Yet that was not enough. Not nearly. The warlock needed as much power as he could get to fend off Doomhammer and any other foes he would meet on his journey to the Tomb of Sargeras. Quel'Thalas's mysterious relics would give Gul'dan the strength he needed.

He and his followers quickly dismantled one of Quel'Thalas's Runestones. They chiseled away at the monolithic relic to build structures known as the Altars of Storms. Gul'dan then turned to an ancient ritual used by the Highmaul ogres. In the distant past, they'd found a way to empower members of their own race. By channeling raw arcane magic into regular ogres, the Highmaul could transform them into highly intelligent two-headed ogre magi.

Few living ogres knew of this technique, but Cho'gall was one of them. He handpicked the brutish ogres who would undergo the transformation, and he oversaw the rituals himself.

Before long, two-headed ogre magi emerged from the altars. They were just as powerful as Gul'dan had hoped they'd be. More importantly, they secretly swore their loyalty to him.

Now, all that remained for Gul'dan was finding the right time to make his move.

INSTRUMENTS OF POWER

During the Second War, Gul'dan gathered information concerning some of the powerful artifacts he had learned about from prying into Medivh's mind. He never had the opportunity to seek out these relics, but he did reveal their existence to the death knights.



ASHES OF QUEL'THALAS

With the Runestone desecrated, the Horde's death knights and other spellcasters regained their powers. Orgrim's forces stormed toward Quel'Thalas's capital, Silvermoon City. They terrorized the countryside, pillaging settlements and cutting down every elf they found.

King Anasterian called on his greatest generals to stop the Horde's advance. Elf magi and rangers spread across Quel'Thalas to resist Orgrim's forces, but they did not have to fight alone for long. Turalyon and Alleria soon arrived with half of the Alliance army.

While Turalyon organized his soldiers and launched attacks against the Horde, Alleria met with Anasterian in Silvermoon City. She urged the elf king to pledge his forces to the Alliance, but he needed little convincing. Anasterian was furious about the Horde's assault. Not since the ancient Troll Wars had the elves died in such numbers. Not since that terrible time had their lands been so defiled. Humans and elves had once banded together to save their respective kingdoms from oblivion. Now, they would do so again.

The Alliance would have the full support and backing of Quel'Thalas.

Though the Alliance and the elves were now unified in purpose, any hope that they had of a quick victory vanished in smoke and fire. The red dragons had come.

After months of hard work, the Dragonmaw orcs had learned how to ride their winged captives in battle. Dozens of the monstrous creatures appeared over Quel'Thalas. The gryphon riders, unaccustomed to battling dragons, were forced to retreat. The orcs and their mounts then swooped down on the Alliance armies, bathing them in gouts of flame. A firestorm enveloped the forests around Quel'Thalas, and smoke blotted out the sun.

The enslaved dragons took no joy in the destruction. Far from it. Many of them wept in sorrow as they slaughtered the elves and burned the life from the wilds.

The roaring firestorm caused most of the elf defenders to seek shelter in Silvermoon City. King Anasterian's people had no physical weapons that could stop the Horde and its dragons from invading the elven capital, but they had something else that could.

Elf sorcerers summoned an immense shield around Silvermoon City. This barrier derived its power from the Sunwell, a fount of magic that served as the heart of Quel'Thalas's culture. For thousands of years, the elves had used its energies to construct their kingdom and protect it from outsiders.

The Horde smashed against the shield again and again, but the barrier did not give way. Even the red dragons' mystical fire could not breach it.

Orgrim's patience was wearing thin. Destroying the high elven stronghold had never been his priority. Lordaeron's capital was. Though Orgrim had not yet satisfied the Amani pact, he had accomplished other things in Quel'Thalas. The gifted ogre magi now served the Horde. The Dragonmaw clan had finally brought the bulk of their winged servants to bear in battle. The Horde had also dealt a grave blow to Quel'Thalas, one that would take the elves many years to recover from.

Orgrim began planning the next stage of his campaign. He would need a route to reach Lordaeron's capital from Quel'Thalas, one that would catch the Alliance by surprise.



ALTERAC'S BETRAYAL

After failing to breach Silvermoon City, Orgrim pulled his forces back and ordered them to march west. The time had come to resume his campaign and attack Lordaeron's capital, and the warchief had found a way to the stronghold.

The roads and valleys between Quel'Thalas and Lordaeron were the easy routes to take if one sought to reach the capital, but they were also heavily fortified. Orgrim would not take them. He would move his armies through the rugged Alterac Mountains south of Lordaeron's capital, giving him the element of surprise.

Not all of Doomhammer's allies agreed with his plans. Zul'jin and the Amani rejected the warchief's call to go west. Their hatred of the elves burned so hot that they would not abandon the siege of Silvermoon. Zul'jin vowed that he would attack Lordaeron's capital only after all of Quel'Thalas was in flames and he held King Anasterian's severed head in his hands.

Zul'jin's stubbornness was both infuriating and troubling. Doomhammer had relied heavily on the Amani to guide the orcs through a land that was not their own. Losing the trolls now, at this critical moment, could spell doom for the Horde.

Gul'dan sensed Orgrim's mounting fears. The warlock knew that now was his chance to finally break free from the warchief's control. Gul'dan convinced Orgrim and Zul'jin that the Stormreaver clan had found a new way to destroy the barrier around Silvermoon City. All it would take was a few more days. Once the Stormreavers had succeeded, the elven city would fall; the trolls could sate their appetite for vengeance, and then they could rejoin the Horde.

Doomhammer was loath to leave more of his forces behind in Quel'Thalas, but Gul'dan's words swayed him. The Alliance was scattered: half of its forces were in Silvermoon, and the other half were still battling the Horde in the Hinterlands. Lordaeron's capital was ripe for the taking, and Doomhammer could not allow the opportunity to slip through his fingers.

Doomhammer left Gul'dan and his Stormreaver clan to unravel the barrier, but he ordered the Dragonmaw to stay in Quel'Thalas and keep watch over the warlock. If the barrier had not come down in three days' time, they would force Gul'dan and his followers to march west.

And if Gul'dan was foolish enough to disobey, Doomhammer gave the Dragonmaw permission to feed him to their war mounts.

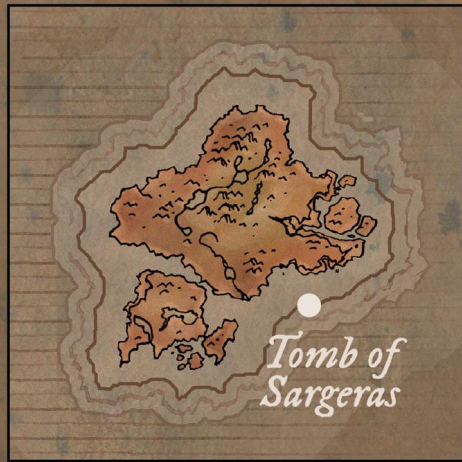
Doomhammer led his forces west, his mind plagued by doubts. Since the landing in Hillsbrad Foothills, things had not gone according to plan. But he knew that was the way of war. Those who adapted found victory, and those who refused to change were destined for defeat.

When the Horde entered the mountains, fortune smiled on Doomhammer. Alterac's king, Perenolde, was awaiting the orcish army. He carried an offer of allegiance . . .

From the beginning of the Second War, Perenolde had been wary of fighting the Horde. He'd believed that the orcs were an unstoppable force. His fear of the Horde had only deepened as he'd learned of the death knights, red dragons, and ogre magi in its ranks.

The Horde's arrival in the Alterac Mountains had finally pushed Perenolde to betrayal. Rather than fight his enemies, he would strike a deal with them. *He would survive.* Perenolde met the Horde to deliver a simple message: he would grant the orcish army safe passage through the mountains if Alterac would be spared from the Horde's wrath.

THE SECOND WAR



Orgrim eagerly accepted the offer, and Perenolde showed the warchief how to avoid the defensive positions in the mountains. Night and day, the Horde marched through Alterac's unguarded passes. When they finally reached Tirisfal Glades, Orgrim gave his forces no rest. He threw every soldier at his command against Capital City's walls.

THE SIEGE OF CAPITAL CITY

Turalyon and his allies had long suspected that the Horde would eventually pivot west and strike at Lordaeron's capital. Their fears were confirmed when Orgrim and most of his forces suddenly pulled back from Quel'Thalas.

Though some elements of the Horde army were still rampaging through Quel'Thalas, Turalyon ordered the bulk of his soldiers to move west with all due haste. With half of the Alliance army battling in the Hinterlands, the task of defending Lordaeron's capital fell to him. At first, reaching the city before Orgrim did not seem so impossible. The Horde had ventured into the Alterac Mountains, and the region's defenses would slow the warchief.

Then word of King Perenolde's betrayal reached the scattered Alliance forces. No one could believe it was true. No one could fathom that any human would pledge loyalty to the bloodthirsty Horde.

But it was true, and the implications were disastrous. With the Alterac Mountains fully barricaded, Doomhammer's journey west should have taken months. With a safe passage open to them, the Horde's soldiers had already reached Lordaeron's capital.

Turalyon feared that the city would fall before he could save it, but Lordaeron was not as helpless as he believed. King Terenas commanded the capital. Though he was not a warrior, he was a man of great charisma and cunning. As Horde catapults bombarded the capital, Terenas told his people that this battle would decide the war. The future of humanity—the future of the Alliance—rested on their shoulders. Terenas himself vowed to die if it meant keeping the Horde at bay until reinforcements could arrive. Against the wishes of his advisors, he took his place on the ramparts and organized the city's defenses.

Orgrim admired Lordaeron's tenacity. The humans and their king fought with a fearlessness akin to that of the orcs. Yet it wouldn't last. Every day, Orgrim whittled away at the capital's defenses. Every day, his siege engines pounded the stronghold's crumbling walls.

Once the Horde's reinforcements arrived from Quel'Thalas, the city would fall. The question was *when* those troops would arrive. The Dragonmaw, Stormreaver, and Twilight's Hammer clans were behind schedule, and Doomhammer had received not a word from them.

Something was not right. Doomhammer felt it in his bones. His unease deepened when Turalyon and his army approached from the east. Their arrival distracted the orcish forces, giving the capital's defenders much-needed rest.

Doomhammer did not fear Turalyon and his forces—he feared what their appearance meant. The other Alliance armies were en route to the capital. The Horde had to breach the stronghold soon. Orgrim had the death knights at his disposal, but he also needed the rest of his soldiers from Quel'Thalas to secure victory.

He would never get them. The Dragonmaw arrived outside Lordaeron's capital, bearing dire news. Gul'dan had betrayed the Horde. He had taken the Stormreaver and Twilight's Hammer

clans with him toward the orcish fleet anchored off of Hillsbrad Foothills. On the heels of this discovery, more troubling news reached Orgrim. The Alliance had learned of King Perenolde's treachery and barricaded the open passes in the Alterac Mountains. Calling on reinforcements from the Hinterlands was now out of the question.

In that moment, Doomhammer knew that the war was lost. Even if his forces were able to take the capital, they could not hold it against the full strength of the Alliance.

Fury burned through Doomhammer's veins. The Horde had been so close, *so very close*, to total victory. Now, it faced total annihilation.

Orgrim called off the siege and ordered his forces into a full retreat to Khaz Modan. He dispatched a Dragonmaw messenger to deliver the same command to the soldiers in the Hinterlands. If the Horde could regroup, there was still a chance to put the pieces of its campaign together. It was a slim hope, but it was the only one Doomhammer had.

The warchief sent the Horde's dragon riders to cover their retreat and waylay the Alliance forces as much as possible. He also sent the Black Tooth Grin clan to hunt down Gul'dan. Orgrim had spared the warlock once before. He would not make that mistake again.

IN SEARCH OF GODHOOD

A few days after Doomhammer marched to Lordaeron's capital, Gul'dan gathered his allies and revealed his plans to seek out the Tomb of Sargeras. He promised power to all who followed him, more power than they could ever hope to gain by continuing with the Horde's pointless war. Nearly every member of the Twilight's Hammer and the Stormreaver clans pledged their support to the warlock. Yet there were a few noticeable holdouts among the Horde in Quel'Thalas.

The Amani trolls had no interest in Gul'dan's call. They continued their siege on the elven capital. The Dragonmaw also defied the warlock, and they moved to bar his path. In the end, neither side risked fighting. The threat of mutual annihilation was too great.

The Dragonmaw set out west to rejoin the main Horde force and warn Orgrim of what had transpired. Meanwhile, Gul'dan and his followers headed south. They met occasional resistance from humans along the way, but nothing that truly gave them pause. In Hillsbrad Foothills, the renegades commandeered a portion of the Horde fleet and sailed west.

Unbeknownst to Gul'dan, the Black Tooth Grin orcs had nearly caught up to him. They boarded the rest of the orcish vessels and followed in his wake.

The Black Tooth Grin were not the only threat to Gul'dan. Far from it. Kil'jaeden soon learned of Gul'dan's reckless betrayal, which had come as a surprise. The warlock had hidden his intentions well from the demon lord. Kil'jaeden prepared to annihilate his former servant for single-handedly dooming what should have been a momentous Legion victory.

Sargeras himself ordered the demon lord to stand down. It was not out of mercy. No, Sargeras wanted to punish the warlock in his own way. If it was power Gul'dan wanted, then the Legion's ruler would let him find the Tomb of Sargeras. He would let him come within reach of what he desired, let the foolish orc taste what *could have* been his.

Then Sargeras would rip it all away, just as Gul'dan had done to the Horde's hopes of victory.

THE TOMB OF SARGERAS

Based on the information he had gleaned from Guardian Medivh's mind, Gul'dan plotted a course to the Tomb of Sargeras. The voyage was long and harsh. Colossal waves and fearsome storms lashed Gul'dan's fleet. It was as if nature itself were rising up to thwart the warlock's quest. As Gul'dan neared the tomb, he could sense the godly energies emanating from within. The promise of so much power, so close at hand, consumed his every thought.

The Tomb of Sargeras rested at the bottom of the sea, and it would require the combined efforts of Gul'dan and his allies to lift it to the surface. The warlock led a ritual, weaving his followers' magics into a single immense spell. The skies turned black as pitch, and the winds lashed the sea into a frenzy. Slowly, ever slowly, the tomb rose from the depths.

A rocky island breached from the churning ocean. At its center was the colossal Tomb of Sargeras, an imposing tower that dominated the barnacle-covered ground.

Not long after the Tomb of Sargeras surfaced, the Black Tooth Grin approached the island. Gul'dan knew he did not have the numbers to defeat his pursuers, but if he could harness the tomb's power, he could survive. He did not know what, if any, dangers lurked within the tomb, but he had little time to prepare for them. Gul'dan ordered Cho'gall and the Twilight's Hammer to hold off their enemies while he took the Stormreaver clan into the structure. As the warlock and his adherents hurried through the tomb's shadowy corridors, they eventually discovered that they were not alone . . .

Long ago, when Aegwynn had transported Sargeras's avatar into the tomb, she had also imprisoned a number of his demon followers at the site. Most of these creatures were dead or barely clinging to life. The Guardian had believed that the tomb's enchanted seals would keep them contained. That much was true—the demons would never have been able to escape the structure on their own. Yet over the millennia, some of them had fed on the avatar's lingering power, regaining enough strength to prowl the tomb.

At Sargeras's command, the creatures leapt from the shadows to tear Gul'dan's followers apart. Then they turned their wrath on the warlock and flayed him alive, ripping the flesh and muscle from his bones.

For a brief moment, his screams of agony shook the tomb. Then there was only silence.

Only a few of Gul'dan's Stormreaver adherents survived the encounter with the demons. Before fleeing from the tomb, they recovered their master's head, believing that it held great power.

Outside, the Twilight's Hammer fought for their own survival. Led by Dal'rend and Maim Blackhand, the Black Tooth Grin cut down the betrayers and left their bodies to rot in the tomb's shadow.

Cho'gall suffered grave wounds in the fighting. He survived only due to his Twilight's Hammer followers. A few members of the clan took the wounded ogre aboard a ship and set sail from the tomb. The winds carried the vessel west, into uncharted waters.

With vengeance served, the Black Tooth Grin orcs boarded their ships and sailed east. As proof of their victory, they retrieved Gul'dan's skull from one of the warlock's followers.

The orc who had sold his race into demonic servitude was no more.



GUL'DAN RAISES THE TOMB OF SARGERAS

THE LIBERATION OF KHAZ MODAN

Far from the Tomb of Sargerias, the Horde continued its desperate retreat to Khaz Modan. The orcish army in the Hinterlands fought through Lothar's forces and raced toward the Thandol Span. Orgrim and his half of the Horde followed close behind. Lothar and Turalyon soon rallied, recombining their armies and storming after the retreating Horde.

With his fleet gone, Orgrim had little choice but to retreat on foot. Long weeks of hard marching and sporadic battles with the Alliance had taken their toll on the orcish armies. Before long, Orgrim and the remnants of the Horde limped into Khaz Modan, pushing through the Wetlands and into the colder, mountainous parts of the region.

En route to the dwarven homeland, Orgrim had dispatched dragon riders to look for the Black Tooth Grin and learn what had become of them. Some of these scouts returned with news. They had spotted the Black Tooth Grin sailing back toward Khaz Modan. The orc sailors had told the dragon riders of Gul'dan's demise. Orgrim took pleasure in this development. If nothing else, at least the traitorous warlock would never again manipulate the orc race. Orgrim only wished he'd been the one to deliver the killing blow.

Yet the satisfaction of Gul'dan's death faded as Orgrim took stock of his forces. The war had annihilated over half of his armies. With the Black Tooth Grin still at sea, he had no navy. The Horde would not find victory in its current state. It wouldn't even be able to hold Khaz Modan against the Alliance, especially if the dwarves and the gnomes joined the fight.

Orgrim dispatched a messenger to gather reinforcements from Draenor. Whether or not the bloodthirsty clans there were ready to fight mattered little. He needed them *now*. Then he ordered his soldiers to gather in Blackrock Spire, where they could wait until the reinforcements arrived.

Blackrock Spire was deep in Horde-controlled territory. If the Alliance chose to pursue, Doomhammer would make them pay for every step. He told Chieftain Kilrogg and his Bleeding Hollow to remain in Khaz Modan. Throughout the Second War, they had kept the dwarves and the gnomes confined in their mountain cities. Now they would have an even greater role. They would delay the Alliance army and prevent it from smashing into the Horde's rearguard.

Doomhammer gathered Chieftain Zuluhed and as many able-bodied warriors from the Dragonmaw as he could. The dragon riders were still scattered across Lordaeron, but Orgrim knew that they were too valuable a weapon to simply abandon. He ordered Nekros to rally the remaining beasts of war at Grim Batol and then transport them, Alexstrasza, and the rest of his resources to Blackrock Spire. Orgrim also commanded the orc to send some of the dragon riders to seek out the Black Tooth Grin, inform them of the Horde's new rendezvous point, and guard their ships from any Alliance naval forces.

Lothar knew that the Horde was wounded. One swift and merciless strike was all it would take to shatter the orcish army forever. Though the Alliance soldiers were fatigued from months of battle, Lothar pushed them onward. This was their chance to end the war.

The Alliance's swift march south would have never been possible without Turalyon and the other paladins. The holy warriors worked day and night, mending the wounded and filling their hearts with resolve and courage. The Alliance soldiers poured into Khaz Modan and made short work of the Bleeding Hollow. The paladins led hunting parties to root out the orcs and drive them from the region.

In defeating the Bleeding Hollow, the Alliance also liberated Ironforge and Gnomeregan. The Bronzebeard dwarves and the gnomes emerged from their mountain strongholds jubilant and eager for retribution. Both peoples pledged their forces to the Alliance. They would lend their hammers, axes, and technologies to the war effort.

For the first time in the war, nearly every noble race in the Eastern Kingdoms was united.

BATTLE OF CRESTFALL

Northwest of Khaz Modan, the Black Tooth Grin continued their sea voyage. Dragon riders sent by Nekros had found the vessels and delivered word of the Horde's retreat to Blackrock Spire. Dal'rend and Maim ordered the Black Tooth Grin to alter course and sail to Stormwind, which was still under Horde control. From there, the orcs would travel to Blackrock Spire by land. Yet if Dal'rend and Maim were hoping for an easy passage south, they wouldn't find it.

Admiral Proudmoore was patrolling the waters. Near the island of Crestfall, the Alliance navy overtook the Horde fleet. Just as in the battle near Zul'Dare, Proudmoore outmaneuvered his foes and hammered them with cannon fire. And just as before, the Horde had dragons. The beasts swooped down from the skies and engulfed the Alliance ships in sheets of fire.

This time, Proudmoore did not retreat. Wildhammer gryphon riders had arrived to support his fleet. After being defeated by dragons in Quel'Thalas, the dwarves had learned new tactics. They used their gryphons' mobility and speed to their advantage, outmaneuvering their larger foes and drawing their attention away from the Alliance boats. Lightning-infused stormhammers and dragon flame set the heavens alight, while cannon fire painted the waves red.

Dal'rend and Maim's ship and a few other vessels escaped the battle intact, but most of the Horde's fleet was sunk by Proudmoore's superior forces. The dragon riders scattered in all directions, fleeing before the wrath of the fearless gryphon riders.

The Alliance had won a decisive victory at sea and destroyed the Horde's navy, but the cost had been great. The red dragons had decimated Proudmoore's own ships. Many brave sailors had died, including the admiral's son. Proudmoore would never forget his child's death, and his hatred of the orcs would fester like an open wound until the end of his days.

THE SIEGE OF BLACKROCK SPIRE

From Blackrock Spire, Doomhammer watched the Alliance army wind into the Burning Steppes like a serpent of silver and gold. Thousands of Alliance soldiers arranged themselves around the Horde stronghold, and then they began their relentless siege.

The fortress's gates would hold, but not for long enough. The dragon riders from Grim Batol hadn't arrived yet, and neither had the Black Tooth Grin clan or the reinforcements from Draenor. They would never get there in time.

Despair took root in Doomhammer's heart, but he crushed it down the moment it reared its head. He would not give in. Not now. Not ever. This war was about more than glory, about more

DEFEAT OF THE AMANI

While the Alliance was besieging Blackrock Spire, King Anasterian led efforts to drive the Amani trolls from Quel'Thalas. The battles were costly, but the elves managed to secure their homeland. In the years to come, Anasterian would withdraw from the Alliance, accusing it of abandoning the high elves in their most desperate hour. Not all high elves believed that, but enough did.



than him. It was about restoring honor to his race and ensuring its survival. Doomhammer had only two choices, the same two he'd always had: secure a home on Azeroth, or return to Draenor and die.

If death was his fate, he would die in honorable combat, not by hunger or disease.

In the fortress of Blackrock Spire, he stoked the fires of the Horde's bloodlust. He called on his forces for one last charge, one final battle to decide their destiny. They were the *unstoppable* Horde. They had conquered the draenei, Stormwind, and many other foes. This world called Azeroth was theirs for the taking, and the Alliance would not stand in their way.

As Alliance siege engines hammered at the mountain, the metal gates suddenly yawned wide. Thousands of howling soldiers spilled from the stronghold.

Orgrim himself led the Horde's assault. He was under no illusions that he could defeat the Alliance by force. Instead, he cut a path toward Lothar. Doomhammer had learned of human culture in recent years. Much like the orcs, the humans revered and idolized their leaders. Killing a chieftain could often break the will and resolve of an orc clan. Doomhammer hoped that striking down Lothar would have the same effect on the Alliance.

The Horde's suicidal charge caught the Alliance off guard. Doomhammer stormed through the siege lines and launched himself at Lothar. The supreme commander did not flee. He met Doomhammer in single combat, just as any honorable warrior would.

A hush fell over the Horde and Alliance soldiers near Doomhammer and Lothar. The crash of sword against hammer rang out across the Burning Steppes.

Neither warrior gave ground. Not at first. But Orgrim was simply mightier than his opponent. The warchief shattered Lothar's greatsword with a swing of his warhammer. The Alliance commander fell to his knees.

With his next merciless blow, Doomhammer crushed Lothar's skull.

Watching their warchief vanquish the enemy commander inspired the orcs, and they pressed their attack. Orgrim's gambit had paid off. He could see the sorrow and despair in his enemies' eyes. The Alliance soldiers were flagging. Many of them were losing their will to fight.

Yet Turalyon did not give in to sorrow or despair. Such feelings were of no use to him. They would not bring Lothar back. They would not avenge his fallen friend.

The young paladin unleashed his holy powers. The Light radiated out from Turalyon, blinding all around him, including Orgrim, and bringing the fighting to a standstill. The paladin took up

Lothar's broken blade and knocked the stunned orc warchief unconscious. He then called on his allies to stand tall in this dark hour, just as Lothar would have. Through every trial the Alliance had faced, their commander had never hesitated. He had led them with wisdom and bravery. He had treated them as more than soldiers, as friends and family. They were all Lothar's sons and daughters, and they would carry on his dream of ridding the world of the Horde.

Now was not the time for uncertainty, not when victory was within reach. Now was the time to fight. For Azeroth. For the Alliance. *For Lothar.*

Hope burned bright in every Alliance soldier who heard Turalyon that day. With a final battle cry, the paladin rallied his comrades. The Alliance crashed into the Horde, and the orcish armies buckled from the onslaught. Some fled north, east, or west. Others raced south toward the Dark Portal. A brave few continued fighting outside Blackrock Spire, hoping for death in battle.

They would not find it. Turalyon and the other paladins overwhelmed these soldiers, but they did not put them to the blade. They bound them, along with their warchief, in chains.

DESTRUCTION OF THE DARK PORTAL

Led by Teron Gorefiend and his death knights, some of the Horde escaped the Alliance and fled toward the Dark Portal. Reaching the safety of their homeworld was their only hope of survival.

Turalyon and the Alliance hounded their every step, the memory of Lothar's death still raw and painful. They were eager for vengeance, but just as eager to track the Horde to the Dark Portal. Little was known about the gateway or its exact location, and Turalyon hoped that the retreating orcs and death knights would lead him to it. They did.

Outside the Dark Portal, in the Black Morass, the Alliance overtook the Horde. The battle that unfolded was one of the most brutal and desperate fought in the Second War. Gorefiend and his death knights called upon the fury and terror of their necromantic arts. They could not defeat Turalyon's forces, but it was enough to allow the Horde to slip through the portal.

Turalyon did not pursue the Horde. He had already pushed his soldiers to the breaking point, and he did not know what horrors awaited them on the other side. There was only one thing left to do: destroy the Dark Portal and prevent the Horde from ever returning.

For this, Turalyon called on Khadgar and his fellow magi. The sorcerers gathered around the looming gateway and began a great spell. Khadgar led the other magi as they unraveled the portal, pulling apart each ethereal thread until the rift slammed shut. The backlash of energies shattered the portal's stone frame in a blinding explosion of arcane light.

The Dark Portal, which had brought so much ruin to Azeroth, crumbled to dust. A roar of approval sounded through the Alliance lines. The soldiers, who had fought so hard, who had seen their friends and loved ones die, fell to their knees in celebration. Many wept tears of joy.

The war was over.

The Alliance had won.

FRACTURING OF THE HORDE

7 YEARS AFTER THE DARK PORTAL

The Horde had lost.

Such was the news that Teron Gorefiend and his followers carried back to Draenor. What was worse, the way to Azeroth was closed. When Khadgar had destroyed Azeroth's side of the Dark Portal, the resultant blast of arcane energy had lashed into the orcish homeworld, and the gateway on Draenor had exploded in a flash of errant magic. The portal's physical frame had shattered into rubble. There would be no escape from the Horde's dying world.

After so much bloodshed and war, the orcs had accomplished nothing. They had little food and no enemy to conquer. They had no future except for a slow, agonizing death.

Some powerful clans had remained on Draenor. As was the case before the First War, bloodlust consumed them. Over time, the orcs' numbers had dwindled, but they were still slaves to anger. Word of the Horde's defeat on Azeroth fueled their rage.

It was only a matter of time before the Horde would consume itself from within.

The remnants of the Horde on Azeroth were faring little better. Kilrogg and his Bleeding Hollow clan had not reached Blackrock Spire in time to join Doomhammer's forces. They'd witnessed the aftermath as some of the defeated Horde soldiers stumbled to the Dark Portal. Kilrogg had hoped to reach the gateway as well, but the Alliance army had barred his way. Rather than risk a suicidal charge to the portal, he'd pulled back his Bleeding Hollow. The orcs quietly disappeared into the wilds north of the gateway to plan their next move.

Much like the Bleeding Hollow, the Dragonmaw at Grim Batol had not arrived at Blackrock Spire in time to aid Doomhammer. Seeing that the Alliance was triumphant, the orcs had retreated to their fortress. They barricaded themselves within the ancient stronghold and continued breeding and training their red dragons. If the Alliance ever discovered their presence, at least the Dragonmaw would have weapons to fight with.

Dal'rend, Maim, and the surviving members of the Black Tooth Grin were also still alive. They'd arrived at Blackrock Spire after the Horde had been defeated. The clan had gathered with other Horde survivors, mainly from the Blackrock clan, and waited until the Alliance had pulled its forces out of the region. With the way clear, the orcs had then snuck back into Blackrock Spire and taken control of the stronghold.

Dal'rend and Maim blamed the Horde's defeat on Doomhammer. They'd despised the warchief ever since he'd struck down Blackhand in the mak'gora. The brothers now planned to reforge the Horde as they saw fit, but they knew it would take time. They gradually reached out to other large groups of Horde survivors, trying to rally them under their new banner. Kilrogg ignored them. He had seen his destiny, and he knew it did not lie with Dal'rend and Maim's "false" Horde.

Yet the Dragonmaw did pledge their support to the orcs in Blackrock Spire. They offered to give some of their enslaved dragons to Dal'rend and Maim's forces if ever they were needed.

Other members of the Horde scattered into the wilderness. Some traveled in packs. A few were alone. Among the solitary survivors was Eitrigg, the former handler of Garona. In the aftermath of defeat, he dwelled on everything the half-orc had told him about the dark forces manipulating the orcs. He began to believe what Garona had said, and his unquestioning loyalty to the Horde faded.

Gul'dan's promises, the "benefactor" Kil'jaeden, the Dark Portal—none of these things had been what they'd seemed. Forming the Horde had not brought the orcs salvation; it had brought them doom.

With shame and anger in his heart, Eitrigg disavowed the Horde. He struck out north in search of a place to spend the rest of his days.

A place to die in peace.

THE COST OF WAR

While the remnants of the Horde struggled for survival, victory celebrations graced every Alliance city. Humans, dwarves, gnomes, and high elves reveled in their triumph. Yet when the jubilation passed, a harsh reality set in: life would never be the same.

War had decimated the Eastern Kingdoms. The Horde had razed countless villages and cities. Corpses choked the roadways and mountain passes from Hillsbrad Foothills to Quel'Thalas.

For nearly everyone who'd fought, the war did not end with the Dark Portal's destruction. Survivors were plagued by nightmares of the horrors they'd witnessed. Many soldiers had lost close friends. Some had even lost their entire families. Still others emerged from the war forever maimed and disabled. The struggle to find inner peace would be a long and arduous road, a battle more difficult than any of the survivors had faced against the Horde.

Even Turalyon was haunted by what he'd seen. The death of his mentor, Lothar, pressed down like an iron fist on his heart. The temptation to withdraw into himself was strong, but Turalyon would not abandon people in need. He'd been promoted to supreme commander of the Alliance, and thousands now looked to him for guidance and leadership.

Turalyon knew that the key to bringing life back to normal was rebuilding the Eastern Kingdoms. He spearheaded these efforts by gathering the Alliance leadership in Lordaeron. The rulers agreed to pool their resources to mend their war-ravaged nations. Due to its betrayal, Alterac did not take part in this meeting. The human leaders were still debating how to deal with the rogue kingdom, and the discussions would continue for many weeks.

ALLERIA AND TURALYON

During the Second War, many members of the Alliance formed friendships. Some, like Alleria and Turalyon, even kindled closer relationships. The elf and the human were from different worlds, but they had been brought together in a way that only war could do. As the months passed and Alleria and Turalyon discovered more about each other, they grew close. The war and its aftermath would test their bonds. But in the end, their love would prevail.



Special importance was placed on rebuilding Stormwind. King Terenas of Lordaeron had pledged to aid the fallen kingdom and support Prince Varian Wrynn's ascension to the throne. For some, Stormwind was a powerful symbol of humanity's future. If even it could rise from the ashes, anyone could.

Word of Stormwind's reconstruction was met with mixed feelings by the kingdom's refugees. Many of them refused to return to their broken home. Stormwind was a reminder of everything they'd lost. These refugees preferred to start their lives anew in Lordaeron.

Yet other refugees did return to Stormwind, including Prince Varian Wrynn. Turalyon oversaw efforts to repatriate the kingdom's citizens and secure Varian's place as the next king. He surrounded the teenager with seasoned ministers and advisors to help him settle into his new role.

While Turalyon was occupied in Stormwind, his fellow paladins went to work in Lordaeron. The Order of the Silver Hand had been formed to fight the Horde, but its purpose did not end with the Dark Portal's destruction. The paladins coordinated with the Church of the Holy Light to help the Alliance move forward. They healed the sick and granted shelter to the survivors who were so broken by the war that they could no longer care for themselves.

ORC INTERNMENT CAMPS

Not all members of the Alliance were so focused on healing and rebuilding. Hatred of the orcs still burned in the hearts of many. Alleria Windrunner had seen countless elves perish in the Second War. Driven by revenge, she spent her days hunting down orcs who had escaped capture. It was her way to deal with the loss and sorrow brought on by the war.

Alleria was not the only one hunting orcs. Groups of humans, elves, dwarves, and gnomes stalked the Eastern Kingdoms. They combed the deep wilds and remote mountains in search of their prey. The Alliance hunters captured many of the orcs they found. Others, they killed on sight, vengeance for loved ones who had died in the war.

The question of what to do with the captured orcs became a subject of bitter debate. Gilneas and Stromgarde argued for the execution of the prisoners. Yet Lordaeron was against putting the orcs to the blade. The capacity for mercy proved that the Alliance was more civilized and honorable than the Horde. Rather than execute the orcs, Lordaeron wanted to lock them in internment camps—prisons to be funded by Alliance members.

Dalaran's Kirin Tor also lobbied for imprisonment. After the First War, the Council of Tirisfal had faded from existence. The Kirin Tor now took charge over matters that the secret order had once specialized in, such as investigating demonic activity. Dalaran's magi wished to study the orcs and their strange magics, as much for the pursuit of knowledge as for strategic purposes. The Kirin Tor argued that by better understanding the orcs' strengths and weaknesses, they could defeat them if war ever broke out again.

The Alliance eventually came to an agreement. The member nations would fund the construction of internment camps, which would house the orcs. One of Stromgarde's most celebrated soldiers, Danath Trollbane, would oversee these crude prisons. If order could be maintained, the camps would remain. If not, the Alliance would revisit executing the orcs.

The camps did prove successful, but bitterness remained over their existence. Gilneas thought the prisons were a pointless burden on the Alliance. They were already spending a fortune

DURNHOLDE KEEP

Though Danath Trollbane oversaw all of the camps, he delegated command of them to the Second War's high-ranking veterans. One prison outside Durnholde Keep in Hillsbrad Foothills fell under the control of a respected lord named Aedelas Blackmoore.

During the First War, Blackmoore had discovered the infant orc Go'el and had taken him to Durnholde. Unbeknownst to the rest of the Alliance, he'd continued raising the young orc, whom he named "Thrall."

In secret, Blackmoore plotted to mold Thrall into his own obedient general—a general who would one day lead the captive orcs against the Alliance. It was Blackmoore's hope that he could assert dominion over the human nations and reign as their king.



rebuilding Stormwind, and now more coin was being siphoned into keeping their enemies alive.

In the years that followed, the cost of maintaining the camps would remain a sticking point for Gilneas, and it would eventually drive the nation away from the Alliance.

NETHERGARDE KEEP

Far to the south, Khadgar watched over the site where the Dark Portal had once stood. His heroics in the Second War had earned him the coveted title of archmage. Yet Khadgar had spent no time celebrating. He knew that the threat posed by the Horde was not over.

The fel energies used by the Horde had killed much of the land surrounding the Dark Portal, and conditions were continuing to worsen. Even though the gateway had been destroyed, fel magic was somehow seeping into Azeroth. Khadgar eventually discovered that this was because a connection still existed between his world and Draenor. A lingering dimensional rift remained in the area. From it, fel energies from the orcish homeworld were affecting Azeroth.

The rift resisted Khadgar's attempts to close it. Unless Khadgar and other magi held the fel magic at bay, it would creep across the Eastern Kingdoms and bleed the land of life.

Khadgar and his fellow magi brought their findings before the Alliance. The archmage warned that as long as the dimensional rift was open, the possibility of another invasion remained. He called on the Alliance nations to fund a stronghold, Nethergarde Keep, to watch over the rift. From there, Khadgar and other magi would also neutralize the spreading fel magic.

After considerable debate, Khadgar secured the resources he needed. Nethergarde Keep gradually arose atop a hilly outcropping overlooking the southern half of the Black Morass. From the construction site, Khadgar observed the broken landscape and measured its fel energies.

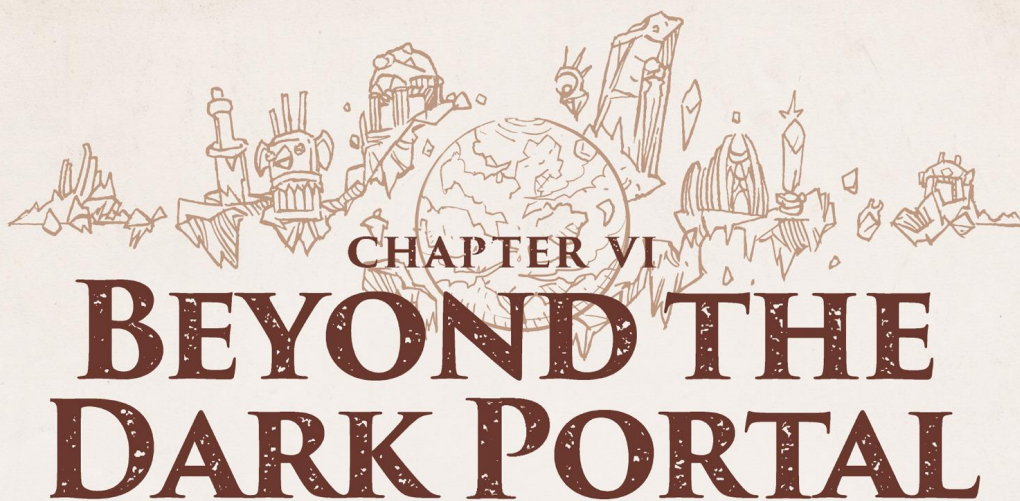
He often mused about the orcish homeworld. What horrors lingered there? What had become of the orcs who had returned through the portal?

Soon enough, he would find out.



CHAPTER VI
**BEYOND THE
DARK PORTAL**





CHAPTER VI

BEYOND THE DARK PORTAL

REFORGING THE HORDE

8 YEARS AFTER THE DARK PORTAL

Life after the Second War was stark for Draenor's orcs. Their world was still dying. Fel energies continued to spread, choking natural life into extinction. The demonic bloodlust coursing through their veins had not diminished, and too often orcs turned upon orcs, creating a whirlpool of chaos that threatened to drag the race down into oblivion. The Warsong and the Shattered Hand clans, in particular, had insatiable needs for violence.

The closest the Horde had to a leader was Ner'zhul, the orc who had inadvertently led his people into the Burning Legion's clutches. Gul'dan had seen no use in bringing the elder shaman to Azeroth, and he had left him on Draenor. Ner'zhul had kept to his ancestral lands in Shadowmoon Valley. In time, Draenor's orcs had looked to him for guidance. Yet leadership was not a burden he wanted. Ner'zhul had fallen into despair. Day and night, visions of death plagued his broken mind. He saw orc skeletons littering a barren world. He'd even had a skull tattooed on his face, a practice shaman had long used to mark certain failed apprentices as "dead" to their people.

For Ner'zhul, there seemed to be no way to save the Horde from doom. The invasion of Azeroth had been a desperate attempt to escape a slow death, and it had failed. The orcs did not have the strength to try again.

Teron Gorefiend, however, was not prepared to give up. He had seen Gul'dan's plans unravel, but he had also witnessed moments of incredible power. Conquering Azeroth? Perhaps it was impossible. Yet Gul'dan had gleaned knowledge from Medivh's mind, and he had told his death knights that there were many potent artifacts out there that were vulnerable, ripe for the taking.

Gorefiend had three particular artifacts in mind. The first was the Book of Medivh, a tome that contained some of the Guardian's considerable power and his knowledge of blending different shades of magic together. The second was the Eye of Dalaran, a relic crafted by the Kirin Tor that could focus and amplify magical energies. The third was the Scepter of Sargeras. This artifact, created long ago by the Burning Legion, had the ability to open gateways between worlds.

Gorefiend and his death knights cared only for themselves. They desired a new world that they could assert sole dominion over, but they knew they would need the Horde's help to escape Draenor. With the artifacts, the orcs could create new dimensional rifts. Not to Azeroth, but to other worlds where the Horde could settle.

Yet these artifacts were back on Azeroth, and Gul'dan had not told his death knights of their exact locations. Even if Gorefiend could rebuild the Dark Portal, he would need the Horde's help to claim the instruments of power. This presented a challenge. None of the survivors trusted Gul'dan's former allies, especially the unholy death knights. Success depended on Ner'zhul. He was the only orc on Draenor who still had the influence to rally and lead the clans.

Ner'zhul vehemently resisted Gorefiend's ideas. What good would a few relics of power do? How would they possibly save the orcs? More importantly, Gorefiend had betrayed Ner'zhul in years past. He had been one of Gul'dan's closest allies. How could Ner'zhul trust the death knight?

Gorefiend persisted, telling Ner'zhul of how they could open new rifts to flee from their dying homeland. There were countless worlds out there in the cosmos. Even a weakened Horde would surely find *one* to conquer.

Ner'zhul slowly relented. Gorefiend's plan was appealing. Draenor's decay weighed heavily upon Ner'zhul. He felt guilt for allowing the Legion to sink its claws into his people, and a fresh start on a fresh world might be his only chance to redeem himself.

He gathered the leaders of the remaining clans. Among them were Grommash Hellscream of the Warsongs, Kargath Bladefist of the Shattered Hand, and Fenris of the Thunderlords. Ner'zhul was stunned at how easily they agreed to his plans. Hellscream, Bladefist, and Fenris had been forced to sit out the entirety of the First and Second Wars. They thirsted for battle, any battle.

The other clans wanted war, too. Any chance to escape Draenor was worth taking.

Opening the Dark Portal for the first time had required tremendous amounts of magical energy. Restoring the rift to its former size would be far simpler. The bridge between worlds still existed, albeit in a diminished form. Teron Gorefiend told Ner'zhul that the lingering power kept within the Skull of Gul'dan would be more than enough to reconstruct the Dark Portal.

That was a fortunate bit of news, for the skull had been brought back to Draenor by Horde refugees. In the time since the Dark Portal had slammed shut, the skull had passed between orcs, traded and fought over as a prized trinket.

After claiming the skull, Ner'zhul and the death knights began their great convocation. He could only hope that the Alliance would be unprepared.

RETURN OF GARONA

In the waning months of the Second War, Garona had wandered the land on her own. She could still feel the Shadow Council's dark presence in her mind, trying to bend her thoughts. She could not trust her actions around friend or foe. Slowly, patiently, she fought her way back into control, shrugging away as many of Gul'dan's lingering mental chains as she could.

Finally, she was confident she could resist the Shadow Council's orders. That meant Garona was ready to visit the one person she still trusted in the world: Khadgar.

Under the cover of darkness, she infiltrated Nethergarde Keep and snuck into Khadgar's private quarters as he slept. They had not seen each other since their battle against Medivh. They had much to discuss.

Garona told him of her activities during the Second War, and she also openly confessed to assassinating King Llane. Khadgar believed her when she said she had been compelled to do it by Gul'dan; he could sense the Shadow Council's mangled spellwork still woven through her thoughts.

The presence of these dark enchantments proved something else: at least one member of the Shadow Council was still alive and on Azeroth. Were that not the case, the spells would have lost their potency the moment Gul'dan had died. Someone was trying to maintain his links to his old puppets.

Over several months, Khadgar secretly met with Garona outside Nethergarde Keep, carefully unravelling the Shadow Council's hold on her. He was successful. Garona, for the first time in her life, was free.

In gratitude, Garona offered to do whatever she could to hunt down the Shadow Council on Azeroth. Khadgar eagerly accepted. Of late, he had been sensing strange energies radiating from the nearby rift, and he was concerned that forces on Draenor were working to expand it.

He asked Garona to remain in the area, hidden from the Alliance, while he investigated.

FEL OMENS

Before long, Khadgar sent a message to many of the Alliance's leaders, asking them to meet in Nethergarde Keep at once. There was some reluctance. The Second War had only recently ended, and most nations were still working to rebuild.

Nonetheless, the leaders traveled to the keep. Once there, they understood Khadgar's urgency. He and the other magi had managed to stop the spreading fel energies, but not before they had turned the southern half of the Black Morass into a wasteland. The keep's garrison had taken to calling the region "the Blasted Lands." The northern portion of the Black Morass, still teeming with life, had been renamed the Swamp of Sorrows in honor of those who had died in the Second War. The sight of the Blasted Lands was a sobering reminder of the dark forces the Alliance had stopped . . . and of what they might be called upon to stop again.

But the state of the land wasn't the truly bad news. Khadgar told the leaders that there had been unmistakable surges of fel magic where the Dark Portal had once stood. He feared that the orcs were attempting to expand the existing rift and pass through it.

The gathered leaders agreed to give Khadgar their full support. War-weary as they all were, they had no intention of allowing the Horde to gain another foothold on this world.

Turalyon coordinated the military effort from Stormwind, where he was in the midst of helping the kingdom rebuild. He tasked Danath Trollbane, one of the Second War's most prominent veterans, with leading a small army to the Blasted Lands. In the meantime, Turalyon would rally the rest of the Alliance forces for the march south.

Unfortunately, the Horde's invasion was already under way.



REOPENING THE DARK PORTAL

Just a few weeks after Khadgar warned the Alliance of the impending threat, Ner'zhul finally succeeded. Drawing on the Skull of Gul'dan's energies, he expanded the rift between Draenor and Azeroth.

Almost immediately, Grommash Hellscream led the spear tip of the Horde's invasion force—the Warsong, Shattered Hand, Thunderlord, and Laughing Skull clans—into the Blasted Lands. These soldiers were joined by Gorefiend and his death knights. The orcs began constructing a physical frame around the dimensional rift, creating a new Dark Portal that could remain open permanently without needing a constant influx of power.

Kilrogg Deadeye and his Bleeding Hollow clan had been watching over the Blasted Lands for any sign of the Horde's return. They met with Grommash and the death knights, informing them of what had happened on Azeroth after the Second War. The information would prove invaluable in the days ahead. Gorefiend ordered Kilrogg and his people back to Draenor. They had fought for survival since the end of the war, and they deserved time to rest.

By the time Danath's meager army arrived at the Dark Portal, the Horde had brought many soldiers to Azeroth. The humans stood little chance against their enemy's superior numbers. Brutal, close-quarters combat erupted across the southern edge of the Blasted Lands.

Danath was the only member of his army to leave the battle alive. He retreated to Nethergarde Keep, where he hoped to use its garrison. Despite the earlier defeat, Danath was confident he could contain the orcish armies in the region until the rest of the Alliance arrived.

He wasn't wrong. The orcs did not have the numbers needed to mount a true invasion. But conquest was not their objective this time.

The Horde's fearsome soldiers made a show of preparing for a full-scale assault. Meanwhile, Gorefiend and his death knights led a hunting party beyond the Blasted Lands in search of the artifacts. The group was composed of death knights and orcs, including Chieftain Fenris. Few Alliance soldiers noticed their departure, and none guessed their purpose.

Garona did. She began to track them, trying to discern what they were searching for.

LORD DAVAL PRESTOR

Deathwing had gone into hiding shortly after the Second War ended. His plan had failed—the orcs had not conquered Azeroth—but there had been some small victories. Much of the red dragonflight, along with its leader, Alexstrasza, was still under the Dragonmaw clan's control. The other Aspects had not yet taken action against the orcs. Most of the dragons feared falling prey to the Demon Soul and suffering Alexstrasza's fate. The human kingdoms had also experienced heavy losses, and they needed time to recover.

When he sensed the rift to Draenor expanding, Deathwing wondered if the orcs had somehow managed to replenish their numbers for yet another war at full strength, but it soon became clear that their "invasion" was only a feint. Conquest was not their purpose.

And yet, Deathwing was intrigued. He decided to take on human form once again and influence the Alliance's response to the Horde. This tactic had been very effective during the First War.

There was another political crisis taking place. The Alliance was furious at Alterac's betrayal, and there was much debate as to how the kingdom should be punished—or if it even deserved to exist.

Lordaeron had become the place where these debates were held. Deathwing returned there in a new human form, casting himself as a minor noble named Lord Daval Prestor, a distant cousin of King Perenolde. Having an apparent connection to Alterac royalty gave his words weight.

Prestor advised Lordaeron's king, Terenas, to establish martial law in Alterac until the line of succession could be settled. This move split the attentions of the Alliance army, weakening its response to the Horde's new invasion. The human leaders found Prestor to be charming, endearing, and refreshingly pragmatic. He showed no signs of being prickly about the pride of "his people," and he seemed to have only the best interests of the Alliance at heart.

With the Alliance snared in unnecessary turmoil, Deathwing formed his endgame to restore his black dragonflight to its former power and glory. The human nations were unlikely to suffer serious damage from the Horde's invasion, and thus his plans on Azeroth would not advance. Any attempt to reestablish the black dragonflight would be noticed by the Alliance and, more importantly, by the other Dragon Aspects.

Perhaps the solution to that problem did not lie on Azeroth at all. The orcs' homeworld, Draenor . . . The other dragonflights could not threaten Deathwing there.

It mattered little that the world was blighted. Dragons did not need to live off the land the same way mortals did.

Deathwing moved to make contact with the Horde once again.

THE BOOK OF MEDIVH

As battle engulfed the Blasted Lands, Gorefiend led the Horde's covert hunting party north. Of the three artifacts he sought, he knew only the Book of Medivh's location. He had learned it was in Alterac, a kingdom far from the Dark Portal.

Gorefiend's forces quietly traveled to Blackrock Spire to make contact with Blackhand's sons, Dal'rend and Maim. Through their alliance with the Dragonmaw in Grim Batol, they had access to red dragons. Gorefiend desperately needed these creatures to expedite his journey to Alterac.

The meeting was disastrous. Dal'rend had declared himself warchief of the "true Horde." He considered Ner'zhul a coward and a usurper, and he had no intention of helping him with his plans.

Gorefiend left empty-handed, but he was soon approached by Deathwing. He offered the death knight and his allies a deal: he would lend his black dragons to help the Horde retrieve what it needed; in exchange, the Horde would transport "precious items" to Draenor. As a sign of trust, Deathwing told Gorefiend the exact locations of the other two artifacts, as well as the dangers his forces might face while retrieving them. One was in Dalaran, and the other was deep within the Tomb of Sargeras.

Gorefiend was in no position to turn Deathwing down. He split his forces into three raiding parties. Black dragons would transport them to collect the artifacts immediately.

Gorefiend suspected that obtaining the Book of Medivh would be the most difficult of the three tasks, so he decided to handle it personally. Deathwing had warned him that Alterac was under martial law, so Gorefiend expected stiff resistance. The Alliance forces occupying the city were

utterly unprepared to face dragons and death knights; when the Horde raiders arrived, most of the soldiers fled in terror.

Gorefiend infiltrated the castle and found King Perenolde. The human was erratic, boisterous, making demands; his sanity had slipped away, in truth. Deathwing had made sure his “distant cousin” had lost his mind so that the king could not contradict the lies the dragon was telling in Lordaeron. Bemused, Gorefiend humored Perenolde’s fantasies for a few moments, and then he agreed to wipe out the Alliance occupying force in exchange for the artifact. Such chaos would only help divide humanity’s attention, giving him more time to complete his task.

With the Book of Medivh in their possession, the death knight and his followers left the mad king alive and made their retreat from the city. Gorefiend kept his word: the Alliance soldiers stationed in Alterac could do little to fight off the black dragons’ relentless onslaught, and the garrison was eradicated.

REVELATIONS

While Gorefiend and his forces were assaulting Alterac, the fighting at Nethergarde Keep ground to a bloody stalemate. Turalyon had arrived with Alliance reinforcements. Alongside Khadgar and Danath’s soldiers, they kept the Horde contained. Yet the humans couldn’t shake the suspicion that the orcs were not throwing their full might into the invasion. Alliance scouts stayed on the alert for unexpected maneuvers, but none came. The Horde seemed content to test Nethergarde’s defenses day after day without trying to overwhelm the keep.

As the days passed, more and more Alliance reinforcements arrived at the keep, enough to not only defend the walls but also launch counterattacks against the Horde. The siege was eventually forced back into the empty, open landscape of the Blasted Lands.

That should have spelled the end of the invasion . . . but it didn’t. The orcs continued to fight, maintaining a skirmish line for no apparent reason. They sacrificed warriors to hold or retake useless ground.

Khadgar’s suspicions grew into an unnerving theory: the Horde was buying time for some other purpose. The invasion was just a distraction.

To find answers, Alliance forces captured one of the enemy. They brought him back to the keep for interrogation. Turalyon led the questioning, calling on the Holy Light to draw out information from the orc.

The captive eventually talked and confirmed what Khadgar feared. The Horde’s new leader, Ner’zhul, had no interest in conquest. Small raiding parties had spread across Azeroth under the Alliance’s noses, searching for powerful artifacts. There was no telling where they had gone or exactly what they were looking for.



THE EYE OF DALARAN

North of the Blasted Lands, time was running out for Gorefiend. He'd hoped that the other two hunting parties had already obtained their artifacts. They hadn't. When he joined his forces that had set out for Dalaran, he was furious to learn that they hadn't been able to sense the Eye of Dalaran. Deathwing revealed the reason why. Dalaran's Kirin Tor magi had cast wards on the relic, keeping it from being sensed from a distance.

Fortunately for the Horde, the Kirin Tor had no idea they were under scrutiny. They had enchanted the Eye of Dalaran simply because it was important, not because the magi believed anyone would be foolish enough to try to steal it.

Though Gorefiend and his followers could not detect the artifact's exact location, Deathwing was more sensitive to such things. He instructed the hunters where they could find it. He then gathered his black dragons and assaulted Dalaran's outer defenses, providing a distraction that Gorefiend and a small group of death knights could use to sneak into the city.

As magi rushed to defend their home from the dragons, Gorefiend and his followers crept through Dalaran's streets. Soon enough, they discovered the Eye of Dalaran, locked in an enchanted vault. Gorefiend shattered the containment wards placed around the artifact.

And in doing so, he attracted unwanted attention. One of the most powerful leaders in the Kirin Tor, Archmage Antonidas, raced to investigate the source of the disturbance. He and a handful of magi battled the death knights in the vault, but the element of surprise was on the Horde's side. Gorefiend and his allies killed one of the magi and escaped with the artifact.

Antonidas gave chase for as long as he could, but once the hunters had reunited with the black dragons, they vanished into the skies. All the archmage could do now was warn Khadgar.

THE SCEPTER OF SARGERAS

The third hunting party could not make the journey to the Tomb of Sargeras entirely on the backs of black dragons. The distance was immense, and there were no islands en route where the creatures could land and rest. Even for Deathwing's mighty servants, such a journey was beyond their ability. The hunters needed to find another way to reach the tomb.

They settled on stealing ships from the same harbor where Warchief Doomhammer had overseen the construction of the Horde fleet. The site had fallen under Alliance control and been renamed Menethil Harbor in honor of Lordaeron's king. There were plenty of ships, but many of them were Alliance vessels under the command of Admiral Daelin Proudmoore.

Despite the risks, the hunters had little choice but to take ships. Their only advantage was the element of surprise. The Alliance navy would certainly not expect to fight black dragons and members of the Horde.

In that, the hunters were wrong.

When Gorefiend had set out on his quest, he had been followed. Garona had kept her distance, observing the death knight's pact with Deathwing. When the hunting parties had separated in three directions, Garona had to choose which to follow. She had shadowed the group that traveled to Menethil Harbor, believing that it was seeking out the Tomb of Sargeras.

As the hunting party planned its assault on the harbor, Garona went to work. She could not warn the humans directly—they would not listen to an orc—but she knew their language well. She scrawled a note to warn about the impending attack, and she made sure the Alliance would find it. It was a simple matter. She showed herself to the harbor's guards, and when they gave chase, she dropped the missive and ran.

The incident gained attention immediately. An orc intruder leaving notes was not something seen every day, and the information in it was hard to believe.

Yet when the black dragons swooped down a few hours later, the humans were not completely unprepared. A bloody confrontation erupted in the harbor, and the hunting party only managed to steal a few small, slow ships. They sailed them clumsily out to sea while the black dragons burned any vessels that attempted to pursue. Garona was unable to follow. She traveled as quickly as she could back to the Blasted Lands to tell Khadgar what had happened.

The voyage to the Tomb of Sargeras was slow and miserable, on ships not meant for the open ocean. When the hunting party arrived, they had to fight their way through the swarm of demons that had killed Gul'dan, taking great losses.

The Scepter of Sargeras was indeed inside the tomb, and the hunting party claimed it. It was well worth the journey. The artifact's ability to open rifts in the fabric of reality would make it critical to Ner'zhul's efforts back on Draenor.

Only a scant few members of the hunting party made the journey back to the Eastern Kingdoms.

When the hunters finally reunited with Gorefiend at the Dark Portal, the death knights made preparations to return to Draenor. Deathwing had already brought them enormous carts loaded with his "precious cargo." The objects were heavy, large, and enchanted—mortal eyes could not see what lay within the crude containers, and magical energies seemed to have no effect on them. The contents were of little concern to Gorefiend. He wanted only to finish his mission.

Deathwing was satisfied. The Horde would carry a huge clutch of black dragon eggs to Draenor, and soon he would join them to oversee the rebirth of his dragonflight.

THE SONS OF LOTHAR

Gorefiend suspected that after the Horde's latest attack on Azeroth, the Alliance might seek to invade Draenor. He left behind a large number of soldiers to prevent this from happening. This force was composed mainly of Warsong orcs led by Hellscream, along with the mok'nathal Rexxar. With this small army in place, Gorefiend and the rest of the Horde returned to Draenor.

Their departure was noticed by the Alliance, and it did not bode well. Based on what he had learned from Archmage Antonidas and Garona, Khadgar began piecing together the Horde's objective. Some of it was incomprehensible to him—he knew of dragons, but Deathwing was not a creature most mortals were aware of—but all of it seemed sinister in nature.

Khadgar only learned the true scope of the Horde's plans after the Alliance captured a death knight. The archmage bombarded his prisoner with arcane magic, forcing him to reveal all he knew of Ner'zhul's intentions. At last, everything was clear. Ner'zhul and the Horde were planning to escape their dying world by creating new portals, and they had stolen the artifacts to do so.

When Khadgar told Turalyon of what he'd learned, they both agreed that they could not allow the Horde to invade another world. No other land should suffer as Azeroth had.

Yet it was possible the Alliance's other heroes wouldn't feel the same way. Launching a campaign into Draenor would require an army, and casualties would likely be high. Turalyon and Khadgar both feared that there might not be much of an appetite for battle among the soldiers who had already spent years fighting to protect Azeroth from the Horde.

It was time to find out. Turalyon raised his banner, declaring that he would lead this army—the “Sons of Lothar”—into the orcish homeworld and end the Horde forever.

Not all of the Alliance's soldiers answered the call, but most did. Nearly every one of the Second War's most revered heroes—including Alleria Windrunner, Danath Trollbane, and Kurdran Wildhammer—brought their forces to Nethergarde Keep in preparation for war.

Garona wanted to join the expedition force, even if it was only in secret. Khadgar knew he could use her knowledge of Draenor to his advantage, but he had a different task for her. They both knew that members of the Shadow Council were still alive on Azeroth. He convinced the half-orc to stay behind, hunt them down, and kill them all.

The Sons of Lothar smashed through Hellscream's warriors, forcing them to scatter into the far corners of the Blasted Lands. With the way clear, the Alliance expedition force marched through the Dark Portal and laid eyes upon Draenor for the first time. The sight shocked them. They stood on land that had once been Tanaan Jungle; now it was Hellfire Peninsula, a barren wasteland of red earth stretching endlessly into the distance.

The Sons of Lothar faced no real resistance in those first days. The orcish forces had not expected to be chased back to Draenor. Yet word of the invasion soon spread throughout the Horde.

A DEAL WITH DRAGONS

Gorefiend brought all of his cargo to Hellfire Citadel, where Warchief Ner'zhul was waiting. By now, the Horde had received word that Alliance forces were streaming through the Dark Portal. Time had grown short, and Ner'zhul was anxious to begin.

He was stunned, however, to see the full measure of what Gorefiend had brought back. Not only had he obtained the three artifacts, but he had also returned with a large number of suspicious carts. These items belonged to a surprise guest: Deathwing. The black dragon and other members of his flight had come through the Dark Portal disguised as orcs so as not to draw attention to themselves.

Ner'zhul was initially terrified of Deathwing. Even though the dragon was not wearing his true form, he radiated immense power. Deathwing sensed the potent Skull of Gul'dan in Ner'zhul's presence, and he demanded it for himself. The warchief balked at this request, but only for a moment. He was in no position to resist a creature like Deathwing, and he had no further need of the skull. Its purpose had been to reopen the Dark Portal.

Deathwing was interested in using the skull's lingering energies to strengthen his dragonflight and accelerate the growth of his eggs and whelps. As a token of “friendship,” Deathwing left a portion of his black dragons with the Horde to protect Hellfire Citadel against the Alliance's invasion.

With the Skull of Gul'dan in his possession, Deathwing left Hellfire Citadel. He settled on Gorggrond as a suitable place to hide his clutch of black dragon eggs.

Meanwhile, Ner'zhul put his own plans into action. The gathered artifacts would grant him enough power to open portals to other worlds, but he needed to find a place to begin the ritual. The Dark Portal's location had been chosen because it rested on a convergence of magical ley lines, but now that was in Alliance hands.

The only other nexus of ley lines Ner'zhul knew about was at the site of the Black Temple. He ordered the bulk of the Horde to accompany him to that location. The warchief left Kargath Bladefist and his Shattered Hand at Hellfire Citadel to hold the Alliance army at bay.

ASSAULT ON HELLFIRE CITADEL

Khadgar and Turalyon both agreed that stopping Ner'zhul was their highest priority. If he were to fall, the Horde's plan to escape to other worlds would collapse. Believing that Ner'zhul was still in Hellfire Citadel, the Sons of Lothar launched an all-out offensive against the stronghold.

Chieftain Bladefist and his Shattered Hand had dug in at the citadel for a siege. The orcs had hoped to hold the Alliance at bay for a week. Their defenses fell before the first day ended. Even with the help of black dragons, Kargath simply had no means to repel simultaneous attacks from dwarf gryphon riders in the sky and soldiers on the ground. Once Khadgar and his fellow magi joined the fray, Kargath had to abandon his position and flee into the wastes.

The Sons of Lothar were victorious, but they had no time to rest or rejoice. The presence of black dragons at Hellfire Citadel was an ill omen. What was worse, Khadgar discovered that Ner'zhul had marched southwest with the rest of the Horde and most of his potent artifacts. Strangely, the archmage did not sense the Skull of Gul'dan moving with them. He felt its presence somewhere in the north.

Khadgar knew that the Sons of Lothar could not simply focus on Ner'zhul. The archmage needed the Skull of Gul'dan to destroy Draenor's side of the Dark Portal. After much debate, Turalyon decided to split his forces. One half would track down the Skull of Gul'dan. The other would apprehend Ner'zhul and the artifacts in his possession.

Khadgar, Turalyon, and Alleria Windrunner led the forces that sought out the Skull of Gul'dan to the north. Danath Trollbane and Kurdran Wildhammer pursued Ner'zhul to the south.

The chaos of the coming battles would soon overwhelm both sides of the war.



BATTLE OF AUCHINDOUN

Ner'zhul and the orcs were disappointed to hear how fast Hellfire Citadel had fallen, but they already had a considerable head start on the Alliance. The Horde knew this land, and they were moving quickly. It didn't seem possible that their enemies could catch up to them.

Unfortunately for Ner'zhul, Kurdran Wildhammer and his gryphon riders had decided to scout ahead. They found the warchief and his small army at the edge of the Bone Wastes, west of Shadowmoon Valley. The dwarves rained hell upon the orcs, bombarding them with impunity. Unless Ner'zhul and his people found a safer route to the Black Temple, they would soon die.

There was only one such path nearby: through the draenei tomb city of Auchindoun. Much of the holy site was in ruins, but many of its crypts and tunnels were intact. During the Horde's war against the draenei, Gorefiend had learned much about Auchindoun. He knew of little-used passageways that led toward Shadowmoon Valley—paths that Ner'zhul and his forces could travel through to elude the Sons of Lothar and get closer to their destination.

Auchindoun was a haunted and twisted place. It would not be safe to enter, but Ner'zhul had no alternative.

As he led his forces into the tomb, the gryphon riders launched a bold new attack—one that they would soon regret. Kurdran was knocked from his mount and captured by the Horde. Before the other dwarves could rescue him, he was taken into Auchindoun's darkened corridors. Kilrogg Deadeye interrogated Kurdran, hoping to learn about the Alliance's true numbers. The dwarf held his tongue even under unspeakable torture.

Danath Trollbane's ground forces were not far away. When they arrived at Auchindoun, some of the gryphon riders explained the situation. It would be very dangerous to rescue Kurdran. In Auchindoun's tight quarters, a large force was little more effective than a small one, and the orcs knew the terrain. They would be capable of outmaneuvering Danath, no matter how many troops he brought with him.

An unexpected source of aid presented itself. An Outcast arakkoa named Grizzik had been following the Sons of Lothar as they pursued the Horde south. He had no love for the Horde. Years ago, Chieftain Kargath had toppled the high arakkoa capital, Skyreach. His orcs had killed nearly all of its inhabitants, and they had captured high arakkoa and thrown them into the cursed Sethekk Hollow. Grizzik was one of these unfortunate prisoners. He emerged from Sethekk Hollow as an Outcast, warped and twisted by the region's shadowy energies. Eager for vengeance, Grizzik offered to lead the Alliance through Auchindoun.

Guided by the arakkoa, Danath and his soldiers stormed through the tomb city. They moved carefully, avoiding the Horde's ambushes, and methodically searched Auchindoun. In time, they liberated Kurdran.

Yet Ner'zhul was nowhere to be found. Only Kilrogg and the remnants of his Bleeding Hollow clan stalked Auchindoun. They had volunteered to occupy the Alliance while the rest of the Horde escaped to the Black Temple. It was not simply nobility that drove Kilrogg to make this sacrifice. Years ago, he had performed a ritual that granted him a vision of his own death. He now realized that Auchindoun was the place where he would breathe his last breath.

The Bleeding Hollow fell upon the Alliance forces. As blood spilled across Auchindoun, Danath confronted Kilrogg. The two engaged in a brutal duel that echoed through the tomb city's halls until Danath plunged his blade through the orc's throat. With their chieftain dead, the rest of the Bleeding Hollow scattered or surrendered.

Kilrogg's sacrifice was not in vain. He had given Ner'zhul the time he would need to safely reach the Black Temple with the rest of the Horde.

GRUUL THE DRAGONKILLER

Gorgrond was inhospitable terrain, the perfect place for Deathwing to build a refuge from those who could not fly. He and his black dragons swooped down on the mountains in force, seeking out safe places for his eggs.

Though the land was barren, it was not unoccupied. Gorgrond was home to the gronn who had survived Draenor's slow decay. The mightiest of these giants was known as Gruul. He lorded over a number of ogres and lesser gronn who dwelled in the mountains. Gruul's kind were highly territorial, not prone to living in close proximity with one another. But the calamities that had befallen Draenor had changed them. The gronn now joined forces in order to survive.

Gruul and his followers had no intention of allowing intruders to conquer their home. They fought back, surprising the black dragons with their ferocity.

Deathwing ignored the gronn, seeing them as little more than pests. He focused on finding a number of hiding places for his unhatched children while the rest of his dragonflight fought the native creatures.

His arrogance led to the ruination of his plans. While Deathwing was distracted, the Sons of Lothar arrived in Gorgrond, searching for the Skull of Gul'dan. The Alliance soldiers were deeply unsettled by what they had found. Battles between black dragons and gronn had resulted in many deaths. Gruul and his followers had taken to impaling their slain enemies on spikes, displaying their corpses to all.

The gronn nearly turned on the Sons of Lothar with violence, but Khadgar and Turalyon were quickly able to demonstrate that the Alliance was also the enemy of the black dragonflight. They struck a simple bargain with Gruul. If he gave them safe passage through Gorgrond, they would help him defeat Deathwing.

The gronn and the Alliance prepared an ambush at the largest cache of Deathwing's eggs, nestled in one of Gorgrond's barren valleys. The Sons of Lothar wasted little time; they destroyed as many of the unguarded eggs as they could, hoping to lure Deathwing into the open.

When Deathwing learned of their actions, he and his draconic followers appeared in the skies and unleashed their molten fury on the intruders. It was just the moment Gruul had been waiting for. The massive gronn scaled Gorgrond's mountains to battle Deathwing with his bare fists.

Meanwhile, Khadgar lashed Deathwing with his arcane power, ripping apart the metal plates bolted to the black Dragon Aspect's spine. Deathwing's body began to come apart. Molten energies burst forth from his broken form, spilling fire and magma across Gorgrond. The pain was so great that it forced him to drop the Skull of Gul'dan. If he had taken only a few more wounds, he might have died on Draenor that day. Instead, Deathwing abandoned his plans, flying straight back to Azeroth through the Dark Portal (and over the heads of many startled Alliance soldiers).

Deathwing would never forget what happened to him that day. He swore vengeance on those who had attacked him, particularly on Khadgar.

As fighting continued between the gronn and the other black dragons, Khadgar and the rest of the Sons of Lothar collected the Skull of Gul'dan. Then they beat a hasty retreat, fearing that Gruul and his followers would turn on them once they had defeated the dragons.

When the fighting in Gorgrond was done, most of the black dragons were dead or dying. Gruul reasserted his dominion over the land. His battle with Deathwing would earn him newfound respect among his followers, and he would become known as the Dragonkiller.



GRUUL FACES DEATHWING

THE BLACK TEMPLE

Having recovered the Skull of Gul'dan, Turalyon turned his forces south. Shadowmoon Valley was far, but he had magic to help him expedite the journey. Khadgar and his fellow magi opened a series of portals through which the Sons of Lothar reached southern Draenor.

Outside the Black Temple, the two halves of the Alliance army reunited. Yet they had not reached the city in time to stop Ner'zhul. What was worse, the Horde had prepared for their arrival. The remnants of the orcish army had dug in around the Black Temple to keep the Sons of Lothar back.

Much to Khadgar's dismay, he sensed potent energies lashing out from atop the Black Temple. Ner'zhul and his followers were in the midst of preparing their spell to open new portals. There was no time for a drawn-out siege, no time to find a way around the Black Temple's guardians.

The Sons of Lothar launched themselves against the city and crashed into the defenders. While battle raged, Khadgar and his fellow magi hunted for Ner'zhul, hoping to reach him and disrupt his spellwork.

They would not succeed.

Atop the city's largest tower, Ner'zhul had gathered some of the death knights and a number of Shadowmoon orcs to help him with his spellwork and protect him from the Alliance. He and his followers had harnessed the power of the Eye of Dalaran, the Book of Medivh, and the Scepter of Sargeras. Ner'zhul tapped into the nexus of ley lines beneath the Black Temple, but he was woefully unprepared for the amount of skill needed for this ritual. He was desperate to succeed, and his recklessness caused the energies at his command to spiral out of control. As planned, Ner'zhul blasted multiple holes through the fabric of reality, but they were followed by others. *Many* others.

The magic that Ner'zhul had unleashed destabilized Draenor's ley lines. Unimaginable forces began to tear open rifts across Draenor. With each passing moment, the world groaned louder in upheaval. Fissures erupted across land and sea.

Khadgar and the other magi arrived just as this chain reaction was unfolding. They managed to recover the Eye of Dalaran and the Book of Medivh, but not the Scepter of Sargeras. With the artifact in hand, Ner'zhul and a few of his closest followers escaped into the nearest portal.

Ner'zhul had saved himself but doomed his world.

THE BREAKING OF DRAENOR

Khadgar had recovered most of the stolen artifacts, but the damage to Draenor had already been done. The unstable rifts opening across the land would soon shatter the world and almost certainly kill everyone on it. Even worse, the destructive energies would blast through the Dark Portal into Azeroth.

After consulting with Turalyon, Khadgar knew what needed to be done. The Sons of Lothar would have to destroy the Dark Portal to protect their homeworld, and they would have to do so from Draenor. With chaos unfolding all around, there was no time to gather on Azeroth and perform the task there. It was a suicide mission, but no one hesitated.

The energies lashing across the world hampered Khadgar's own magical abilities, preventing him from creating a portal to Hellfire Peninsula. He and his allies were forced to use gryphons



NER'ZHUL OPENS COUNTLESS PORTALS ACROSS DRAENOR

to reach the Dark Portal. Khadgar, Turalyon, Alleria, Kurdran, Danath, and a number of other expedition members made the journey.

Most of the Alliance soldiers stationed at Hellfire Citadel had already retreated back to Azeroth, but now the remnants of the Horde were scrambling through the Dark Portal as well.

And the orcs were none too pleased to see that someone had come to close off their only means of fleeing.

The two sides crashed together outside the yawning gateway in their desperate attempt to escape oblivion. As the battle raged, Khadgar and the other magi unleashed the raw power contained within the Skull of Gul'dan, trying to touch as little of its fel essence as possible. Turalyon and his forces encircled the sorcerers and fended off the terrified orcs who sought to flee from their world.

The magi's spellwork ignited a massive explosion that destroyed the Dark Portal's stone frame and severed the bridge between Azeroth and Draenor. Yet there was little time to savor the victory.

The magical stress unleashed by Ner'zhul's spell was still spreading through the world, and it was growing more destructive by the moment. As violent earthquakes shook the land and continents fell away, Khadgar and the Sons of Lothar ran through an open rift nearby, not knowing where it would take them or whether they would survive. Only moments later, the world itself ripped apart.

Draenor, the realm touched by Aggramar and shaped by the primals and the breakers, the realm of the glorious Apexis civilization and the mystical orc clans, was no more.

REMNANTS OF THE HORDE

The orcs who had escaped through the Dark Portal before it closed brought grim tidings to the Horde on Azeroth: their homeworld was gone. Ner'zhul had sacrificed everyone to save himself and a handful of his loyal followers. It seemed impossible that anyone else could have survived Draenor's destruction.

For Chieftain Grommash, this news was devastating. His only surviving family—his son, Garrosh—had still been on Draenor, in the Mag'har camp. Grommash put aside his grief and led his Warsong clan north to take shelter in the isolated Swamp of Sorrows. He was not giving up; he was merely regrouping. Grommash believed that there would never be peace between the orcs and the humans, and he wanted his fighters to be ready for battle.

The members of the "true Horde" regarded the news about Draenor as confirmation that they were the rightful successors to Warchief Blackhand's rule. In the years to come, Dal'rend and Maim would strengthen their forces.

The Dragonmaw in Grim Batol would do much the same. Zuluhed and many of their clan had returned to Draenor at the end of the Second War. Yet with news of their homeworld's destruction, the Dragonmaw on Azeroth believed that their leader was dead. Nekros took command over his people. He ordered them to continue lording over Alexstrasza and her red dragons in Grim Batol.

Other members of the Horde saw no reason to keep fighting the Alliance. The noble mok'nathal Rexxar believed the rest of his people had perished on Draenor, and he was disgusted by everything that had transpired in recent years. His loyalties were now dust. Rexxar retreated into Azeroth's wilds, and he wandered the world in solitude.

Tucked away in the Alterac Mountains, Drek'Thar and the Frostwolf clan carved out a new home. They isolated themselves from other orcs in the hopes of escaping the Alliance's wrath. It was a harsh and lonely existence, but it was not without its benefits. Drek'Thar had rekindled his connection with the elements, and he used them to keep his people safe.

Far from the Eastern Kingdoms, Cho'gall and the Twilight's Hammer clan knew nothing of Draenor's fate. Even if they had, it wouldn't have mattered. The whispers of the Old Gods were calling to them. Cho'gall and his followers sailed toward the distant continent of Kalimdor in search of their dark masters, eager to help them bring about the Hour of Twilight.

They did not know they were being followed. Garona had picked up Cho'gall's trail, and she tracked the former Shadow Council member to the mysterious lands of Kalimdor.

VALLEY OF HEROES

Many of the orcs who had fled Draenor surrendered immediately to the Alliance in the Blasted Lands. They were carted off to the internment camps that had sprung up around Lordaeron. Among the Alliance nations, debate still raged on what to do with the prisoners.

Yet most of the Alliance's attention was not on the orcs but on the Dark Portal. Some of their greatest leaders and heroes had not returned from their expedition. Accounts from the few Sons of Lothar who had come back painted a grim picture, but there was still hope that one day Turalyon, Khadgar, Alleria, Kurdran, Danath, and their followers might return.

As the days, weeks, months, and years began to pass, that hope faded. The missing soldiers were presumed dead. Statues of the expedition's leaders were erected at the gates of Stormwind City, so that all citizens would receive a daily reminder of those who had made the ultimate sacrifice in order to save their world. Plaques were fixed to the statues, bearing messages from the leaders' friends, comrades, and loved ones.

It would be decades before Azeroth would learn the truth of what had happened.

In the meantime, the peoples of the Eastern Kingdoms settled into their new lives. The First and Second Wars had far-reaching repercussions, altering the balance of power across the land. The Council of Tirisfal was no more, and the concept of a single Guardian imbued with great power was abandoned. Azeroth now had new protectors. The most prominent was the Alliance. Even though the Horde had been defeated, the Alliance's members saw no purpose in disbanding the faction. They would maintain their ties, sharing resources and military strength to protect the world.

The paladins of the Silver Hand also dedicated themselves to safeguarding the land. Only Turalyon had journeyed to Draenor; he had told his comrades to stay behind. The paladins soon trained new holy warriors in their ways, and the ranks of their righteous order swelled.

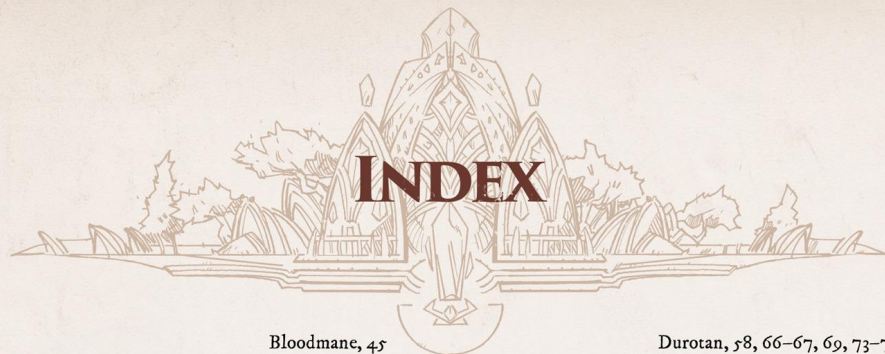
Elsewhere, the Kirin Tor of Dalaran studied the imprisoned orcs and their magics. The magi knew that elements of the Horde were still lurking throughout the Eastern Kingdoms. They wanted to learn as much as they could about their enemy in the event that another war broke out.

Just as on primordial Draenor, just as on countless worlds throughout the cosmos, conflict had changed Azeroth and its peoples forever. Yet there was more turmoil to come. In the years ahead, Azeroth would need the Alliance and other protectors to survive.

TO BE CONTINUED . . .



MEMORIALS IN STORMWIND FOR THE MISSING HEROES FROM THE ALLIANCE'S EXPEDITION TO DRAENOR



- Aborius, 16, 69
 Adherents of Rukhmar, 45-46
 Aedelas Blackmoore, 129, 178
 Aegwynn, 104-105, 111-113, 115, 117-118, 120, 134, 169
 Aerie Peak, 161, 166
 Aggramar, 11, 13-14, 17-18, 37, 46, 127, 197
 Aiden Perenolde, 142, 152, 161, 165, 167-168, 186-187
 Akama, 53, 56, 75, 92, 96
 Alexstrasza, 139, 141, 155-159, 171, 185, 197
 Alleria Windrunner, 156, 158, 164, 176-177, 190-191, 197-198
 Alonsus Faol, 154
 Altars of Storms, 163
 Alterac, 108, 128, 142, 152, 158, 161, 165, 167-168, 176, 186-187, 198
 Amani, 106, 108, 126, 146, 151, 156, 160, 162, 164-165, 168, 173, 197, 198
 Anasterian Sunstrider, 156, 164-165, 173
 Anduin Lothar, 105-107, 109, 111, 119, 121, 124, 129, 131-134, 136-137, 142, 152, 154, 156-158, 161, 171, 173-174, 176
 Anhar order, 25-26, 28-29, 32-33, 44-45
 Antonidas, 142, 188-189
 Anzu, 21-25, 29, 44-46
 Apexis, 24-26, 28-33, 37-38, 44-46, 49, 98, 197
 arakkoa, 12, 24-26, 28-29, 32, 36-38, 44-46, 49, 64, 98-99, 192
 Archimonde, 50
 Argus, 50, 53, 62-63
 Artificers, 53-54, 75, 87, 96
 Auchenai, 54
 Auchindoun, 54, 93-96, 99, 192
 Ban'dinoriel, 162
 Barathen Wrynn, 106-107, 109, 111, 124
 Black Morass, 116-121, 123, 128, 130, 174, 178, 184
 Black Temple, 87-88, 191-192, 195
 Black Tooth Grin, 82, 116, 123, 168-169, 171-172, 175
 Blackhand, 64-65, 73-74, 77-79, 81-85, 87-89, 91, 97-100, 114-116, 119, 123-125, 127-129, 131-132, 135, 140, 146-147, 151, 162, 169, 175, 186, 197
 Blackrock, 39-41, 58, 64, 74, 77, 79, 81-83, 89, 123, 128-129, 140, 146, 149, 151, 160, 162, 175
 Blackrock Mountain, 130-132, 166
 Blackrock Spire, 132, 138, 171-175, 186
 Bladespire, 38, 40-41, 50, 66-67, 94-95
 Bladewind, 39-41, 57, 71-75, 78
 Blasted Lands, 184-190, 198
 Bleeding Hollow, 39-41, 64, 66, 82, 97, 116, 123, 125, 132, 150-151, 171-172, 175, 185, 192
 Bloodmane, 45
 Bone Wastes, 96, 192
 Bonechewer, 39-41, 82, 100, 123, 138
 Book of Medivh, 114, 182, 186-187, 195
 Botaan, 14, 16-21, 25-26
 botani, 20-21, 25-29, 64, 97
 Breath of Rukhmar, 28-29, 32
 Brightwood, 124, 130, 134
 Broken, 96
 Bronzebeard, 149-150, 172
 Burning Blade, 39-41, 98, 123
 Burning Crusade, 11, 18, 62
 Burning Legion, 6, 12, 18, 50-51, 62-63, 68, 70, 75, 79, 81, 84, 87-89, 92, 96, 99, 104-106, 112-114, 117, 119, 131-132, 134, 139-140, 147-148, 162, 168, 182-183
 Burning Steppes, 130, 172-173
 Capital City, 142, 146, 158, 160-161, 164-168
 Cho'gall, 78-79, 84, 97, 127-128, 131-132, 138, 148-149, 163, 169, 198
 Church of the Holy Light, 125-126, 154, 177
 Citadel, the, 82, 87-89, 94-95, 99
 colossals, 16-20
 Council of Exarchs, 53, 75
 Council of Seven Nations, 142, 152-154
 Council of Tirisfal, 104, 107, 111-112, 115, 120, 131, 177, 198
 Cyrukh, 85
 D'ore, 50-51, 53-55
 Daelin Proudmoore, 142, 157-158, 172, 188
 Dal'trend, 15, 77, 169, 172, 186, 197
 Dalaran, 105, 108, 112, 142, 166, 177, 182, 186, 188, 195, 198
 Danath Trollbane, 177-178, 184, 190-192
 Dark Portal, 94-95, 115-119, 123, 128, 130, 133, 140, 166, 174-178, 183-186, 189-191, 193, 195, 197-198
 Dark Star, 54, 87-88
 Daval Prestor, 185-186
 Dawgar, 12
 death knights, 148-149, 158-160, 162-165, 167, 174, 183, 185, 187-189, 195
 Deathwing, 127, 139-142, 155-156, 185-190, 193-194
 Demon Soul, 139, 141, 146, 155-156, 185
 Doomhammer, the, 74, 135, 173
 Dragon Aspect, 127, 139-140, 155, 185-186, 193
 Dragon Soul, 139-141
 Dragonmaw, 39-42, 82, 98-99, 123, 140, 146, 155, 157, 164-165, 167-168, 171, 175, 185-186, 197
 Draka, 73, 123, 128-129, 138
 dreadlord. *See* Jaina Proudmoore
 Drek'Thar, 73-74, 81, 123, 128, 198
 Durnholde Keep, 129, 160, 166, 178
 Durotan, 58, 66-67, 69, 73-74, 79, 81-83, 89, 91, 116, 123, 128, 138
 Duskwood, 134
 Eastern Kingdoms, 105, 108, 172, 176-178, 189, 198
 Eastweald, 126
 Eitrigg, 83, 138, 162, 175-176
 Elwynn Forest, 130, 132
 Emerald Dream, 6, 106, 139
 Evelynna
 Evergrowth, 12-14, 17-21, 25-26, 29, 36, 125
 exarch, 53-54, 57, 71, 75, 84, 87, 92-93, 96
 Eye of Dalaran, 182, 188, 195
 Faralton, 19, 21, 30-31, 97
 Fenris, 66-67, 73, 97-98, 183, 185
 First War, 81, 104-143, 146-148, 152, 154, 175, 177-178, 185
 Frostfire Ridge, 21, 30-31, 38-39, 58, 66, 123
 Frostwolf, 39-41, 58, 64, 66-67, 69, 73, 79, 81-83, 89, 97, 116, 123, 128-129, 198
 Furies, 16, 69
 Ga'nar, 66-67
 Garad, 66-67, 69
 Garadar, 69, 91
 Garona, 78-79, 93, 118-119, 121, 133-134, 136, 138, 162, 175, 183-185, 188-190, 198
 Garrosh, 91, 197
 Gavinrad the Dire, 124, 134, 136, 154
 Genedar, 50-55, 63, 71
 genesaur, 16-20, 25-26, 29, 64, 97
 Genn Greymane, 142, 152
 Gilneas, 108, 142, 152, 177-178
 Gnarled, 26, 29
 Gnarlgar, 25-26, 28-29
 Gnoll War, 125
 Gnomeregan, 108, 150, 166, 172
 Go'el, 128-129, 178
 Gog the Gronnslayer, 37-38
 Gordawg, 16, 69
 Gorggrond, 21, 24, 30-31, 36, 39, 42, 58, 64, 67-69, 83, 98, 190, 193
 Gorias, 38, 40-41, 47, 49-50, 53, 56
 Gorian Empire, 37-39, 42, 46-47, 50, 56, 66, 73
 Great Sea, 119
 Grim Batol, 155-156, 158, 166, 171-172, 175, 186, 197
 Grizzik, 99, 192
 Grommash Hellscream, 64, 73-74, 77, 89-91, 97, 183, 185, 189-190, 197
 Grond, 13-18, 20-21, 24, 36-37, 42, 44, 46
 gronn, 19-21, 36-39, 66, 97-98, 193
 Gruul, 98, 193-194
 Guardian of Tirisfal, 133



Gul'dan, 68-74, 76-82, 84-95, 99-100, 114-116, 118-119, 123, 128-129, 131-136, 138, 140, 147-149, 151, 162-163, 165, 167-171, 176, 182-185, 189-191, 193, 195, 197
 Gurubashi, 106-111, 121, 125, 131
 Hakkar the Soulflayer, 107
 Hand of Gul'dan, 85, 94-95
 Hataaru, 53
 Hellfire Citadel, 99-100, 190-192, 197
 Hellfire Peninsula, 99-100, 115, 123, 190, 195
 high arakkoa, 44-46, 98-99, 192
 Highmaul, 38, 40-41, 50, 56-58, 64, 78, 94-95, 97, 163
 Hillsbrad, 147, 158, 160-161
 Hillsbrad Foothills, 152, 157-158, 165-168, 176, 178
 Hinterlands, 156, 160-162, 165, 167-168, 171
 Hok'lon, 56
 Holy Light. *See* Light, the
 Holy Order of Northshire Clerics, 125
 Hour of Twilight, 84, 127-128, 198
 Illidan Stormrage, 63
 Incineratus, 16, 69
 Ironforge, 108, 150-151, 166, 172
 Jok'non, 107, 109
 Ju'pa
 juggernaught, 151
 K'ara, 50-51, 53-54, 87
 K'ure, 50-51, 55, 84
 Kalandrios, 16, 69
 Kalimdor, 106, 198
 Karabor, 54, 75, 85, 87, 88, 91-92, 94-95, 131
 Karash, 45
 Karazhan, 106, 111-112, 115-122, 130, 133-136
 Kargath Bladefist, 64, 66, 73-74, 98, 183, 191-192
 Kelgok, 66-67
 Khadgar, 120-121, 133-134, 136, 142, 158, 174-175, 178, 183-185, 187-191, 193, 195, 197-198
 Khaz Modan, 149-152, 155, 166, 168, 171-172
 Kill'jaeden, 50, 63, 68-70, 73, 75-77, 79, 81, 84, 88, 91-95, 99, 114, 128, 147-148
 Kilrogg Deadeye, 64, 66, 73, 97, 125, 132, 171, 175, 185, 192
 Kirin Tor, 112, 115, 120, 142, 177, 182, 188, 198
 Kosh'harg, 44, 47, 57-58, 69
 Kul Tiras, 108, 142, 157
 Kurdran Wildhammer, 161, 190-192, 197, 198
 Lakeshire, 131
 Laughing Skull, 39-41, 100, 138, 185
 Legion. *See* Burning Legion
 Leoroxx, 67, 97
 Leran, 71

Light, the, 6, 10, 21, 24-25, 33, 50-51, 53-57, 87, 93, 96, 124-126, 152, 154, 173, 187
 Light's Hope Chapel, 126
 Lightning's Blade, 39-41, 100
 Lithic, 45
 Llane Wrynn, 105-107, 109, 111, 119, 124, 133, 136, 138, 183
 Llore
 Loch Modan, 128, 130
 Lordain, 126
 Lost Ones, 96
 Mag'har, 91, 197
 magnaron, 18-20, 66, 97
 Maim, 77, 169, 172, 175, 186, 197
 mak'gora, 135, 175
 Maladaar, 54, 93, 96
 Malygos, 139
 Mannoroth, 88-89, 91, 116
 Mar'gok, 97
 Maraad, 36, 71-72, 92-93, 96
 Medivh, 100, 104-121, 125, 133-136, 163, 182-183, 186-187, 195
 Menethil Harbor, 188
 Mereldar, 126
 Modgud, 156
 mok'nathal, 66-67, 83, 97, 189, 197
 Molok, 46-47
 Moroes, 112-118
 Murmur, 93, 96
 Naanu, 8-9
 naaru, 50-53, 63, 84, 87, 93
 Nagrand, 16, 21, 38, 42-44, 55-57, 64-68, 84
 Naielle, 53
 Nekros Skullcrusher, 141, 146, 155-158, 171-172, 197
 Nelgarm, 47-49
 nelghor, 42, 140-141
 Nelghor-shomash, 42
 Neltharion, 139
 Ner'zhul, 66, 73-77, 88-89, 182-183, 185-187, 189-192, 195-197
 Nether. *See* Twisting Nether
 Nethergarde Keep, 178, 183-185, 187, 190
 Nexus, the, 139
 Nielas Aran, 104-105
 Nobundo, 56, 92, 96
 Nordrassil, 63
 Northrend, 104, 117
 Northshire Abbey, 125
 Nozdormu, 139
 ogro, 19-20, 36-38, 97
 Old Gods, 127-128, 131-132, 138-140, 198
 Orastrasz, 141
 Order of the Silver Hand, 152-154, 177, 198

Orgrim Doomhammer, 58, 73-74, 83, 89, 91, 128-129, 135-136, 138-140, 146-149, 150-151, 155, 157-158, 160-165, 167-168, 171-173, 175, 188
 Oshu'gun, 55, 73, 76, 81, 84
 Othaar, 53
 Outcasts, 44-46, 55, 98
 paladins, 154, 158-160, 171, 174, 177, 198
 Pale, the, 55, 84, 128
 Pantheon, 11, 18, 50
 primals, 19-21, 25-29, 36, 39, 54, 97, 197
 Quel'Thalas, 106, 156, 160, 162-165, 167-168, 172-173, 176
 Ragnaros, 131-132, 138
 Rakshar, 12
 Rangari, 51, 53-54, 56-58, 71, 75, 87, 92-93
 red pox, 49, 69, 71-74, 91-92, 96
 Redridge Mountains, 124, 129, 131-132, 139, 141
 Redwalker, 100
 Restalaan, 58
 Rexxar, 97, 189, 197
 Rukhmar, 21-25, 28-29, 32-33, 44-46
 Rulkan, 70, 73, 75-76
 Runestones, 162, 164
 rylak, 42, 99, 140, 155
 saberon, 45
 Saidan Dathrohan, 154
 Salavass, 32
 Sargerass, 11-12, 18, 50, 62-63, 99-100, 104-105, 112-114, 117-118, 132, 134, 147, 168
 Scepter of Sargerass, 182, 188-189, 195
 Second War, 144-179, 182-185, 188, 197
 Sethe, 21-25, 44, 49
 Sethekk Hollow, 22, 25, 44-46, 98-99, 192
 Sha'tari, 53-55
 Shadow Council, 78-82, 85, 87-89, 91, 96, 114, 118, 128-129, 131-133, 135, 138, 141, 147-149, 162, 183-184, 190, 198
 Shadowmoon, 40-42, 44, 47, 54, 64, 66, 70-71, 73, 76-78, 82, 87, 195
 Shadowmoon Valley, 21, 30-31, 42, 51, 54, 66, 71, 76, 85, 87, 182, 192, 195
 Shattered Hand, 64, 82, 98, 100, 123, 136, 138, 182, 185, 191
 Shattrath, 53-54, 56-57, 71, 75, 85, 87, 89, 91-93, 96-97, 99, 131
 Silvermoon City, 164-166
 Skalax order, 25-26, 28-29, 32, 37-38
 Skettis, 46
 Skull of Gul'dan, 183, 185, 190-191, 193, 195, 197
 Skyreach, 45, 98-99, 192
 Sons of Lothar, 189-193, 195, 197-198
 Spires of Arak, 32, 44-46, 64, 98

Spirit of Life, 12, 19, 21, 25–26
 sporelings, 20
 Sporemound, 13–15, 17–19, 26–29
 Steamwheedle Cartel, 108, 151,
 Stormreaver, 148, 151, 163, 165, 167–169
 Stormwind, 105–112, 118–121, 123–127, 129,
 131–138, 140, 142, 146–148, 151–152, 154,
 172–173, 177–178, 184, 198–199
 Stormwind City, 105, 109, 111, 124, 129–138,
 166, 198
 Stranglethorn Vale, 106–107, 109, 125
 Stratholme, 126, 154
 Stromgarde, 142, 177
 Sunwell, 164
 Swamp of Sorrows, 184, 197
 Taala, 26, 28–29
 Talador, 21, 25–26, 28–29, 37, 39
 Talgath, 63–64, 66, 68
 talonpriests, 45–46
 Tanaan Jungle, 14, 21, 30–31, 39, 64, 69, 82,
 99, 190
 Taria Wrynn, 136
 Telmor, 58
 Telredor, 92, 96
 Temple of Karabor. *See* Karabor
 Terenas Menethil II, 142, 167, 177, 186
 Terokk, 44–46
 Terokkar Forest, 46, 54, 56–58, 69, 71, 78,
 98–99

Teron Gorefiend, 148, 174–175, 182–183,
 185–190, 192
 Teron'gor, 76, 78, 93, 96, 148
 Thandol Span, 151, 157, 171
 Thoradin, 152, 156
 Thoras Trollbane, 142
 Throne of Kil'jaeden, 91–92, 128
 Throne of the Elements, 16, 42–44, 46–47,
 49, 66, 68–69
 Thunderlord, 39, 64, 66–67, 97–98, 185
 Tirion Fordring, 154
 Tirisfal Glades, 167
 Tirisgarde, 104
 Tomb of Sargeras, 105, 115, 119, 134–135, 148,
 163, 168, 170, 186, 188–189
 Turalyon, 152–154, 158, 161, 164, 167, 171,
 173–174, 176–177, 184, 187, 190–191, 193,
 195, 197–198
Twilight Canticle, 127–128
 Twilight's Hammer, 84, 97, 123, 127–128, 132,
 138, 163, 167–169, 198
 Twisting Nether, 10–11, 50, 62–63, 113, 134
 Tyr's Hand, 126
 Uther Lightbringer, 154, 158
 Varian Wrynn, 136, 152, 177
 Varok Saurfang, 83, 160
 Velen, 50–51, 53–54, 56–58, 63, 71, 74–76,
 84, 87–88, 92–93, 96
 Velthreek, 32

Vindicators, 53–54, 56, 71, 75, 87, 92–93, 96
 Void, 13, 21, 25, 44, 46, 51, 53–55, 84, 87, 97,
 127–128, 132
 void lords, 10–11, 62, 127
 vrykul, 64
 War of the Ancients, 62, 106, 113, 139, 141, 162
 Warsong, 42, 64, 89, 97, 99, 182, 185, 189,
 197
 Well of Eternity, 62–63
 Westfall, 107, 124, 132
 Wetlands, 151–152, 155, 171
 Whiteclaw, 67, 74, 79, 81, 97, 100
 Wildhammer, 155–156, 160, 172, 190, 192
 wind serpent, 21, 22, 24, 44
 world-soul, 10–12, 127
 Yonzi, 37–38
 Ysera, 139
 Zagrel, 74, 79, 81
 Zan'non, 109
 Zang, 14, 16
 Zangar Sea, 21, 92
 Zangarmarsh, 96
 Zul'Aman, 162
 Zul'Dare, 157, 161, 172
 Zul'jin, 146–147, 160, 162, 165
 Zuluhed, 140–141, 146, 171, 197



