The Dread Necropolis

A thousand years ago this obsidian citadel traveled from world to world, serving as a bastion of invasion for the forces of the Nameless King. Yet even the mind-shattered warlocks of the Nameless King couldn't guess at the ancient secrets buried below.

"The Dread Necropolis" is an adventure framework like Summervine Villa and Bonespur Keep found in the *City of Arches* sourcebook. This framework is intended to help you build your own adventures for tier 2 or tier 3 5th edition characters. Though set in the City of Arches, designed for any 5th edition ruleset, and described as part of the Rise of the Nameless King campaign outline; you can easily modify this adventure framework for your own system, setting, and adventure.

This Isn't a Typical Adventure

This framework isn't written like a traditional adventure. Instead, it presents a filled-out location along with secrets, histories, potential inhabitants, and story seeds you can use to build your own adventure.

The Dread Necropolis

Across countless worlds, the Dread Necropolis served as a bastion for the armies of the Nameless King. A thousand years ago, during the War of the Blue Star, the forces of the Nameless King arrived outside the City of Arches in this obsidian citadel appearing from thin air.

But the Necropolis is far older than that. The Nameless King didn't *build* the Dread Necropolis. He *found* it and bent it to his will. The Necropolis's secrets still lie forgotten in its lowest depths.

Today, the Dread Necropolis appears a two-day's journey away from the City of Arches. Necromancers loyal to the citadel's general, Karavon the Gray Blade, summon armies of the ancient dead bound to their lord surrounding the citadel. Within, cultists of the demon lord Ibraxus summon demons from the world of Choul, arming them for the coming battle against the City of Arches.

Adventure Seeds

Several situations can bring the characters to the Dread Necropolis. Choose one of the following seeds to bring them into its dark halls or use them as a model to generate your own seed.

Kill Karavon the Gray Blade. The blackguard general of the Nameless King served his liege in life and now serves him in death. While the forces of the City of Arches muster for the coming battle with the undead forces amassing outside the Dread Necropolis, Rosely Zeshe, spymaster of the queen, wants to send in a small team of seasoned adventurers to infiltrate the keep, find Karavon, and kill him – thus sending the armies of the Necropolis into disarray and saving countless lives in the battles to come. Roselyn Zeshe gives the characters a key to an arch that teleports them into the Arch of Skulls in the lower chambers (area 1 in the Lower Chambers).

Stop the Assassination of Astaria. Ten centuries ago, the celestial Astaria cursed the Nameless King, removing all memories and images of the tyrant from the world. Astaria then secluded themself in a monastery at the edges of a titanic waterfall in the plane of Mount Celestia to ensure the curse stayed in place. Garland Willowmane learned that the Knights of the Nameless King found a key to enter the Monastery of Astaria and plan to use it to infiltrate the monastery, kill Astaria, and end the curse – bringing the Nameless King back to the world. Garland asks the characters to enter the Dread Necropolis and hunt down the assassins who plan to use the archway inside (area T4 of the central tower) to infiltrate the monastery.

Destroy the Necropolis. Though most only know the Dread Necropolis as the bastion of the Nameless King, its history goes much further back. Danvon of Duskwater, archmage of Kartan, learned that the whole necropolis is itself a sentient creature and its heart lies in a secret chamber somewhere in the citadel. This heart appears as a fist-sized black gemstone. Danvon hires the characters to infiltrate the Necropolis, locate this heart, and return it to Danvon so he may ensure this powerful artifact can no longer pollute the world around it.

Secrets and Clues

Reveal the following secrets and clues as the characters learn about or explore the Dread Necropolis. You don't have to hand out every secret, and you choose how the characters learn about it as you run your game.

- While the Nameless King used the Dread Necropolis during the War of the Blue Star a thousand years ago, the citadel itself is far older.
- The Dread Necropolis can shift between worlds, turning it into mobile bastion its commanders can use to invade other worlds.
- Below the Dread Necropolis are chambers even those within the citadel don't know about. Forgotten evil lurks in this vast chamber.
- The heart of the Dread Necropolis is a black gemstone about the size of a fist containing the tormented soul of a slain demon prince named

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Orzuun the Sallowed. Orzuun was an enemy of Ibraxus of Chuul and still seethes at his defeat thousands of years ago.

- One of the vast columns found in the lower chamber has a secret stairwell to the crypts in the central halls. The current occupants of the Dread Necropolis are unaware of this hidden entrance.
- Two archways reside in the Dread Necropolis. The nearly forgotten Arch of Skulls lies in the Lower Chambers. The Arch of Celestia resides in the central tower, rebuilt from a fallen holy tower of Celestia by those wishing to invade the Monastery of Astaria.
- Karavon the Gray Blade once served as an unholy knight and general of the Nameless King. He was slain during the War of the Blue Star but has returned as an undead knight and serves his master still.
- Warlocks of the Nameless King and the demon prince Ibraxus of Chuul draw demons into the Necropolis and arm them for war against their enemies.
- Necromancers of the Nameless King animated vast armies of undead outside of the tower and bind them to the will of Karavon. Should Karavon fall, so too will this army.
- The factions supporting Karavon and the Nameless King have friction with those that serve the demon prince Ibraxus. Though both work together for the return of the Nameless King – tensions between them are high.

NPCs

The characters may run into one or more of the following NPCs while exploring the Dread Necropolis.

Karavon the Gray Blade. A former unholy knight and general for the Nameless King, Karavon now serves his master in death as he did in life as a **death knight**, **death knight aspirant**, or **dread knight** (depending on what 5e variant you're running and what level you're building your adventure around). Karavon typically resides in the central tower's throne room (area T15).

Veluul the Necromancer. A necromancer in service of the Knights of the Nameless King (use the **mage** or **archmage** stat block), Veluul is fanatically loyal to Ibraxus of Choul. The demon prince tasked Veluul with the reanimation of the fallen dead. Veluul sometimes flies outside of the tower but can often be found in the shattered chamber of the central tower (area T9).

The Grave Lord. A **stone giant vampire** resides in the lowest chambers of the Dread Necropolis, commanding a host of vampire spawn he calls the Children of Evershadow who spend their days pantomiming normal village life. The Grave Lord's existence is completely unknown to those who rule over the citadel now – a fact the grave lord resents. The Grave Lord is one of the few who knows the whole story of the heart of the Dread Necropolis and the entity it contains.

Caroline Wyrmblood. A human **scout** of the Deadland Shadows from the Oasis of Mother's Tears, hunters of the Nameless King captured Caroline and brought her to the Necropolis. Several other Deadland Shadows were brought here and sacrificed to keep open the archway to Choul in area M9.

Eriz Rainwing. Once a tiefling paladin who served in the War of the Blue Star, Eriz was slain while infiltrating the Dread Necropolis a thousand years ago. Now a **ghost**, Eriz still believes they are on the mission to kill Karavon the Gray Blade, not realizing his team succeeded back then only for Karavon to return now. Eriz knows about the secret passages they planned to infiltrate the upper reaches of the Dread Necropolis.

Monsters

Several different factions operate throughout the Dread Necropolis. Use the following lists to inspire your own encounters as needed or to stock or re-stock this location as the characters travel through it.

Lower Chamber Encounters

1. **Ghoul** and **ghast** pack eating ancient flesh
2. **Vampire spawn** hunting for fresh blood.
3. An **otyugh** bursts from the ground.
4. Ancient skeletal **frost giants** lumber through the chamber.
5. A **ghost** of former infiltrators thinks they're still here to assassinate Karavon a thousand years ago.
6. The bones of a skeletal **adult green dragon** awaken.
7. Dozens of **swarms of rats** roar through ancient bones
8. Crestfallen **specters** yearn for the touch of life.

Main Floor Encounters

1. Armored **hezrou** thirst for battle and blood.
2. **Cult fanatics** drag a scout of Deadland Shadows to sacrifice and draw in more hezrou from Choul.
3. A **mage** leads a unit of **wights** into or out of the Dread Necropolis.
4. **Vampire spawn** scouts prepare for a trek into the Deadlands at night to find more prisoners.
5. **Knights** and **priests** of the Nameless King prepare for deployment.
6. **Vrock** hunters seek an escaped scout of the Deadland Shadows.

Central Spire Encounters

1. An armored **glabrezu** attended by several **knights** thirsts for war.
2. A **marilith** and **mage** attendants slithers to the latest war meeting.
3. **Mages** and **knights** of the Nameless King prepare to bring orders down to the lower levels.
4. An **archmage** with **gladiator** bodyguards head towards the Arch of Astaria.

Outside the Necropolis

The Dread Necropolis arrived several weeks ago at the edge of the Deadlands – a desert wasteland east of the City of Arches. The Necropolis appears as an obsidian citadel with several towers rising from its high walls. Outside, necromancers summon hordes of skeletons and zombies – building an army of the dead. Undead wyverns fly over the ramparts and towers of the Dread Necropolis keeping an eye out for intruders.

Entering the Necropolis

The characters can enter the Necropolis in three ways. First, if they can avoid the undead wyverns above and fly into the Central Spire where Karavon sends orders to his lieutenants and the rest of the armies. Second, the characters can attempt to infiltrate the Necropolis through the front doors of the keep (area M5 on the map), perhaps aided by allies. Third, they can enter through a forgotten archway called the Arch of Skulls (area F1) using a key and another connected archway. You are free to determine how the characters acquire this key and find the correct arch – building out adventures for each if you wish or simply giving them both through resourceful quest NPCs.

Necropolis Locations

The Necropolis is split into three main areas: the Caverns of the Forgotten Dead far below the main citadel, the Main Floor, and the Central Spire.

Cavern of the Forgotten Dead

Deep below the Dread Necropolis lies a vast natural cavern filled with the remains of countless dead. The curved ceiling is 150 feet high, and the cavern stretches hundreds of feet wide and nearly half a mile long.

Several towering carved pillars 50 feet wide and 100 feet high support the structure above.

This hall is not mapped but contains the following locations. Should the character enter through the Arch of Skulls, they can choose to follow a path through the Black Mire or follow the strangely out of place music coming from the Sunless Village. Their path next takes them to the Throne of the Grave Lord and the cracked pillar with the staircase leading to the Main Floor.

F1. The Arch of Skulls

In the southern-most reaches of the cavern stands a hill of ancient bones. Jutting out of the bones is the Arch of Skulls, a 20-foot diameter archway built from the fused skulls of humanoids, beasts, and demons. Several hundred **ghouls** lurk around this hill gnawing on what little dusty flesh hangs on to the bones of the hill. They are drawn to light and the scent of living flesh.

F2. The Black Mire

Black pools formed from the liquified remains of the dead host several corpse-eating **otyughs** who swim through underground passages from pool to pool.

F3. The Sunless Village

Several dozen **vampire spawn** known as the Sunless Children built a village like those of surface humanoids. They pantomime life as mortals, farming dead crops in dead fields, drinking foul liquids at a local public house called the Silent Sow, and otherwise pretending to be their mortal selves. This playact quickly falls aside when they see mortals on whom they can feast. The vampires here are desperately afraid of their sire, the Grave Lord in area F4.

F4. Throne of the Grave Lord

A powerful and ancient stone giant **vampire** called the Grave Lord rules over the Cavern of the Forgotten Dead. It is his blood that turned the Sunless Children into vampires. He's served by several **stone giant vampire spawn** (use the stone giant stat block with selected vampire spawn traits). The Grave Lord spends most of his days seated upon a carved throne of petrified bone. Nearby, one of the massive support pillars is cracked revealing a staircase leading up to area M1 on the main floor.

The Main Floor

Lieutenants and elite soldiers of Karavon prepare for war on the main floor of the Dread Necropolis. Here cult fanatics of Ibraxus summon demons from the abyssal layer of Choul, arm them, and send them out to the battlefield while commanders of the undead armies outside the citadel come to meet with the citadel's commanders above.

Squares on the map are 20 feet, the ceilings are 25 feet high, and the chambers are dimly lit with violet everburning torches.

M1. False Tomb

A stone staircase from area F4 in the Cavern of the Forgotten Dead leads to the hollow sarcophagus of this false tomb. The current inhabitants of the Dread Necropolis are unaware of this secret entrance.

M2. Forgotten Tombs

These forgotten tombs contain the remains of soldiers and sages from times long past. Undead **mages** and **knights** may reside in these tombs along with their ancient possessions.

M3. Hidden Passage

A headless statue of the Nameless King hides a crack in the wall leading to the tombs in areas M1 and M2. These haven't yet been discovered by the Necropolis's current inhabitants. **Cult fanatics** often take Deadland Shadow prisoners past here from area M4 to area M8.

M4. Tombs of Imprisonment

Several old tombs have been repurposed as dungeon cells holding several **scouts** of the Deadland Shadows who had been keeping an eye on the Dread Necropolis before being captured. Many of them have already been sacrificed in M9 to summon demons from Choul.

M5. Central Hall

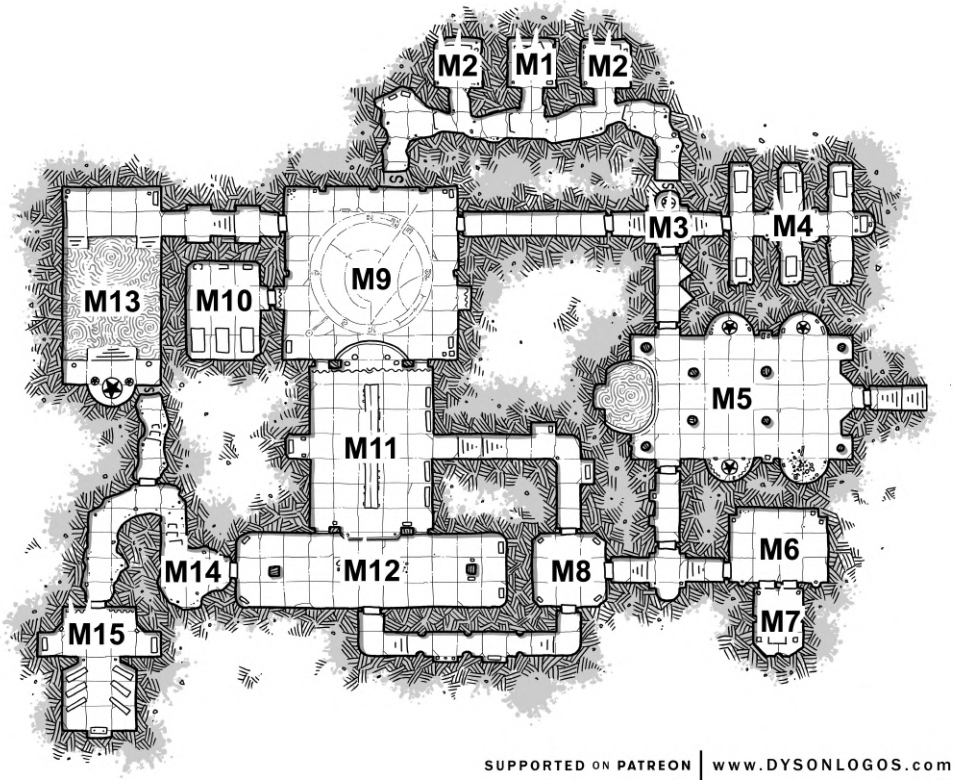
This massive central hall includes pillars carved to depict pained skeletons holding the archway of the ceiling above. Statues in the outer alcoves depict champions of the Nameless King and his consort, the God Queen Sett. Religious followers of Ibraxus or the Nameless King use the bloody pool on the far side of the chamber to bathe themselves in the blood of demons.

M6. The Castellan's Office

While Karavon prepares for war in the Central Spire, he gives control over the daily interactions of the necropolis to Castellan Grimvold, a **vampire** attended to by several **wights** and **wraiths**. Grimvold keeps careful track of the armies they're building in large dusty tomes and scrolls in his office.

M7. Castellan's Private Chamber

This is the private chamber of the Castellan, including his sarcophagus. The Castellan has heavily trapped this room against living creatures. The chamber fills with poison gas and blasts of lightning if any living being enters.



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M8. Hall of Portraits

Several grim portraits show the sycophants of the Nameless King during his reign over a thousand years ago. Many are crawling with black mold or have been burned out where they depicted iconography of the Nameless King. A spiral staircase here leads to area C1 of the Central Spire.

M9. Summoning Chamber

A huge archway to the realm of Chuul swirls on the southern wall of this chamber underneath a curtained balcony connected to M9. Cult fanatics pour the blood of sacrifices into a large summoning circle on the ground. As they do, **hezrou** and other demons step forth from the archway. The cultists arm these demons with arms and armor from area M10.

M10. Armory

Huge suits of thick and crude armor lie in piles here along with heavy axes and single-edged greatswords. Three shattered stone sarcophagi lie in the southern part of this chamber, piled high with helms, spiked gauntlets, and other large weapons and pieces of crude armor.

M11. Feasting Hall

Here vampire spawn, ghasts, and demons feast upon the flesh and souls of captured humanoids in a bloody celebration of the coming return of the Nameless King. Ghoul musicians play horrifying discordant music on humanoid-skin instruments.

M12. Audience Hall

Here leaders of the Dread Necropolis make declarations to lower lieutenants who spread the word among the armies outside of the citadel. A band of well-dressed **ghouls** attends to this hall, attempting to keep it clean but failing miserably at the job. A heavy iron door to the west hasn't been opened in thousands of years.

M13. Altar of Sett

A pool of black oily water rests in a deep pool before a huge statue of the God-Queen Sett – consort of the Nameless King. Cultists often bathe in these black pools while receiving visions of a dark world beyond the minds of mortals. A secret passage, unknown to current occupants, lies to the south leads to the hidden chambers of M14 and M15.

M14. Infested Ossuaries

Several ossuaries lay carved into the stone walls of this chamber infested with several **swarms of rats**.

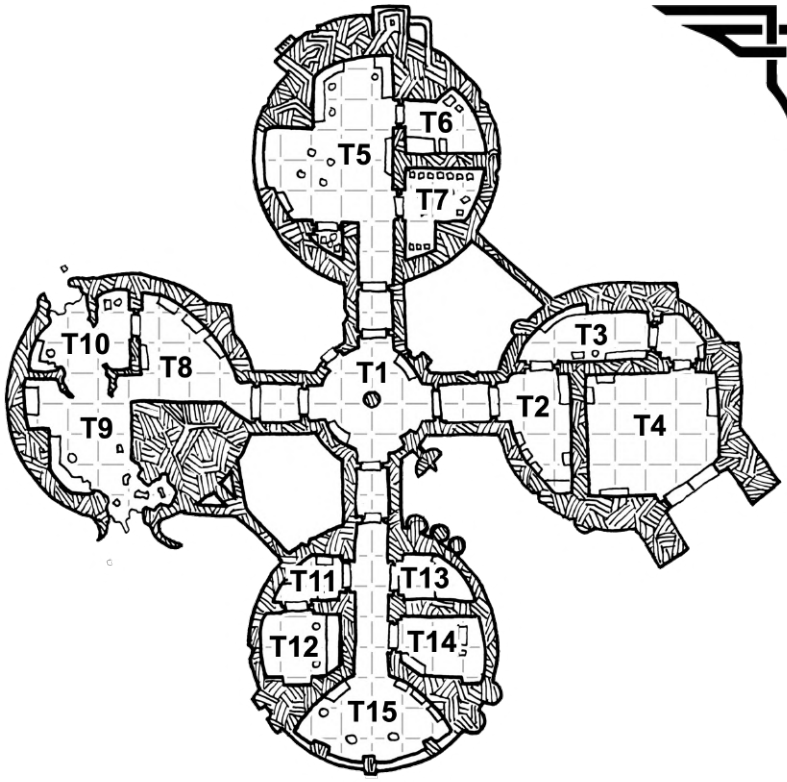
M15. Temple of Father Grimskull

This temple hasn't been disturbed in thousands of years. Dozens of corpses, some of which animate into clattering **skeletons** and dusty **zombies**, sit in the pews, heads bowed towards a statue of Father Grimskull, a forgotten deity of death and undeath – one of the twelve forgotten deities known as the Lower Twelve.

Held in the statue's hands is a black fist-sized stone known as the Heart of the Necropolis. It is this stone that lets the necropolis travel between worlds. The Nameless King and Karavon know how to tap into the energy of the heart, but they do not know of its existence here. One who possesses the heart can crush it, destroying the Necropolis. One who carefully studies the heart can use it in a way similar to a *helm of teleportation*, teleporting the citadel to other worlds. The citadel can teleport this way once per month.

The Central Spire

The Central Spire consists of four joined towers above the main halls of the Dread Necropolis. Here Karavon's main lieutenants bring information to their leader and take his orders down to the armies surrounding the Dread Necropolis.



T1. Spiral Staircase

A spiral staircase leads up from area M8. Two undead **fire giants** stop anyone from coming up who isn't authorized by Karavon himself to do so.

T2. Arch Construction Chamber

Stoneworking tools and bound books of holy and unholy texts line the shelves of this chamber where sages and conscripted stoneworkers built the Arch of Astaria in area T4.

T3. Arch Guardians

Two undead **fire giants** guard the doorway to the Arch of Astaria in T4. These fire giants are bound to Karavon. If he is defeated, they crumble to dust.

T4. Arch of Astaria

The sage Arvantes (see area T11) and his servants carefully built an arch out of stone collected from the heavenly world of Celestia. Arvantes and Karavon plan to open the archway to the Monastery of Astaria where they hope to coerce or slay the celestial and break the curse of the Nameless King.

T5. Generals' Meeting Hall

Several tables and chairs adorn this meeting hall where generals and lieutenants of Karavon meet and discuss their plans.

T6. Unholy Armory

Several of Karavon's most powerful weapons and armor reside here – deployed to his most trusted allies for the missions they undertake in his name.

T7. Trophy Room
Karavon's most favored victims receive the honor of being put on display in this macabre trophy room. Heads of humanoids and celestials, carefully preserved, line the walls while their weapons rest on displays.

T8. Aerial Armory
Large cabinets and shelves hold lances, saddles, and riding gear used to arm the undead forces who ride out on undead wyverns in area T9 and T10.

T9. Wyvern Roost
Several undead **wyverns** roost in this hall. The tower wall has been broken outwards, letting the wyverns take flight from this chamber. **Wights** armed with lances usually ride on the wyverns.

T10. Wyvern Den
One or two undead **wyverns** can usually be found here feasting on the flesh of fresh corpses.

T11. Advisor's Office
The sage Arvantes (an undead **mage**, **archmage**, or **lich**) pours over books and scrolls seeking information that can aid Karavon and his forces into waging war against the City of Arches. This includes information on returning the Nameless King from his exile and corrupting the Mages of Kartan – bringing them back under the thumb of the Nameless King.

T12. Arvantes's Library
This chamber holds books and scrolls the mage advisor Arvantes gathered over centuries.

T13. Spiral Staircase
A spiral staircase leads up from area M8.

T14. Karavon's Private Chamber
A stone slab serves as Karavon's bed in this spartan chamber. A small shrine in one corner has a picture of a smiling man and a handful of candles bunt down the stone altar upon which it sits. Only Karavon knows who this man is and what he meant to Karavon and he's not talking.

T15. Throne of Karavon
This chamber serves as Karavon's audience hall. A throne carved from black obsidian melted from the infernal heat of Xereth, the Nameless King's undead draconic mount. Karavon, a **death knight**, is often attended by **fire giant** bodyguards and **mage** attendants.

Treasure
Throughout the Dread Necropolis, the characters may find parcels of treasure from the following list. You can place these treasure parcels where you think they best fit. F4, M7, M15, T6, and T15 are suitable areas.

- 21,212 GP, 251 PP
- 7 x 250 GP jade gemstones
- 5,000 GP abyssal glowing gold statuette with ruby eyes

The characters may find all the following consumable magic items:

- 2x Potion of Healing (Superior)
- Restorative Ointment
- Potion of Giant Strength (Fire)
- Ghoulish frozen whistle that casts *circle of death* (DC 17)
- Holy amulet that casts *mass heal*.

The characters my find one of the following permanent magic items:

- Gem of Seeing
- Immovable Rod

Nightbringer
Karavon wields *Nightbringer*, a +3 greatsword that inflicts an extra 2d6 necrotic damage on each hit. Once per day, a creature attuned to Nightbringer can cast the spell *circle of death*. This ability returns at the next dawn. Nightbringer is a Neutral Evil intelligent sword who, like its wielder, wishes to see the Nameless King return. Nightbringer may serve one who hunts the Nameless King, should it think them strong enough to complete the task and become something greater.

Nightbringer is one of several swords forged by the Nameless King and given to the King's greatest champions. Other blades include *Sunburner* – the flaming blade wielded by the efreeti Skrathe; *Bloodletter* – the infernal blade wielded by a champion Erinyes named Kryvus Redvein; and *Duskfire* – an abyssal blade wielded by the balor of Chuul named Ulvenda. This last blade ended up in the hands of the Knights of the Black Flame who purged the blade of its abyssal nature and reforged it as the Blackfire Blade of Irixthius.