

# ***SHADOW KING***

*A Time of Legends novel*

*By Gav Thorpe*

When his family is betrayed and slain, Alith Anar, ill-fated prince of the Nagarythe, is forced to walk a dark path. With the island of Ulthuan in the grip of a civil war with their evil counterparts, the druchii, Alith Anar follows his destiny to become the Shadow King. Hunting his enemies from the darkness, he is now on a quest for vengeance that will never end.



## **About the Author**

Prior to becoming a freelance writer, Gav Thorpe worked for Games Workshop as lead background designer, overseeing and contributing to the Warhammer and Warhammer 40,000 worlds. He has written numerous novels and short stories set in the fictional worlds of Games Workshop, including the Time of Legends 'The Sundering' series, the seminal Dark Angels novel *Angels of Darkness*, and the *Last Chancers* omnibus. He lives in Nottingham, UK, with his mechanical hamster, Dennis.

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GRUDGEBEARER

The following is an excerpt from *Shadow King* by Gav Thorpe.  
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It seemed to Alith that the winter wind was more bitter than any that had come before. It brought swirls of snow down from the mountains, but it was not just the cold that clawed at Alith, it was the feeling of being trapped.

From the high mountain path, the young Anar looked south and west across Elanardris. He could see the manse, the gardens swathed in snow. Smoke drifted from the house's three chimneys, billowing southwards on the stern breeze. Beyond the manse, the meadows and hills were laid out in a pattern of dark walls and hedges cutting through the white blanket. The white-walled farmhouses and guard towers could barely be seen, located only through their brightly tiled roofs and the telltale wisps of smoke.

Beyond that, almost at the horizon, the hills of Elanardris gave way to the undulating plains of central Nagarythe. Here the cloud-swathed sky was shrouded by a darker smog, the fires of a huge encampment. The army of Anlec squatted like a brooding black beast on the borders of the Anars' realm, waiting for the snows to cease. At this distance, and through the snow flurries brought down from the north, even the keen eyes of Alith could make out little detail. The enemy camp spread like a stain over the white hills, lines of black shapes that stretched from north to south.

The druchii, his grandfather had called them: dark elves. They had turned from the light of Aenarion and the lord of gods, Asuryan. Eoloran no longer regarded them as Naggarothi. They were traitors to the Phoenix Throne and betrayers of Malekith, their rightful prince.

Their foes thought the same of the Anars. They considered Eoloran's refusal to acknowledge the authority of Anlec as a slight against Aenarion's memory. Alith knew this from the interrogations of prisoners taken after the last battle, when the druchii had

attempted to force their way up into the hills. It had been a foolish, desperate assault before Enagrui tightened her wintry grip on Nagarythe. The druchii had been stopped by Eoloran and Eothlir – again, for there had been three such attacks since Malekith had returned – and the dark elves were content to wait for conditions to improve and their numbers to swell further.

Alith's loneliness had been increased by the lack of contact with Ashniel. Far from giving him the triumphant homecoming Alith had imagined, Ashniel had been moved by her father to one of the lord's castles higher in the mountains, far from the enemy. Occasionally Alith would receive a short letter from her, in which she professed her regret at their parting and her wish that they would see each other again soon. Alith had little enough time to reply to these letters, for he spent most days up in the mountains keeping watch on the druchii host. Try as he might, he had little leisure to spend composing poetry and declarations of love and knew that such missives as he managed to send were brusque and clumsy.

As these morose thoughts occupied Alith, a lionhawk, her plumage white to camouflage her against the snows, swept down with a shriek from the mountain clouds. She circled around Alith and the group of scouts around him, and then settled on his wrist. Alith listened to her chirping and cawing for a moment, nodding in understanding as the bird relayed the message from Anadriel.

He stroked the lionhawk's head in thanks before raising his arm and allowing her to fly back to her nest. She would come again when called.

'A rider, on the Eithrin Ridge,' Alith announced to the twenty elves accompanying him. They were all dressed in robes of white trimmed with dark bear fur, enchanted with the greatest blessings of stealth and secrecy known to the dedicants of Kurnous. Even this close, it was hard for Alith to see where elf stopped and snow began. 'Anadriel is moving in from the south-west; we shall intercept this spy from the north-east. Quickly now, we don't want Anadriel to steal our glory!'

Many times the scouts had intercepted druchii warriors attempting to spy upon the Anars' army and defences. As far as Alith knew, not a single one had escaped to take news back to the druchii commanders. This one was different. It was obvious that nobody would be able to cross the Eithrin Ridge unobserved, especially on horseback, and so the druchii had concentrated their

forces to the west and north. Alith's instinct told him that this uninvited visitor was not a spy, and wondered if Elthyrior had finally been caught out.

However, there was no solid reason to suspect that this stranger was the raven herald. Alith had heard nothing from Elthyrior since their parting before the battle with the Khainites, and guessed only that he had reached Ealith safely and persuaded Malekith to send Aneltain south. Elthyrior could be dead, a captive of Morathi, or hidden in whatever lairs the raven heralds used to avoid the attention of their enemies.

As wintry spirits, the scouts made their way across the snow-covered rock, heading towards Eithrin Ridge. They flitted through the sparse trees, deftly running across the snow, moving sure-footedly over patches of sun-glittering ice. As they made their way down the mountainside, the shadow of Anil Narthain fell upon them and the air grew colder. Alith blew on his fingers as he jogged, keeping them warm so that he would not fumble with his bow if the stranger proved to be a threat. The snow crunching underfoot, Alith and the other archers ghosted southwards, eyes fixed ahead for any sight of the interloper.

It was mid-morning before Alith crested a rise, coming out into the winter sun, and saw the intruder. It was not Elthyrior. Although the elf was some distance away, Alith could see that he was shorter than the raven herald, and he was dressed in a grey cloak beneath which could be seen flashes of golden scale and white robes. The intruder was leading his horse, striding across a long snowdrift that had built up on the flanks of the Eithrin Ridge. Alith signalled wordlessly to the others to spread out and circle to the east to come at the stranger from several directions.

For a short while Alith lost sight of his quarry as the rocky slope dipped sharply and then rose up again. Pulling himself up the steep wall of the snow-filled crag, Alith caught sight of the stranger again, standing some three hundred paces away. He had stopped and was looking around quickly, and for a moment Alith wondered if the intruder had spied one of the scouts.

A keening cry overhead announced the presence of Anadriel's lionhawk, and only moments later six figures that before had been invisible stood up. Standing in a semi-circle some hundred paces from the stranger, they were dressed in the same style of clothes as

Alith's warriors and had arrows bent to their bows. Alith rose to his feet and dashed across the snow, fitting an arrow to his bowstring.

The stranger had raised his arms and thrown back his cloak, revealing no scabbard at his waist, only the long knife that any traveller in the wilds would be sensible to carry. He was exchanging words with Anadriel and Alith caught the end of a reply.

'...need to speak to Eoloran and Eothlir,' the stranger called out.

Anadriel saw Alith and his scouts approaching from the opposite direction and lifted a hand in brief greeting. The stranger turned slowly to look at Alith. His expression was calm, confident even. He pulled back his hood with deliberate slowness, revealing reddish-yellow hair tied with golden thread. He was certainly not from Nagarythe.

'Name yourself,' Alith called out, stopping some fifty paces from the elf, his arrow aimed at the stranger's chest.

'I am Calabrian of Tor Andris,' the elf replied. 'I bear messages for the lord of the Anars.'

'We know the manner of messages that Morathi would send,' said Alith. He lifted up his bow and arrow. 'You know the manner of our replies.'

'I come not from Anlec, but Tor Anroc,' Calabrian said patiently. 'I carry missives from Prince Malekith.'

'And what proof do you offer?' demanded Alith.

'If you would allow me to approach, I will show you.'

Alith relaxed his arm and brought down his bow. Letting go of the arrow, he waved for Calabrian to come closer. The messenger lowered his arms and stepped up to his horse. He drew something from his saddlebags and held it up. It was a scroll case. Calabrian walked purposefully, glancing at the other scouts, the case still held clearly in view. Alith signalled for him to stop a few paces away and stepped up to him with an outstretched hand. Calabrian placed the casing in Alith's grip and took a few paces further back, his eyes unwavering from Alith's face.

The seal on the case was certainly that of Prince Malekith, and was unbroken. It was light, and so Alith doubted it contained a concealed weapon. Just to be sure, he tucked the case into his belt rather than return it.

'That message is for Eoloran Anar alone,' said Calabrian, stepping forwards. In an instant, Alith was ready, bowstring taut, the

arrow pointed towards Calabrian's heart. The messenger stopped. 'I have other assurances, but only Eoloran will understand them.'

'I am Alith Anar, grandson of the lord you seek,' Alith assured the other elf. 'I will take you to the manse and there you will meet Eoloran Anar. Be warned, though, that if your claim proves to be false, you will not be treated well. If you wish, we will take you to the border of Elanardris directly and you can return to your master unharmed.'

'My mission is vital, the prince made that very clear to me,' said Calabrian. 'I offer myself to your judgement and mercy.'

Alith regarded Calabrian for a long time, seeking some hint of deception. There was none that he could see. A glance over the messenger's shoulder showed that Anadriel was inspecting Calabrian's horse and saddlebags.

'She will find nothing out of the ordinary,' said Calabrian, without looking around. 'A few personal items and those things needed when travelling in the grip of winter; that is all.'

Alith did not reply but simply waited for Anadriel to complete her search.

'All is well,' she called out eventually. 'No weapons of any kind.'

'These are dangerous times to be travelling unarmed in Nagarythe,' said Alith, his suspicion returning. 'How is it that you could pass without fear through the Anlec host that sits upon our doorstep?'

'I came not directly from the south, but crossed the mountains from Ellyrion,' explained Calabrian.

'A dangerous crossing,' said Alith, unconvinced.

'Yet it is one that I had to make,' said Calabrian. 'Though I do not know the detail of Prince Malekith's message, he left me in no doubt as to its importance and urgency. When I have Prince Eoloran's reply, I must return by the same route.'

There was earnestness in Calabrian's expression that convinced Alith.

'Very well,' said Alith, lowering his bow and returning the arrow to its quiver. 'Welcome to Elanardris, Calabrian of Tor Andris.'

Alith was not surprised when Calabrian had insisted that only Eoloran, Eothlir and Alith were allowed to be present when Prince Malekith's message was opened. The messenger had requested that

he be brought to the manse in secret, and made it plain that he only trusted the Anars and feared that agents of Morathi were present in Elanardris. Alith left him with Anadriel on the slopes north of the manse while he consulted his father and grandfather.

So it was that in the darkness of the cloud-swathed night, Alith led Calabrian to the summer house that stood in the eastern stretch of the garden. A single lamp burned within as Alith entered and gestured for Calabrian to follow. A ewer of spiced tea sat steaming on the low table in the middle of the single-roomed building, fluted cups arranged around it. The smell was sharp and Alith crossed quickly and poured himself a hot drink, warming his hands on the delicate cup.

Eoloran was stood at the window, gazing to the south, swathed in a fur-lined robe of deep blue, calfskin gloves upon his hands and his breath misting in the cold. Eothlir was sat on one of the benches that lined the white walls of the summer house, the scroll case in his hands.

‘You said that you would offer further assurances as to the veracity of your claims,’ said Eoloran, still looking out into the darkness. ‘Make them known to me.’

Calabrian cast an appealing glance towards Alith, who poured a drink for the messenger. Sipping gently, Calabrian turned to Eoloran.

‘Malekith instructed me to say “The light of the flame burns brightest at night”,’ said Calabrian, intoning the words with deep solemnity.

Eoloran spun around and glared inquisitively at Calabrian.

‘What does it mean?’ asked Eothlir, taken aback by his father’s reaction. When Eoloran replied, his voice was quiet, distant.

‘Those words were first spoken by Aenarion. It was before Anlec was built, just after the daemons had ravaged Avelorn and slain the Everqueen. I remember it well. He had vowed vengeance for the death of his wife and the slaying of his children, and in grief had decided to draw that accursed blade. I argued against him. I warned Aenarion that... that weapon was not for mortals to wield. I could see that his rage would consume him, and said as much. Those words were his reply. He left atop Indraguir that night and flew to the Blighted Isle. When he returned, the Aenarion I had known was no more and a life of bloodshed followed. How do you know this phrase?’

‘You will have to ask Prince Malekith,’ said Calabrian, setting his empty cup on the table. ‘He bade me to learn the words but offered no explanation. I trust that you believe my story?’

Eoloran nodded and gestured for Eothlir to pass the scroll case.

‘Only Aenarion and I were present when those words were spoken, but it seems reasonable that Aenarion might use them again in the presence of his son,’ Eoloran said.

Taking the case, Eoloran examined the seal and, satisfied that it remained intact, broke the circlet of black wax with his thumb. He pulled open the end of the tube and slid out a single piece of parchment. Placing the case carefully on the table, he opened the scroll.

‘It is a letter,’ said Eoloran. He scanned the elegant script for a moment and then began to read aloud, his voice breaking with emotion.

*For the eyes of Eoloran Anar, beloved of Aenarion, true protector of Nagarythe. First I must thank you, though words cannot do justice to the debt I owe you for your support. I have heard that you marched to my aid at Ealith, and though that endeavour was ultimately to fail, I escaped and that is due in no small part to the presence of your army. I understand the great risk that you took in showing such support and assure you that you will be honoured and repaid when I reclaim the rule of Nagarythe. Truly you were a friend to my father and, I hope, an ally to me.*

Eoloran paused, clearing his throat, a tear forming in his eye. He swallowed hard, brushing away the memories with a wipe of his hand across his brow. He continued in a clearer voice, his calm demeanour returned.

*Alas that I must entreat further aid from you at this time. What I ask is dangerous in the extreme and I will not hold it against you should you feel unfit to comply. Please respond through my messenger, Calabrian, who can be trusted with the deepest of secrets. However, I must ask that you tell no more of your people than necessary of what I now request, lest word of it reach the ears of Morathi, by conventional means or via other, more deceitful paths. I march upon Anlec with the first thawing of the spring. Even now, my army assembles in Ellyrion, far from the prying eyes of my mother and her spies, while other forces loyal to the Phoenix King*

*draw their gaze southwards. I am confident that I will reach Anlec, but the defences of the city are little short of impenetrable.*

*I ask that you take such warriors as you deem utterly trustworthy and infiltrate Anlec, there to stand ready for my attack. I cannot say at what time the stroke shall fall, so you must set out for the city come the first sun of the spring. No army can breach the gates of Anlec, but should they be opened before me I stand ready with a host of warriors the likes of which have not been seen upon Ulthuan's shores for an age. I wait with anticipation for your speedy reply and wish you the blessings of all the gods.*

*I remain your loyal ally and grateful prince.*

‘Then there is the rune of Malekith and his seal,’ Eoloran finished.

‘That is a considerable request,’ said Eothlir as Eoloran passed the parchment to him.

‘We are going to help, aren’t we?’ said Alith.

‘Yes we are,’ replied Eoloran, surprising Alith with the speed of his answer. It was unlike Eoloran to take such a decision with so little consideration. ‘Had the prince commanded us to hurl ourselves at the walls of Anlec, I would comply. For the sake of Nagarythe, and all of Ulthuan, Morathi cannot be allowed to continue as ruler. The prince must be restored if we are ever to know peace again.’

Eoloran stood in thought for a moment, rubbing at his chin. He looked at Calabrian, who had stood meekly listening to the contents of the letter he had carried on such a dangerous journey.

‘How much of Malekith’s intent do you know?’ asked Eoloran.

‘No more than you,’ the messenger replied. ‘I left Malekith in Tor Anroc and knew nothing of his plan to move his army to Ellyrion. Nor of his intent to assault Anlec.’

‘Then I shall write a reply to your master, and you will be taken across the mountains to Ellyrion,’ said Eoloran. ‘With Anar guides to lead you, I am sure that your return journey shall be less fraught than the one that brought you here.’

‘Who shall we send with him?’ asked Eothlir. ‘Perhaps more importantly, who shall we take with us to Anlec? And by what means will we get there unheralded?’

‘Anadriel and the other scouts who met Calabrian already know of his presence here,’ said Alith. ‘They are all trustworthy, kin to the Anars each of them. Anadriel knows the mountains as well as I,

perhaps even better. I can think of no better guide, nor a more skilful warrior.'

'I would have you take Calabrian, Alith, and then return to the manse to keep our lands safe for our return,' said Eothlir. 'To risk every lord of the Anars on this one quest seems careless, and to abandon Elanardris would be perverse.'

'No,' said Eoloran, cutting across Alith's protest. 'Alith has proven himself in battle, and a finer eye cannot be found in Elanardris. If he is to have a future as a lord of the Anars, he fights with us. There are many who can see to the defence of Elanardris in our absence, and if Malekith marches on Anlec I would say that our foes' priorities will quickly change!'

Alith was profoundly grateful for his grandfather's opinion, but remained quiet lest an outburst change Eoloran's mind.

'For the moment,' said Eoloran with a look at Alith, 'he can run down to the house and bring me back parchment, ink and a quill.'

'Of course,' said Alith, bowing his head in thanks. As he left the summer house, he heard his father's voice quiet but angry, but his words were lost as Alith headed down the path towards the manse.

The winter days dragged on as heavy cloud sat upon the mountains, the snow sometimes coming in blizzards and at other times in more gentle flurries. Anadriel took Calabrian across the mountains to where the borders of Nagarythe, Chrace and Ellyrion met, and sent him south to Malekith.

By secret paths and unknown vantage points, the scouts of the Anars spied upon the enemy camps, noting their numbers and positions. All of this was passed to Eoloran to chart the disposition of his foes. With Alith and Anadriel, the lord of the Anars plotted the route by which a small group of warriors could evade the enemy and leave Elanardris unseen. Twice more Calabrian dared the dangerous route across the mountains to confer with the Anars, bringing assurances from Malekith that his attack was ready and returning with the renewed promises of Eoloran. Then the winter's grip tightened, blizzards ruled the peaks and there came no further word from the prince.

Thirty warriors were chosen by Eothlir, as those most trusted and most capable. All had served the Anars for centuries, several of them distant cousins to Alith. Amongst them were Anadriel, Anraneir, Casadir and Khillrallion. Eothlir began to refer to these

warriors as the Shadows, as it would be in secrecy rather than strength that they would succeed.

The Shadows met each other every few days, to discuss the route from Elanardris to Anlec. Khillrallion tested the pathways out of Elanadris and returned several days later to confirm that he had not seen another elf in all of that time. While these practical steps were taken, Eoloran turned his hand to a different form of subterfuge: promulgating a falsehood to his allies that would explain his coming absence.

Through Caenthras, the ruler of the Anars spread the word that he had been in contact with Prince Durinne of Galthyr, a port in the west of Nagarythe. Eoloran let it be known that the two were arranging to meet, and would confirm their alliance and mutual support in the spring. Caenthras took this news with enthusiasm, and would often speak of how he wished for Malekith's return. Eoloran kept his silence on this matter, uncertain of Caenthras's reaction should he know the truth. The old warrior had been invigorated by the fighting against the Khainites and was clearly chafing at the imprisonment imposed by the besieging army. It was Eoloran's fear that Caenthras would march out to join Malekith if he knew the truth, leaving Elanardris unprotected, though it pained him to lie to his friend.

Each day Alith would awaken and look to the skies, hoping to see the first sun of spring. In Nagarythe, the winters were deep and harsh, but once the north wind turned to the west and the clouds broke, spring and then summer would come quickly. The sign that Malekith was ready to attack grew closer with every morning.

Alith was curled up on a bed of leaves at the back of a cave, at one of the watch positions overlooking the druchii army. A slight noise caused him to wake instantly, reaching instinctively for the naked sword that lay beside him. Someone was silhouetted against the slightly paler circle of the cavern entrance. A smokeless lamp glowed into life to reveal the face of Anraneir. He was smiling broadly.

'Come, sleepy one, and look at this,' he said, stepping aside.

Alith sprang up and strode to the opening, guessing Anraneir's cause for happiness. There was an almost imperceptible warmth on the breeze, which came from the west. Looking to the east he saw

the first red rays of the sun cresting over Anulir Erain, the White Mother who was the tallest of the mountains south of the manse.

‘The first spring sun!’ laughed Alith. Anraneir hugged Alith in his joy, and the young Anar shared his enthusiasm. The sun signalled a very perilous time for them both, but the prospect of action after such a bleak winter was exciting.

‘We should head back to the manse today,’ said Anraneir. ‘Your grandfather will no doubt wish to leave tonight.’

‘Best wait for Mithastir to replace me here,’ said Alith. ‘Someone still needs to keep an eye on the enemy. You should go now, since it would raise questions why you are here and not at your post.’

‘Of course,’ said Anraneir, deflated by Alith’s practicality. With a waved hand and a whispered word he dimmed his lantern and disappeared into the gloom.

Alith sat cross-legged on the ledge outside the cave, gazing down at the pinpricks of campfires far below. He whispered a chant in praise of Kurnous as he waited for Mithastir to arrive, thanking the Lord of the Hunt for bringing the early spring. Alith took it as a good sign from his patron.

Singly and in pairs, the Shadows gathered in a small copse of trees known as the Athelin Emain close to the southern border of Elanardris. Alith was one of the first, and waited in the darkness for the others to arrive. As the moons glowed from behind thin clouds, Eoloran and Eothlir finally made their appearance, clad in dark cloaks like the rest. It was the first time Alith had seen his father and grandfather dressed in this fashion, entirely unlike the statesmanlike robes or shining armour he was accustomed to seeing. The ruler of the Anars gathered his warriors beneath the boughs of a great tree, the dim moonlight streaming through the naked branches to cast dappled shadows on the ground.

‘We must pass the druchii line before sunrise,’ said Eoloran, looking at the thirty Shadows. ‘We all know the path which we take, and the danger should we be discovered. I offer you one last chance to return to your homes. As soon as we set foot beyond these trees we are committed to this journey, all the way to Anlec and whatever fate Morai-heg has reserved for us. Some of us, perhaps all of us, may not return from this fight, and it may be a fool’s errand that we run.’

There was silence from the others. Alith was eager for them to start out, to put an end to the waiting and planning.

‘Good,’ said Eoloran with a grim smile. ‘We are as one mind. Lauded shall be those that march with me today, and great shall be the gratitude of the Anars and Prince Malekith.’

With that, Eoloran turned south and the Shadows began their perilous quest.

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