

# BLACK CRUSADE™

## THE TOME OF DECAY™



ROLEPLAYING IN THE GRIM DARKNESS  
OF THE 4<sup>TH</sup> MILLENNIUM

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# INTRODUCTION

*“Through his blessings, death itself is stayed. In his embrace, there is only affection and love. Let us share his munificence with those still ignorant of our cherished Grandfather, lest they perish before knowing his generosity.”*

—Pox Magister Effluvias Plo,  
before the Putrefaction of Hive Kappax

To live is to eventually die, the inescapable fact of all mortal life. Almost all of those aware of their lives fear and dread this final end, which echoes the collapse of all order into disorder through remorseless entropy. Many strive to avoid such a fate, and are willing to perform any deed or suffer any woe to keep death from their door, if only for one more day. This is perhaps futile, but can attract the attention of one who represents both ruin and the struggle against it that typifies all life. For wherever there is life, there is decay—and where there is decay, there is Nurgle.

Nurgle represents this seemingly contradictory state of both loathsome decay and energetic struggle. Despite embodying entropy and the foulest of appearances, he and his Daemons are filled with vitality. All enthusiastically offer their gifts of ruinous diseases to both the lowly and powerful, for Nurgle embraces all to his loathsome bosom. They delight in sharing these blessings to mortals, offering escape from the horrors of death but at the price of utter corruption to their flesh. None are beneath his notice, from the smallest of underhive hovels to the most lordly of sectors. Each new disease, each new mortal brought low, is carefully recorded in a never-ending tally of his loving beneficence. Nurgle exists everywhere, for all living things erode and fail, and with each fall his power grows.

## WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK?

THE **TOME OF DECAY** is the fourth and last book examining the dark secrets and foul plots of the four Chaos powers and their role in the **BLACK CRUSADE** roleplaying game. It is devoted to Nurgle, the Lord of Pestilence, and those who follow him. He is the god of blight and decay, yet also one of boundless energy. In many ways, Nurgle personifies a struggle against death, as despite the terrible diseased and decayed state of his followers, they resist actual death and injury to unnatural degrees. Heretics also learn more of the other fate that can await them, should they prove worthy: Apotheosis to the elevated rank of immortal Daemon Prince. With such power comes the need for even greater power, and Heretics can learn how to launch Black Crusades to burn the galaxy and depose the False Emperor.

## CHAPTER I: NURGLE

This chapter covers the Grandfather of Decay, the Master of Plagues. From his pestilent garden within the Warp, where carrion-flowers sway in the polluted breezes and horrid fungi sprout from rotting corpses, he lovingly concocts new afflictions. His Daemons emerge forth to bring his gifts to mortals across the galaxy, for Nurgle is a generous god who rejoices with each successful plague. Billions fall to his carefully-wrought endeavours, even as the truly appreciative turn to him seeking power through his gifts. His apostles are often shambles of

putrefying flesh and dripping sores, but with unnaturally resilient bodies that vigorously resists final death even as they bring it to those who reject Nurgle's offerings. Just as all life falls to decay, so do those who oppose the Lord of Flies fall to his children.

## CHAPTER II: DEATH BRINGERS

In this chapter, Heretics can find six new Archetypes worthy of the Lord of Ruin: Plague Marine, Veteran of the Long War, Warpsmith, Writhing World Sorcerer-King, Death Priest of Mire, and Plaguemeister. They can also discover new corrupted blessings from Grandfather Nurgle, as well as new rules for Daemonic Possession, Daemon Engines, and powerful mutations suitable for newly ascended Daemon Princes.

## CHAPTER III: LORDS OF ENTROPY

Here players find new rules for Apotheosis to Daemonhood, allowing them to continue playing their characters after reaching the highest levels of Infamy and Corruption as the mightiest of their god's followers. They can also lead Black Crusades against the hated Imperium. This chapter also contains new details on pestilent worlds within the Screaming Vortex that the Heretics might conquer or ally with in their quest for power, such as the worm-ridden Writhing World, foetid Mire, and murderous Guelph.

## CHAPTER IV: THE HEART OF THE VORTEX

This adventure takes the Heretics through the challenge of gaining access to the Lower Vortex, and a mind-bending confrontation with the incomprehensible forces within. Calling on the events from the previous three Tomes, it allows Game Masters to run all four adventures as a complete campaign. If the Heretics survive, they have the chance to rise to Daemonhood, as well as an opportunity to reach the Ascendent Spiral and rise out of the Screaming Vortex.

### NPC PROFILES

In the cases of all NPC profiles, the GM should assume that they are proficient in any weapon they are equipped with. In addition, all NPC weapon profiles have any damage bonuses from Talents, Strength Bonus, cybernetics, or other augmentations included.

### INFAMY FOR NPCs

Certain dangerous and powerful NPCs possess Infamy, representing their particularly potent abilities and dread reputations. An NPC with Infamy has Infamy Points equal to his Infamy Bonus, that may be used as if they were Infamy Points at CP Level 2 (21-60 Corruption Points).



## NURGLE

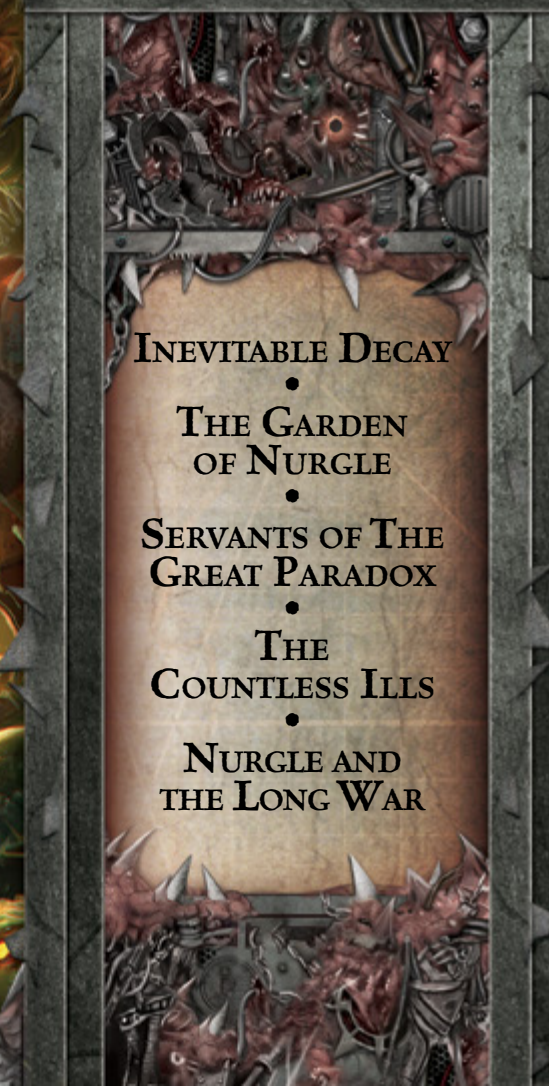
INEVITABLE DECAY

•  
THE GARDEN  
OF NURGLE

•  
SERVANTS OF THE  
GREAT PARADOX

•  
THE  
COUNTLESS ILLS

•  
NURGLE AND  
THE LONG WAR



# CHAPTER I: NURGLE

# INEVITABLE DECAY

*"Rejoice, children! Your Father brings you hope in your darkest hour. Let those who would accept his gifts come forth and receive the blessings of the Lord of Decay. Cast away your crutches and doubts. Put aside beliefs in a false master who fills your hearts with lies, sorrow, and regrets. Embrace instead the glorious gifts of rot and decay. Revel in the beauty of putrescence and be reborn a living symbol of perseverance."*

—The Daemon Prince Gal'furch, addressing the diseased inhabitants of the conquered city of Kulis VII

In every corner of a cold and uncaring galaxy, billions die each day. Wars consume entire systems, drowning civilisations in the blood of their own people. Conceit and avarice drain populations of their riches and their futures for the benefit of a few. Broken promises, deceit, and betrayal topple regimes, sacrificing the lives of those who served them so that the twisted plans of new rulers can come to fruition. In the wake of such tragedies, suffering, and misery, pain and disease touch the minds and bodies of the survivors and cause them to despair. These are the truths of existence in the mortal realm, and the breath that speaks these truths is the same breath that gives life to the malevolent inhabitants of another domain—the Realm of Chaos.

Of all the malign influences foisted upon the mortal realm, only one can be said to genuinely carry with it that singular commodity unlike any other in a bleak and forlorn existence—hope. Only the gifts of Nurgle, the Plaguefather, offer their recipients the chance to become greater in the face of unavoidable diminishment. Through Nurgle and his rancid visitations, a soul can find renewed purpose and the will to raise its face to the heavens, stare back into the void of dissolution and reclaim a life worth living. Endings are new beginnings, and Nurgle offers both in abundance.

*"Entropy is all-consuming, fed by all struggles against it. Thus, even to hope is to despair. So despair, and in your desperation, find purpose."*

—Zlans the Wracked, Speaker of Rot

There is nothing in all of creation that does not decay. No civilisation forever endures the machinations of its rivals. No king survives the plotting of his enemies. No life avoids decay. Not even the False Emperor, with all his deluded sacrificial supplicants and thousands of attending Tech-Priests, will elude the ravages of time and his eventual demise. The question is what happens when the end comes. Nurgle is the answer to that question.

Each inevitable ending brings with it an equally certain start to something new. When a Catachan Spiker traps and consumes a careless Guardsman, the life of the soldier ends and a new Spiker grows. Rotted flesh that sloughs from the arm of a diseased underhive ganger is left in the sewers to feed the plague-rats that scrape out a miserable existence in those dark, maggot-filled tunnels. Even a Rogue Trader whose contract is terminated must seek out new avenues for commerce. There is no ending that does not result in the hope of renewal.

It is because of this inescapable fact of life that Nurgle is known to many as the Lord of All, for there is nothing that transpires anywhere that does not serve his ends. Truly there is no being, no action or outcome that does not further Nurgle's aims. In truth, Nurgle could simply sit back and wait for the universe to unfold according to his design. He is not content, however, to wait. He has too much energy, too much enthusiasm for his work to just sit idly by. From deep within his manse he brews contagion, both physical plagues and virulent ideas, that he and his followers then unleash upon the mortal realm. He welcomes the resistance of those who attempt to deny him, for each time they erect defences against his advances, he learns new ways to circumvent the opposition. Each cure breeds a newer, more powerful disease. Every victory for his enemies is pyrrhic, coming at a cost so great that it leaves the defenders open to the tender predations of Nurgle's ever-evolving poxes. This is the nature of Nurgle. Resistance is self-defeating. Change is a delay, nothing more. Running and denial only buy time at a cost of suffering, and time has no meaning in the Realm of Chaos.

Records of the many races of the galaxy often say that Nurgle corrupts, that he brings ruination to all. To a small extent, they are correct, but their evaluation is narrow in scope and fails to grasp the greater truth. The more primitive races have a much better understanding of the undeniable nature of the Master of Certitude. Life is struggle and erosion. To face the dawn is to await the dusk and, in turn, to endure the night. On a grander scale, if a being had the luxury of observing the rise and fall of empires, of seeing the birth of suns and their eventual collapse into swirling masses of cosmic destruction, the observer would surely recognize the rightful place of Nurgle as the Shepherd of Destiny.

FINAL ENTRY, JOURNAL OF CONFESSOR ALEHR GHENT

THERE, CARVED INTO THE WOOD OF THE PEW, IN THE CHAPEL OF THE EMPEROR'S CREED IT WAS. THE MARK. THREE ENDLESS CIRCLES. DEATH. DECAY. REBIRTH. HORRID, INESCAPABLE, ETERNAL. THE WRETCHED TRUTH OF EXISTENCE LAID BARE IN THREE SMALL CIRCLES, CUT INTO ROTTING WOOD WITH RUSTED NAIL.

OF THE ACOLYTES WHO SAW IT, ONLY I PERSIST STILL. THE OTHERS STRUGGLED AGAINST THE SPREADING ROT, AND THEY SUCCUMBED. OH, OUR MASTER ORDERED THE CHURCH BURNED, THE CITY CLEANSED, THE WORLD QUARANTINED, BUT IT WAS FAR TOO LATE. THE ROT HAD TAKEN HOLD, AND NOW ALL THAT REMAINED WAS TO ACCEPT IT. ONLY I SAW THAT REALITY, THAT INEVITABILITY. THE OTHERS DIED, CHOKED BY FLIES, THEIR FLESH SLOUGHING FROM THEIR BODIES, THEIR BONES MADE THE MEAL OF WORMS.

BUT I PERSISTED. AND THEN I SAW THE PATH. THE SYMBOL ON THAT NOW-DEAD WORLD SHOWED ME. TO THE VORTEX IT BECKONS...



It is only Nurgle's fondness for rot, for disease and decay, that prevents more from accepting his truth. It can be difficult for a mortal to accept that the rotting of a limb or the expulsion of his entrails is a blessing. Yet it is so. Even the decrepit Emperor of Man, ensconced in his Golden Throne, sits as a testament to Nurgle's greatness. Each day a thousand souls give their fleshy bodies and immortal souls to this false idol in a vain attempt to preserve his rotting presence. It is a losing battle, but the ammunition spent in the conflict, the human bodies sent to their wasted doom, does indeed serve a purpose—Nurgle's purpose. Each mortal that falls begets new life and new hope. This is the trade in which Nurgle traffics. Flesh is the coin of his realm, and hopes are the interest he pays on the investments made.

Truly, Nurgle embodies the nature of all things, and thus earns his honorific as the Lord of All.

## IMPARTING HOPE TO A HOPELESS EXISTENCE

Life within the Screaming Vortex, or for that matter anywhere else in the unfeeling galaxy, is harsh, miserable, and full of pain and suffering. Service to an uncaring God-Emperor or an eldritch and absent cosmic deity is ultimately empty and devoid of meaning. Men live and die, and for what? For others to stand on their graves and proselytise? Where is the reward in that? For those who accept the boundless gifts of the Father of Plagues, everlasting hope is the ultimate reward.

Decay is unavoidable. Boltguns rust, the shells they fire are spent, and the fingers that pull their triggers wear down with the passing of time and repeated action. Over the course of their lives, mortals sustain injuries, become infected, sicken

and succumb to their wounds or, more simply, to age. It is impossible to escape deterioration, and yet people try. The struggle to forestall decay moves people to action. It motivates them to greatness. It gives them hope that better times lie ahead; endless possibilities in a universe that seemingly knows only certain crushing doom. It is the Plague Lord that brings light to the darkness. It is Nurgle that gives weak mortals the strength to resist the lies of the Ecclesiarchy and others. It is the Embracing Grandfather who encourages his followers to defy the doom of mortal corruption, and instead use it as a source of strength and inspiration.

In the market squares of backward planets and in the drone-filled cathedrals of the chapters of the Adeptus Ministorum, preachers spew their lies upon an unsuspecting and dim-witted flock. They warn against corruption of the soul and filth of the spirit. They admonish their listeners that to turn from their faith is to join the ranks of the lost and the damned. Their words cannot encompass the horror of the truth.

All Chaos Gods have a dual nature, but Nurgle, more so than any of the other Ruinous Powers, understands that the supposedly separate elements of his essence actually work together in a self-sustaining cycle rather than standing apart from one another as different explanations of the same thing. Khorne, for instance, is a god of bloodshed and killing—of utter carnage—and also one of martial pride and a sense of accomplishment or betterment. These two halves can be seen as two sides of the same coin, but the coin must be flipped to view and appreciate its obverse. But this coin is illusory; there is no divide between its two faces, no beginning and no end. The coin is nought but a feeble mortal metaphor for the truth of Nurgle's influence. On one "side" there is decay, death, and

disease. What would be on the other side of this coin is in fact part and parcel of the first side. Hope, rebirth, resistance, and growth all arise directly from facing death and decay. The Seers of the Eldar Craftworlds and the Inquisitors of the Imperium will never share this truth with the weak-minded fools who drink in their lies like mother's milk.

For a Lord of Chaos, Nurgle's actions seem oddly harmonious—caring even. To receive the blessings of Nurgle, all one has to do is want to live and be willing to do whatever it takes to cling to life. All else follows naturally from there. Worshipers of Khorne must push toward ever-greater levels of destruction and carnage despite the risks to themselves or even to their allies. Those who devote themselves to Tzeentch must deny their lot in life and seek to change everything, never appreciating what they have. Followers of Slaanesh seek to escape reality in a blur of sensation and self-delusion. All that is required to feel the caring touch of Nurgle is to see life for what it is and to want to make the most of it. All that is needed is faith in the future provided by Nurgle.

While an invitation to stroll down Nurgle's pox-strewn path should be welcomed as an honour, not all see it as such. Wasting away under the seemingly malign influence of a skin-eating disease is painful to the afflicted and often repulsive to those around him. When a child's flesh turns a sickly pale green and her eyes glaze over and become dull, milky, unseeing orbs, her father comes to know that he is powerless to prevent her suffering. Seeing a friend's battlefield wound blacken and ooze blood-tinged pus, the stench of its rot choking the air of a barracks, is a reminder of the frailty of all mortals.

If this decay comes at the hands of Nurgle, via the thrust of a rusted blade or the unleashing of a plague, many will curse his name. For those who are unable to see that this pain and suffering lifts the veil that hides the truth of life and death from them, such moments and visions are terrifying. Some blessed mortals, however, are able to look beyond the putrescence and see the decay for what it is—a gift from the Lord of All.

This gift, regardless of the form it takes, opens eyes even as it liquefies them. It simultaneously atrophies the leg muscles of its recipients and gives them the strength to march toward a greater purpose. It is Nurgle's great ambition to speed this universe toward its end by eroding the foundations of reality much as a disease can erode the spirits and bodies of those infected. Through his careful and ceaseless experimentations, begun within his wondrous Garden and then unleashed throughout the galaxy, the pillars that support the framework of existence are slowly but surely weakened. There will come a time when they collapse entirely and the universe will begin a massive transformation. The old ways will be swept aside like a troublesome fly. All that was will cease to be, and from the rotted ruins a new and glorious reality will emerge—one dominated by Nurgle and his beloved children. Those who walk with Nurgle and aid him in bringing about the Great Corruption, as Nurgle calls it, do so with joy in their hearts. They know that Nurgle's victory is assured and that when all things come to an end and life begins anew, they will have helped make it so. This makes theirs a life worth living, despite, and because of, the gifts of their caring master.

# I: NURGLE





## PUTRESCENCE PERSONIFIED

*"I gazed at his magnificence, my vision completely filled with his glorious girth. All around me was flesh and smiling flies. Within his bulk I spied lesser minions, suckling on his leaking entrails. At his feet pools of pus and other bodily fluids gathered, in which his children splashed and played with glee. It was a blessing to behold such glory and joy. It was with great sadness that I awoke into a world filled with Imperial dogma and admonitions. I knew then the path I must walk."*

—Taken from the *Journal of Ulbirna*

When it comes to understanding the glory that is the physical form of the Plaguefather, those who are privileged enough to be able to read about him in the pages of secret texts hidden away in the Black Library are on equal footing with the primitive warriors gathered around sooty bonfires within the wandering Kill Kroozer battleships of marauding Orks. Nurgle, like other Chaos gods, does not have one single form that can be recorded, shared, analysed, or conceived. His is majesty unfathomable by the mortal mind.

Still, if one were to delve into the comparative histories and galaxy-wide myths associated with Nurgle, certain commonalities would present themselves. Whereas

other gods within the Realm of Chaos are associated with dozens, even hundreds, of depictions, there are far fewer variations on the appearance of the Plaguefather. The legends and tales universally describe Nurgle in unflattering terms. He is said to be a vast mound of rotting flesh, with open sores and gaping wounds in which his lesser minions cavort and frolic. Weeping pustules ooze filth and his bowels constantly issue putrescent waste. Beneath his fingernails, maggots and other carrion feeders lay eggs around which develop cysts that periodically burst open and spew their rancid payloads. Perhaps the tales are correct. Perhaps they are not. It does not matter, though, because whatever it is dwells within the mansion at the centre of the Garden, there can be no denying that the creations of this being are both foul and wondrous, and the joy with which he goes about his work is infectious.

Even if none of the insanity-inspired stories of Nurgle can be counted on to be perfectly accurate, the similarities among them are too hard to dismiss, and those similarities extend beyond the gut-churning descriptions of his open sores, exposed intestines, and stupefying stench. Rot and decay are part of Nurgle's nature, but so it seems are jocularly and enthusiasm. Such is the paradox of Nurgle.

Indeed, it may be his boundless energy, the passion with which he delights in his work, and his irrepressible joviality that erodes the minds of so many who contemplate his existence. It seems impossible to believe that a rotund, foetid purveyor of plague and ruin could simultaneously positively beam with mirth and have such concern for the billions of souls upon whom he has inflicted his wracking and hideous poxes. To bend the mind toward the task of reconciling such foulness with such frivolity is to invite madness. Those who are able to do so without slipping into lunacy are fortunate. They will have taken an important step toward understanding the Great Corruption that is to come. Unlike their less "enlightened" brethren, they alone will recognise that the Plaguelord is a tireless gardener of rot, who is always trying to prepare the slowly eroding realm they call reality for its grotesque apotheosis.

TEN-THOUSAND LONG YEARS I HAVE HAD TO REFLECT ON THE TRUTHS OF THE PLAGUEFATHER, AND THESE TRUTHS THE GOD OF PESTILENCE HAS SEEN FIT TO GRANT TO ME AS GIFTS OF HIS DARK ESTEEM:

—ALL ROTS. BODIES, MINDS, SOULS, IDEALS. THESE THINGS DECAY, AND AS THEY DO, THEIR BEARERS APPROACH THE STATE OF WRACKED ENLIGHTENMENT IN THE LORD OF ALL'S EMBRACE.

—TO STRUGGLE IS TO SUCCUMB, FOR IN STRUGGLE ONE FEEDS THE PACE OF ENTROPY. THEREFORE, THOSE WHO FIGHT AGAINST THE INEVITABLE ARE ALREADY VANQUISHED.

—DEATH CANNOT BE CHEATED, DECAY CANNOT BE FORESTALLED. IN THE END, THE PLAGUE GOD WELCOMES ALL TO HIS REALM. THEREFORE, ONLY THOSE WHO WALK INTO HIS ARMS WILLINGLY, IN AWE OF HIS DECREPIT GLORY, CAN CLAIM POWER ETERNAL.

—AGORIS THE FOUL, APOSTLE OF THE RUINOUS ONES