

THE ANCESTOR GODS

Eight Ancestor Gods form the duardin pantheon, though only seven are worshipped by the Khazalites. Formerly mortal beings, they are now ascended deities, each of whom represents a core aspect of duardin culture and is treated with great reverence.

The honouring of one's forebears is at the heart of Khazalite culture. None are more venerated than the Ancestor Gods. Grungni, Valaya, Gazul and Grimnir are regarded as the oldest, having their roots in the very origins of their people, while Thorgrim and Grombrindal were ancient and worthy duardin uplifted to godhood by Grungni's craft. Youngest of their number is Inghilde. Her incarnation is shrouded in mystery, though it is widely believed that both Valaya and Gazul had some hand in her creation. Hashut, the so-called 'Father of Darkness', fell to Chaos due to his greed and ambition and is a cause of much shame to his siblings and the Khazalites. Banished from the pantheon, his statues lie abandoned or even sundered, and his name is uttered only in whispers.

Khazalites pay homage to the Ancestor Gods through remembrance of their great deeds. In honouring a member of their pantheon in this way, a duardin is granted a measure of that god's power. This could manifest as strength or courage in battle, wisdom or fortitude, or even swift passage through the wilderness or a guiding light in dark places, depending on the Ancestor God. Any entreaty is greatly enhanced by contact with stone, perhaps by touching an ancestor statue or by taking up a fistful of earth, for this element is believed to connect all duardin, even their gods.

She towered over Runki, her priestly garb and simple mitre rendered in ancient stone. They knew her as the hearth mother, Valaya, Ancestor Goddess. The duardin mason looked up reverently at her benign countenance, listening to the low crackle of the recently ignited hearth flame between the grand statue's feet.

'Valaya,' intoned Runki, his voice solemn, 'she who held the Kondal Gate against the orruk hordes, I remember you.' He removed his gloves, stooping to take up a handful of dirt and rubbing it between his hands. A patch over Valaya's granite toe had been rubbed smooth. Almost polished, it shone in the firelight, a stark contrast to the rest of the darker and age-worn stone. Runki, as had many duardin before him, placed his dirt-stained hand upon it.

'Noble ancestor, heed me. Through earth and stone, let my words echo. Lend us courage in cleansing our beleaguered halls. In this remembrance do I honour thee.'

Runki fell silent again, though his hand lingered until he felt a great resolve tremble through him and his heart was emboldened.



GRUNGNI

'Grungni is our father god, most vaunted of the ancestors. His voice is that of the deep mountain, and when he speaks, his siblings listen whether they agree with his words or not. We know him as the Great Maker, for his affinity with metal and stone is without equal. His masterful craft has wrought wonders of technology. Fitting, then, that Chamon is his realm. Aye, in his gimlet-eyed gaze are the embers of a thousand forges and his strength is that of an unbreakable anvil. Like all the gods, he has many guises, though in the manner of the noble smith he wears a leather smock and belt of seven hammers. His thick, grey beard is like curled iron. There are those amongst my kind who claim he is a harsh judge and difficult to please. I say he is tempering us, proving our mettle, for only the strongest steel will endure the rigours of fuller and flame.'

Though not the oldest, Grungni is the wisest, and he is respected by all. Great are his deeds, he who fashioned kinglly lightning for Sigmar in honour of their alliance and who shaped the Spiral Crux of Chamon before the hated worshippers of ruin defiled it. Grungni would see our scattered clans united, for he knows our path will only stay its course if it is forged together.'



VALAYA

'Our mother goddess is Valaya, she who represents hearth and hold. She is known as the Defender and offers fortitude and healing to all weary duardin. Her realm is Ghyran, for to us Khazalites, the hearth is akin to life itself. Do not mistake her benevolence for weakness, however. The fire burns as well as warms! Peacemaker she once was, the voice of reason amongst her kin. Even when Hashut, he who shames us all, fell, Valaya clung to hope that her brother might be redeemed and spoke on his behalf. Yet in the end, it was she who struck him down, half blind with tears of grief.'

For a time, Valaya faded from all records. So immense was her grief that even the travails of the Age of Chaos would not end her seclusion. But a fire has lit within her once more, as she returns to help reclaim what was ours. Clad in gromril, her horned helm bejewelled like the stars, she is a fierce warrior-priestess whose long plaits touch the earth. Loyal is Valaya, though of all the Ancestor Gods, she alone has the will to defy Grungni. Fortress builders across the Khazalid Empire honour her as protector of duardin holdings, and brewers revere her as the patron of all ales. In ancient days, her shield stymied the black fire of the ur-drakk, Othmorrag, sparing Karak Thryngaz from immolation, while her runic axe, Vhalankor, shattered Gargant's Gate and cleansed the waters of Strufsson's Tarn, saving its venerable breweries.'



GAZUL

'He is the Stonebeard and the Guardian of the Gate, Gazul, our god of the duardin underworlds. One of the ancient ancestors, his realm is Shyish, though our honourable dead dwell below the many umgi afterlives and thus so too does their custodian. As still and impassive as the mountain, a sombre figure in the garb of a hooded elder is Gazul. He speaks seldom, a trait lost on some beardedlings, I'd say! Far less choleric than some of his siblings, he guides our dead on their final journey to his Gate. Through his runic mastery are our souls kept safe, for Gazul – aided by Valaya – fashioned the Null Rune that defies the malice of Nagash and holds the Shyish Nadir at bay. No unquiet revenant can pass into his domain, though it does not prevent them gathering in its hinterlands. His is the endless watch, the duardin dead his charge until delivered to the stone sleep, as one with the earth.'

As Ruin wracked the lands in the Age of Chaos, Gazul offered sanctuary to our kind. His Gate stood firm against the horrors, and so were we Khazalites spared the fate that befell so many. With his long-hafted hammer, Uzengrom, did he smite the gheist hordes of the Morbid King in a single blow as they gathered at the fringes of his realm. Now as we leave our sanctuary to reclaim our empire, Gazul stands vigil, as indomitable as the mountains and as silent as the tomb.'

umgi – humans



GRIMNIR

'A deep vein of choler ran through Grimnir, the Berserker. He is oft remembered with burning bare red skin and fiery hair. One of our ancient ancestors, he represents the fierce warrior spirit of the duardin. We know him as the Fearless, god of the axe and battle. Aye, none were braver, but he was also reckless. Countless are the monsters he slew, sparing our lands from predation and destruction. Yet, his bellicosity and pride would prove his undoing. Out of a desire not to be indebted to Sigmar for freeing him from the Iron Mountains, he fought the godbeast Vulcatrrix. Their titanic battle collapsed the very peaks and tore chasms in the earth, but both duardin and monster fell, slaying each other in a fateful duel.'

The Grimmdron, our Fyreslayer cousins, are convinced Grimnir or some portion of his spirit endures, and their Zharrgrim priests sing laments of what could have been, had he not been slain. They worship him in all but exclusion of the rest of the pantheon, holding to the belief that upon his death, his essence was scattered across the realms and imbued in their much coveted ur-gold. Whether such a miracle is possible, I cannot say, but we remember Grimnir still to keep his embers alive. He represents the vigour of the duardin, our vital spirit. Stoic as we are, there is always a need for ferocity, for the fire of our wrath to burn hot. Grimnir stokes that flame.'



GROMBRINDAL

'Old Whitebeard, they call him. The Wanderer. I don't know of any duardin who doesn't have a tale about Grombrindal. He roams the realms in a rugged travelling cloak, with naught but a rune-sharp axe. The annals of the ancestors claim he was forged from lore and memory by Grungni. No path is unknown to Whitebeard, and it is said he passes between the realms on roads known to him alone. Although his patron realm is Ilysh, he is far more gregarious than the haughty folk of those lands. Wise enough to know that he doesn't know everything is Grombrindal, grounded in every sense. He travels across any terrain with ease, possessing great affection for rugged earth and stone, for mountain and woods, for tarn and gorge. He is a rememberer of places and honours them as a wayfarer, whilst guiding duardin in search of the old karaks.'

Of all his kin, Grombrindal has the closest relationship with Inghilde, and together they look to the future and represent progress for us duardin. Legend holds that they once challenged each other to a race to the Realm's Edge in Ulgu. Effortlessly did Whitebeard cross the greatest peaks, the dense forests and tumultuous oceans, whilst his competitor ventured in darkness under earth and stone. The contest ended in a draw, and despite repeating it again in Ilysh, still no winner could be found. Instead, they celebrated their kinship with duardin ale of godly potency and their bond has never been stronger.'



THORGRIM

'Stern as iron is Thorgrim, he who remembers every ill deed perpetrated against duardin-kind. He is known as the Grudgebearer and Lord of Oaths. In his chambers in Azyr, he scribes volumes for his Great Library of Grudges. Thorgrim embodies the vengeful side of our nature, that which seeks vindication against those who have wronged us. He hoards the grudges of our souls when they turn to self-destructive rancour so that they do not consume us as they did our forebears. Yet he still expects us to strive for redress, for to leave a grudge unanswered is a grave dishonour.'

Thorgrim still bears the scars of his mortal dissolution, a burden he carries much like his heavy stone tome and his rune axe. He has no time for tricksters, vacillators or the weak of will. Irascible, inflexible, there are none so dour as he. Did Thorgrim not glower the orruk tribes of Ormag's Hollow into retreat before a blow had been struck? Aye, that he did – and more besides.'



INGHILDE

'Inghilde is the youngest of our pantheon. She is known to us as the Delver, and her intrepid spirit inspires us to explore the deep earth. If you want to establish a fresh mine, then you had best honour Inghilde. Duardin lost in to cave-ins or who have run afoul in dangerous places will seek her salvation. A patron of miners and stonemiths is Inghilde, her face coal-smeared, her lip split. She wears these wounds by choice, in keeping with duardin who brave the dark beneath the world. Ulgu is her realm, for shadows are her refuge. A prospector in appearance, she carries the rune-encrusted pick Durdreng that can sunder mountains and is depicted with an ever-burning lantern.'

Inghilde represents the adventurousness of our people, the drive to seek out new underlands and see our pioneering efforts rewarded. Much aligns Grombrindal and Inghilde, for each searches for the lost and the unknown. Together, they are the Wanderer above the ground and the Delver below.'

'HASHUT IS THE FALLEN GOD, NOW SHORN FROM THE PANTHEON. HIS STATUES ARE RUBBLE, HIS NAME A VILE CURSE. HE BRINGS SHAME TO US ALL.'

