

A World Built to Lose



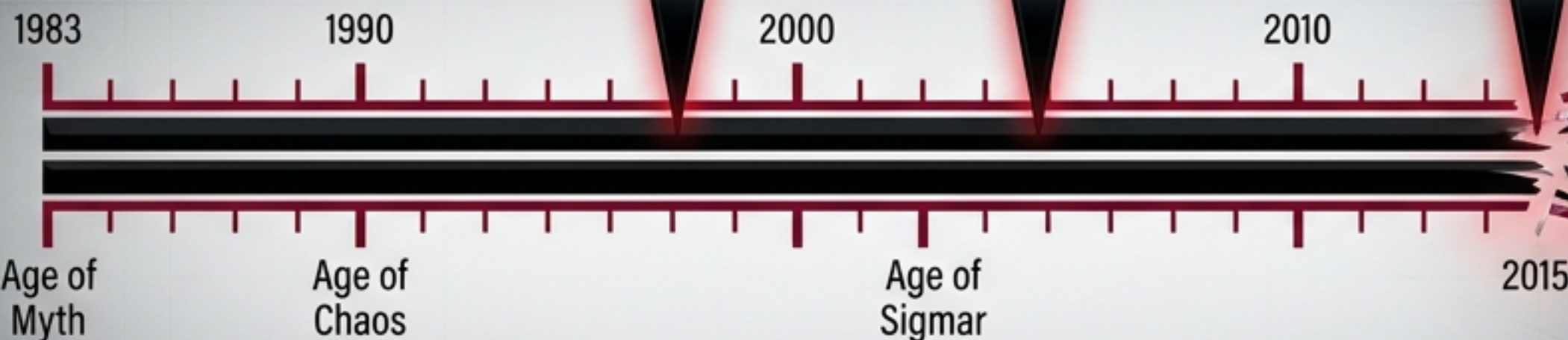
The architecture, execution, and unlikely resurrection
of Warhammer Fantasy (1983–Present).

An analytical autopsy of Mallus.

Games Workshop did the unthinkable in 2015.

- 32 Years of continuous worldbuilding.
- Millions of fans, dozens of languages, hundreds of novels.
- Not retired. Not gently rebooted. Physically destroyed.

Real-World Publishing History



In-Universe Chronology

They wrote an ending where the world physically tore itself apart, almost everyone died, and they stopped making the game.

Grimdark was born
in the mud.



Standard Fantasy

The player is a hero. Glory is the objective.



Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay (1986)

The player is a gravedigger or a roadwarden.
Survival is the win condition. Glory is for people
who aren't paying attention.

Synthesis Insight: Lead designer Rick Priestley engineered a setting that takes medieval paranoia—witches, plagues, things in the woods—and makes it physically, dreadfully real.

The map is a geopolitical trap.

2

Brettonnia: Arthurian France + brutal peasant serfdom.

5

Norsca: Scandinavia + chaos-worshipping raiders.

3

Kislev: Russia + frozen horse archers.

1

1. The Empire: The Holy Roman Empire + a fake moustache and gunpowder.

4

Tilea & Estalia: Italy & Spain + mercenaries and duels.

The familiarity is bait. You arrive thinking it's standard historical fantasy, only to find damnation is one bad harvest away.

A structural wound at the top
of the world.



The Great Catastrophe

1. **The Architects:** Godlike Old Ones engineer the planet via polar Warp Gates.



2. **The Collapse:** 5,600 years ago, the gates break. The Old Ones vanish.



3. **The Leak:** Raw Chaos—nightmares with a will—pours in from a parallel dimension.

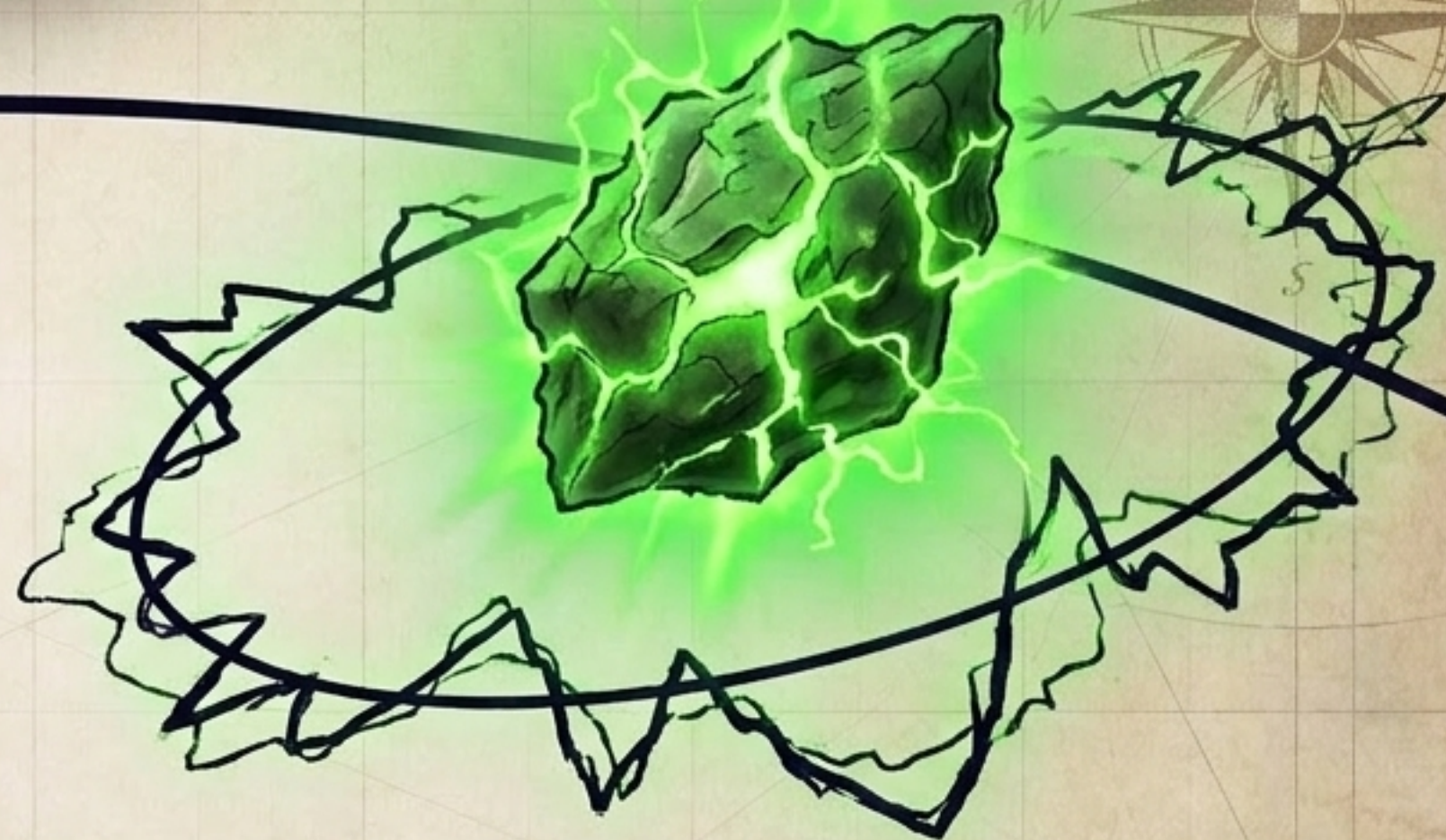


4. **The Scar:** The poles curdle into the hallucinatory, physics-defying Chaos Wastes.

Time is kept by a radioactive moon.



The Honest Moon
Predictable, sane,
representing natural order.

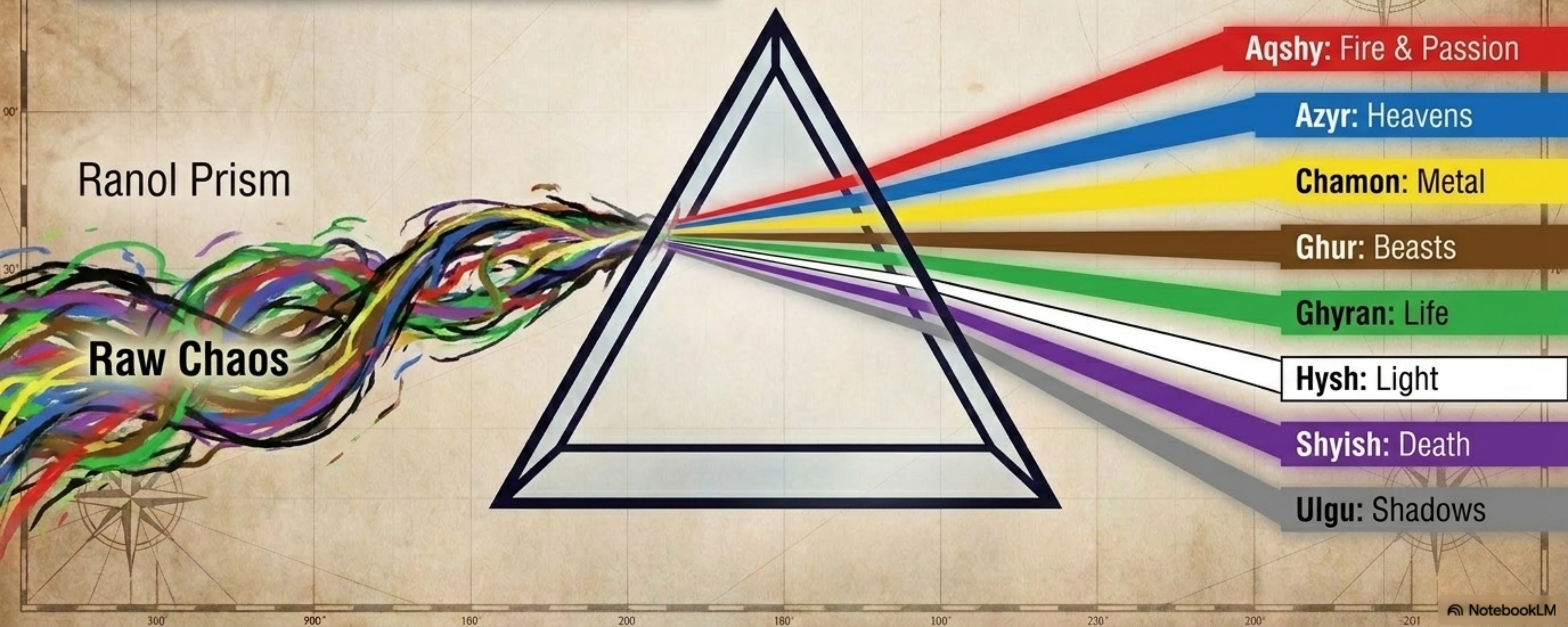


The Chaos Calendar
Swell on no fixed schedule. When fat and green,
mutations rise and monsters stir. Touch its fallen
fragments, and you become a Beastman.

MALLUS

Magic is a heavily refracted weather system.

Raw Chaos would burn a human mind. Magic is simply learning to ride a single separated current.



Reality is maintained through ancient housekeeping.

The Great Vortex

Located on Ulthuan. Maintained by High Elves. A magical whirlpool sucking excess Chaos out of the atmosphere.

The Great Plan

Located in southern jungles. Maintained by cold, patient Lizardmen completing the Old Ones' abandoned 5,000-year-old blueprints.

The world is held together by sweeping the floor.
Stop sweeping, and Chaos fills the room.

A single man forged the line against the dark.

The Miracle:

3,000 years ago, a chieftain named Sigmar allied warring human tribes and proud Dwarf smiths.

The Victory:

United forces crushed a massive Greenskin invasion at the First Battle of Black Fire Pass.

The Legacy:

Sigmar is crowned first Emperor (setting Year 0 of the Imperial Calendar), vanishes, and is eventually deified.

Theological Insight: Polytheistic worship (Ulric, Taal), but Sigmar is the patron saint of fighting for order even when you are destined to lose.

The cosmos runs on an ecosystem of despair.

Chaos Empowers: The Gods grow fatter, unleashing more horrors upon the world.

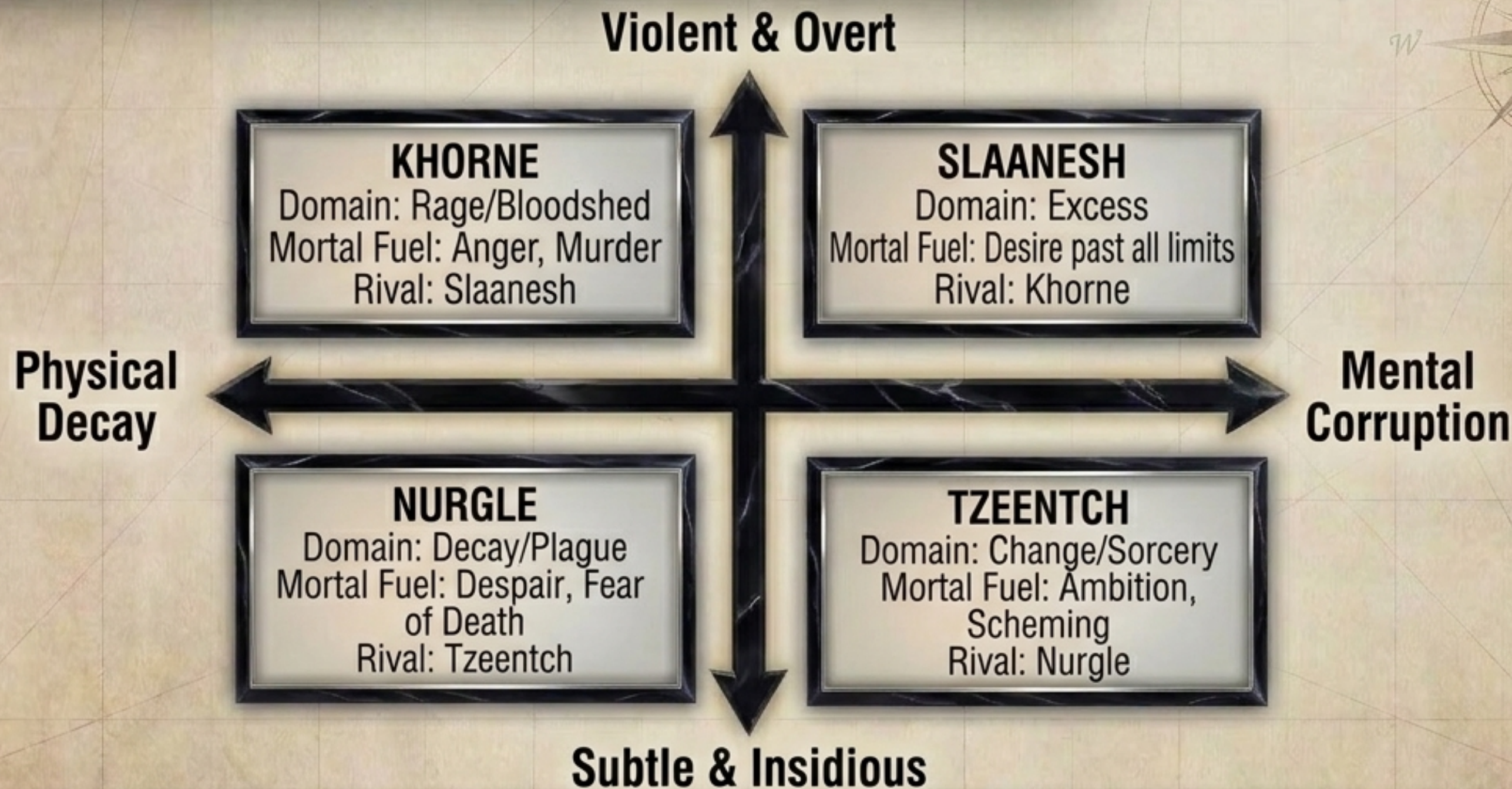
Humanity Struggles: Mortals fight to survive against endless horrors.

Emotions Flare: Mortals inevitably feel rage, fear, ambition, and hope.

You cannot starve these gods, because their food is the human condition.

The Warp Feeds: These exact emotions are the caloric fuel for the Chaos Gods.

The Pantheon of Chaos and the Great Game.



The Great Game: The only mercy for Mallus is that the gods hate each other. If they cooperated, the world ends on Day One.

The Empire is besieged in all three dimensions.

From the Forests:
Beastmen (humanity
mutated by ambient Chaos).

From Within: Vampires
(the literal aristocracy of
an entire region).

From the Mountains:
Orcs and Goblins
(endless greenskin tides).

From Below: Skaven
(millions of warpstone-
weaponizing ratmen the Empire
refuses to believe exist).

From the South:
Tomb Kings
(reanimated god-kings of an
Egyptian-analogue empire).





In 2014, the holding action finally failed.

The End Times

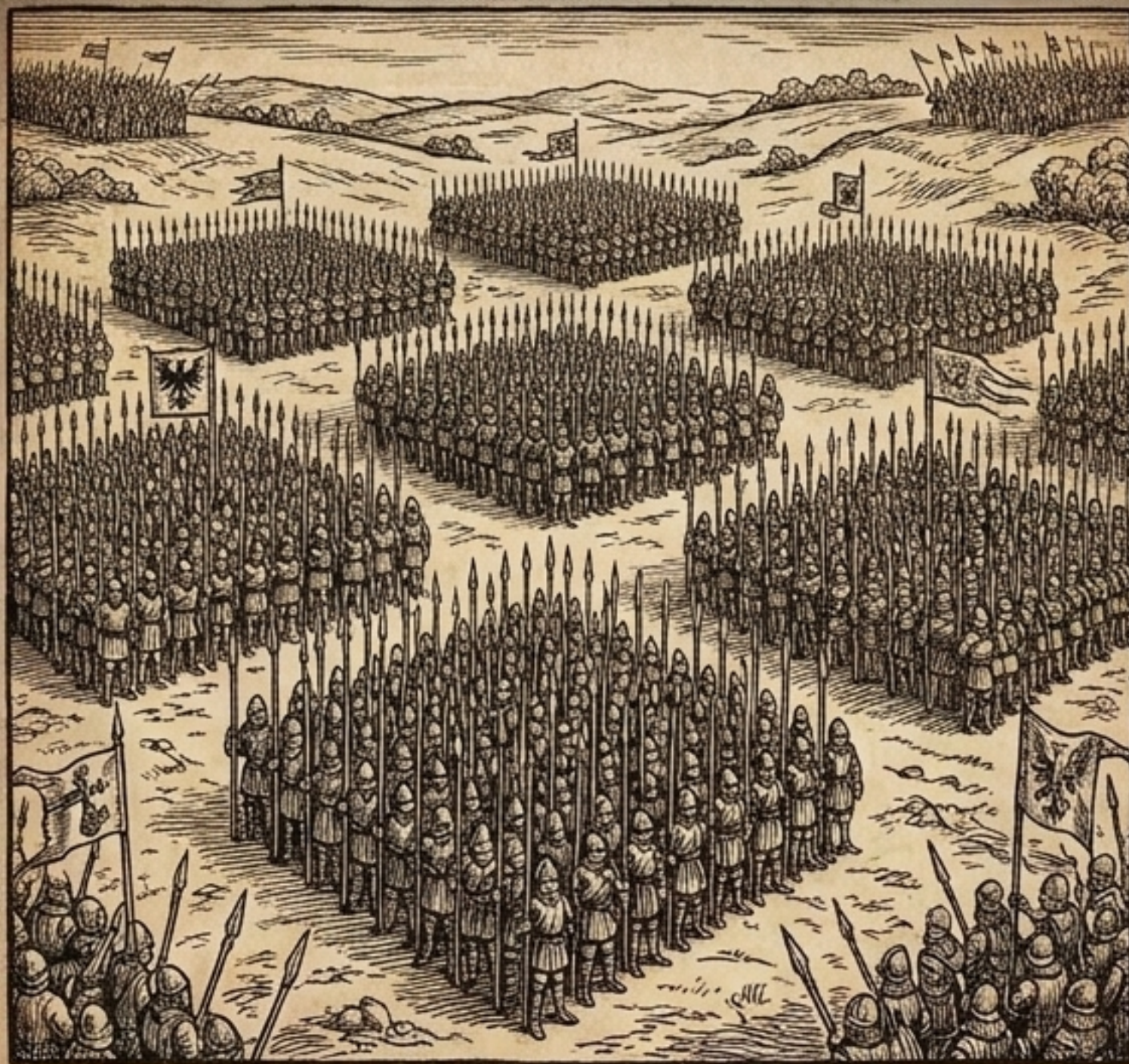
(A five-book publication event)

- Chaos is allowed to win.
- Archaon the Everchosen leads the largest army in history.
- Nagash, the arch-necromancer, resurrects.

The Result:

Province by province, the Old World is overrun, physically destroyed, and annihilated. Sigmar is left clinging to the shattered planetary core.

The mechanics of the game cannibalized the business.

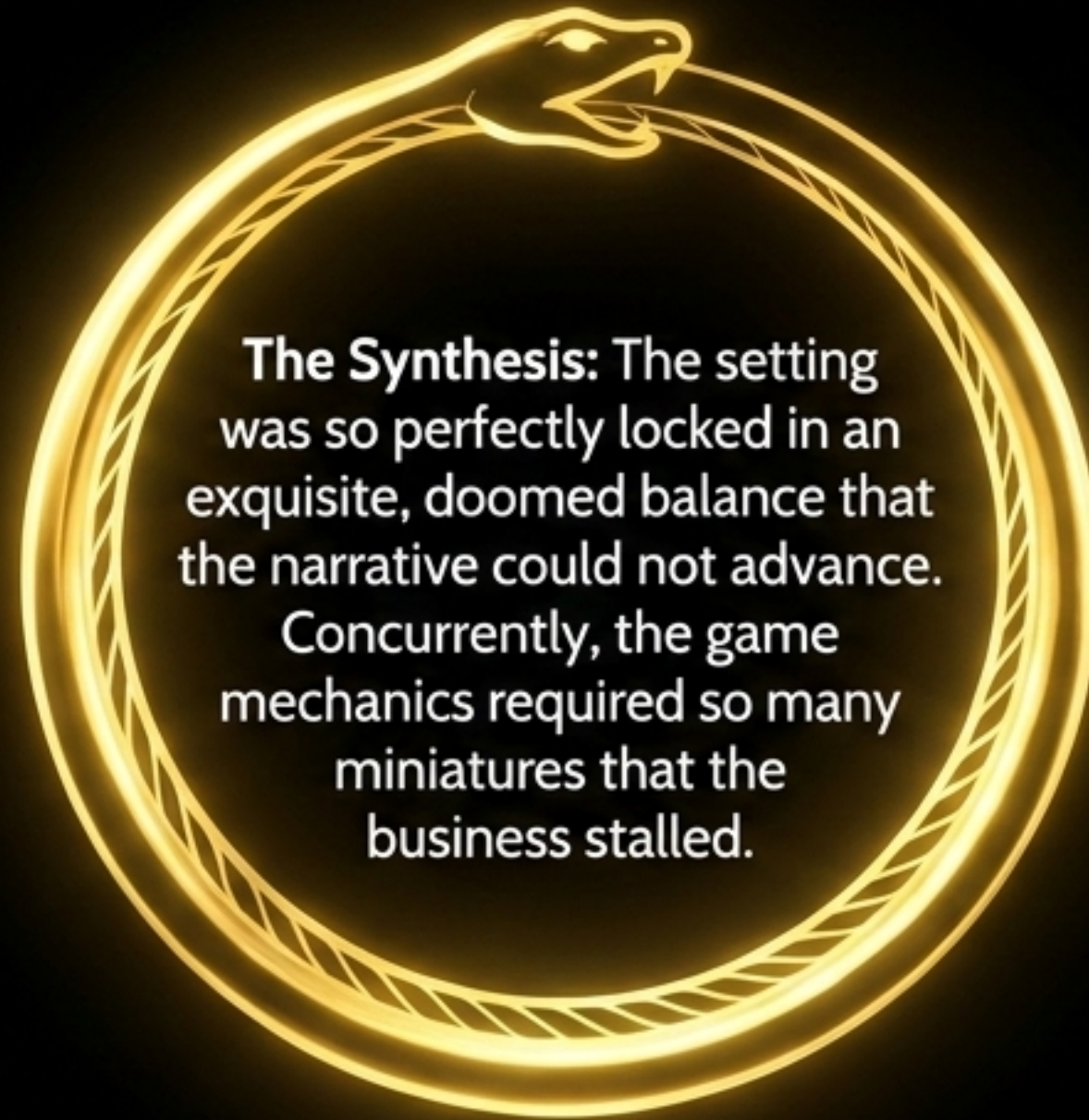


The 8th Edition Problem (2010)

- **The Gameplay:** Required vast, ranked blocks of identical infantry.
- **The Consumer Burden:** Ruinous for hobbyist wallets and patience (buying, building, and painting 100 identical models).
- **The Business Impact:** Rules bloated; sales of core miniature lines stagnated.

Bottom Line: The lore demanded a Viking funeral because the business model required a clean slate.

The Old World was killed by its own perfection.



The Synthesis: The setting was so perfectly locked in an exquisite, doomed balance that the narrative could not advance. Concurrently, the game mechanics required so many miniatures that the business stalled.

The Insight: Chaos winning wasn't just a lore event; it was a corporate necessity. The inevitable doom built into the lore by Rick Priestley in 1983 prophesied the commercial strategy of Games Workshop in 2015.

The corporate pivot required a new cosmology.

	Warhammer Fantasy (The Old World)	Warhammer Age of Sigmar (The Replacement)
Cosmology	A single, doomed medieval planet.	Eight infinite, magic-shaped Mortal Realms.
Gameplay	Massed, ranked infantry blocks.	Skirmish battles with individual heroes.
Tone	Gritty, doomed survival.	Mythic, high-fantasy expansion.

Important Caveat: Age of Sigmar is not a post-apocalyptic Old World.
The continuity was entirely severed.

Returning to a doomed snow globe.

The 2024 Rebirth

Fan grief never faded.
Games Workshop launched
Warhammer: The Old World.

The Mechanics of Return

- Not a continuation.
A historical reenactment.
- Set 300 years in the past
(The Anarchy), deliberately
positioned before the
apocalypse.

Closing Insight: We visit the world while it still lives,
knowing with absolute certainty it will be destroyed.
Watching it lose—slowly, beautifully, defiantly—was always the point.