

DARK MILLENNIUM



INTRODUCTION



It is a dark and desperate age. The Imperium of Mankind stretches out across the stars, a galaxy-spanning realm unlike any other. At its heart sits the Emperor, a crippled god upon a throne of gold whose psychic might has held the shadows at bay for ten thousand years. Yet Humanity is beset by darkness and danger, surrounded by monstrous foes that seek nothing less than the Imperium's utter and total destruction.

In the face of such uncompromising hatred, Humanity must fight like never before. Armies are raised on an industrial scale, fed into the grinding teeth of wars that never end. The Emperor's realm encompasses a million worlds yet Humanity can muster barely enough warriors to guard against its foes. From the countless, faceless trillions of the Astra Militarum to the super-human Space Marines, from the vast war engines of the knightly houses to the secretive might of the Inquisition, the Imperium's armies fight tirelessly. Though these legions wield incalculable might, still they are forced back step by grudging step, day by blood-soaked day.

In this age, Mankind's many foes are as varied as they are deadly. Brutal Orks swarm across the galaxy, an unstoppable tide of malice whose warlike nature makes them a perpetual and terrible threat. The enigmatic Eldar and their twisted kin strike without warning, leaving ruin and misery in their wake. On the Eastern Fringe, the youthful Tau Empire spreads ever outward, their devastatingly advanced weaponry speaking far louder than the honeyed words of their diplomats. From the darkness of the void come the Tyranid hive fleets, monstrous swarms of bioengineered horrors intent on devouring everything in their path. From beneath the sands of dead worlds, the cold mechanical Necrons rise once more, hungering for conquest and dominance over all.

Yet there is one foe to be feared above all others. At the dawn of the Imperium, upon the very chime of Humanity's finest hour, the foul gods of Chaos corrupted the Emperor's greatest warriors and triggered a civil war that was to tear the Imperium in two. Ten thousand years later that war still rages, the foul Traitor Legions and their terrible daemonic allies seeking to plunge the entire galaxy into the hellish pandemonium of the Warp. In the face of these threats, Humanity fights on, taking the war to their enemies on battlefields beyond counting. War rages through looming factories and crumbling cityscapes, across sweeping plains and amid tangled jungles. Though the armies of the Imperium refuse to give in, the darkness is gathering, hope is fading, and the hour grows late...



WHEN PEALS MIDNIGHT

It is said that on Holy Terra there stands the Lost Spire, a majestic bell-tower built in an elder age of wonderment. In a misguided quest to discover the secret of its workings, the Tech Adepts have long since fouled its mechanisms, contaminating its machine-spirit. Its clock face, lost in low-altitude pollution, has moved but irregularly over the millennia and portents say it will chime but once more... as the final signal, the death knell of Mankind.

The Imperium of Man stretches across the galaxy and encompasses over a million worlds. To a great many of the unnumbered souls of its population, Terra, the fabled cradle of Humanity, the mythical seat of the immortal Emperor and the spiritual heart of the Imperium, is but a legend.

Many crave to see Holy Terra, to walk upon its surface and breathe its sanctified air. These pilgrims leave their home worlds, daring impossible journeys, suffering appalling conditions just to get close. The nearest most can hope for is to share the same sector, peering into the night sky to see its shining glory – a lifetime of travel just to see that distant speck with their naked eyes. A few are even lucky enough to enter Terra's star system, to bathe in the hallowed light of the same sun. Most pilgrims never achieve such enlightenment, falling short of their goals due to the immensity of the galaxy, the horrific dangers of space travel, or the perfidious nature of their fellow man. They die with their dreams unfulfilled, never knowing if what they sought was real or but a figment of their imagination.

Yet Terra exists – a sprawling hive world, its surface covered in towering spires of iron, fortress monasteries, Gothic cathedrals, and the massive avenue of ten thousand statues, each as colossal in size as they are in memory. To speak of the heroes such statues commemorate is to invoke the greatest achievements of human history. Dorn the Unwavering, Dracos the Conqueror, Malcador the Hero – the list goes on. Fittingly, this avenue leads to the Imperial Palace. There, at the end of a mile-long passage lined with the unfurled banners of the greatest and most valiant armies to have fought for Mankind, stand the vast doors of the Eternity Gate. Beyond those massive portals, deep within the continent-spanning complex of the Imperial Palace, lies the Sanctum Imperialis, the symbolic heart of the Realm of Man, the most sanctified place in the whole of the galaxy.

Here, in serried ranks of unbroken valour, stand the Three Hundred – the elite of the Adeptus Custodes, the Emperor's bodyguard. Past them are the massive workings of a veritable mountain of mechanica, cables, circuitry, marble slabs, shifting cogs, pistons, gaseous vents, arching pillars and, in the centre, rune-encrusted steps that wind majestically up nearly forty feet. There, atop the pulsing machineries, enshrouded by a halo of eldritch powers and enveloped in a nimbus of alchemical fog, is the Golden

Throne where sits the Emperor, the Master of Mankind, the Saviour of Humanity.

But what would a pilgrim see, should he ever come to be there, if he had the iron will required to lift his gaze upwards to look upon the greatness that is the Emperor? Some say a lordly man, a king of kings, one crowned with living lightnings. A shining god of light, say others, too bright for man to gaze upon. He is a living idol of righteousness, many preach, his worship an anathema to heretical thought or deed. A carrion lord, whisper the very bold, too terrible to behold, in whose name bloody wars are waged and entire worlds consigned to destruction.

The Emperor is perhaps all these things and perhaps none. He is the figurehead of the galaxy-spanning Imperium, worshipped as a god on nearly all its worlds. Although pilgrims in untold billions journey to Holy Terra, the doors of the Eternity Gate have long been shut and few are given leave to enter. Of those who have basked in his glory, the fortunate few who have stood at the foot of the Golden Throne, no records tell of what they beheld. But who could put into words such an experience? Who indeed could truly understand the nature of that divine being?

Outwardly, the Emperor is but a desiccated corpse, kept alive partly by the cyclopean, mystical machine of gold wrought by his own hand and partly by a will so powerful that it transcends the bounds of the blackened, shrivelled husk of his body. Physically fettered, chained atop mountainous banks of machinery, the Emperor's mind stretches out through space and time – a light in a vast gulf of blackness. Should that spark of life ever be extinguished – should the Throne fail in its mysterious purpose – then Mankind would surely be lost. But as long as the Emperor sits there, in silent vigil, there yet remains a glimmer of hope...



The Word of the Emperor is the Rule of the Imperium.

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The Will of the Emperor is the Might of the Imperium.

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The Blessing of the Emperor is the Light of the Imperium.





THE IMPERIUM OF MAN

It is the dark and terrible era of the 41st Millennium and Mankind stands on the brink of extinction. Beset on all sides by hostile aliens and threatened from within by traitors, Humanity's only chance for survival rests with the continuation of the cruel and bloody regime known as the Imperium. Yet few amongst Mankind's untold population realise the truth of the situation or the horrible fate that looms beyond the stars. If there is any future at all, it is a grim one...

The Imperium stretches across the whole galaxy. At its heart is Holy Terra, the cradle of Humanity and the starting point for an Empire that contains countless billions of souls. Despite its great size, the Imperium is spread thinly across the immense expanse of the galaxy; its worlds are dotted through the void and divided by hundreds, if not thousands, of light years. It is therefore wrong to think of the Imperium in terms of a single, united territory; it is rather a sprawling and often disconnected domain. Yet by weight of its own immensity, the Imperium continues to expand, its momentum carrying it forwards, even while vast segments within its boundaries are cut off, isolated, or remain to this day wholly unexplored.

LOST AGES OF HISTORY

Almost four hundred centuries have passed since man first stepped into the cold of space. Forty thousand years. An age so long that almost its entire history lies shrouded in legend. Who knows how Mankind came to be scattered across so many disparate worlds? Who remembers the wars that split their homeworld of Terra asunder and dragged Humanity down to the level of brute beasts? Who would recognise the names of Terra's ancient ruins, of nations destroyed and peoples long since crumbled to dust? To these questions there can be no answers. The questions themselves died upon the lips of men tens of thousands of years past. From those times come only whispers of horror and death, of the ancient days of the Age of Technology, of the Realm of Night, of the Empire of Blood, and of the terrible long centuries of the Age of Strife.

But those eras are in the distant past; now is the time of the Emperor, the Age of the Imperium. It is an age already ten thousand years old and it too is shrouded in myth and steeped in ignorance. It is a time of superstition, in which great and unfathomable technologies have been enslaved to the forces of mysticism and madness. Most of all, it is an epoch of war, a grinding, unceasing war where mere survival is justly hailed as victory. Defeat can only lead to the irrevocable end of Humanity. Of the wars the Emperor waged to build an empire, of the countless agonies of his battles amongst the stars, there are no complete records, only apocryphal tales and half-remembered legends. And there is only

one man who might remember it all.

THE EMPEROR

When the Emperor led Mankind to spread once more across the galaxy, over a hundred centuries ago, it marked the end of a long era of history, an age typified by dark regression, bitter factionalism, and great isolation caused by rampant Warp storms and countless alien invasions. Not even the ancient records kept by the Historitors of the Adeptus Administratum come close to fully telling how the Emperor came to unite and rule Humanity, or how the newly birthed Imperium came to be from whatever barbarism existed before it. Legends speak of the creation of the Space Marines, the launching of the Great Crusade and the brief time of illumination it brought before the terrible wars of the Horus Heresy plunged all into darkness once again. The truth lies buried under millennia of superstition, submerged beneath centuries of myth or lost to the annals of forgotten history. Perhaps there is a secret scriptorium in some oubliette of the Imperial Palace where the truth might be found, recorded in ancient tomes and locked behind adamantine doors sealed with ancient runes of power. If there is such a place, it is best that it remain hidden. Its truths would, at best, be dismissed as fiction, and more likely burnt for their heretical suggestions. Those ancient days will surely remain shrouded in mystery unless the Emperor himself chooses to reveal his knowledge; although none can guess what thoughts revolve inside his carrion skull.

Until ten thousand years ago, the Emperor lived and breathed as a mortal man, but his physical life has long since ended, crushed out of him by Horus, the Arch-traitor, in the final battle for Terra. Today, as for every day since that battle, the Emperor lives only by the immeasurable force of his supreme will. The stasis fields and psi-fusion reactors of the machine known as the Golden Throne preserve his broken and decayed body; his great mind endures inside a rotting carcass, kept alive by the mysteries of ancient technology. His immense psychic powers reach out from the Golden Throne, enveloping and protecting Mankind across the enemy-strewn galaxy, a beacon of light in the malevolent darkness.

If the Emperor fails, then none will be able to stop the influx of the dark powers; ravenous and all-consuming Daemons will flood into the galaxy. Every living human will become a gateway for the destruction of Mankind. Reality as it is known will be subsumed by the stuff of Warp space – a realm of nightmares and cruel insanity where all life will end. There will be no physical matter. No space. No time. Only Chaos.

THE IMPERIUM LIVES

The Emperor has neither spoken nor moved since his incarceration in the arcane mechanisms of the Golden Throne. His much-revered material body is, for all intents, dead, and his psychic mind is wholly preoccupied combating the denizens of the Warp. He fights an eternal battle against the unimaginable horrors of that dangerous realm for the

preservation of Mankind, keeping closed the rifts that threaten to tear between this reality and the next and holding certain doom at bay. All that is left of the Emperor is a consciousness divorced from the material world, a mind incapable of ordinary communication with his billions of devoted servants. The Emperor has given all that he is so that the Imperium that he founded might continue. And so it has. While it has diverged greatly from his original plans, the Imperium endures.

No longer followed as merely Humanity's leader, the Emperor is now worshipped as a god, the holy deity in whose name the Imperium is ruled. Superstition and dogma have become the rituals of worship and they are spread as gospel, with blind obedience highly commended and free thought viewed with suspicion and doubt. It begins with the twelve High Lords of Terra, the most powerful men in the galaxy. It is their task to interpret the Emperor's divine will and their word is law. At their command, the incalculably vast organisations of the Adeptus Terra, also known as the ancient Priesthood of Earth, strive to enact their given tasks.

The Adeptus Terra, working under the direction of the High Lords, is divided and subdivided into an uncountable number of departments and subordinate organisations. Its offices span the whole of the Imperium and its powers extend to every human world. No man is free from its influence or from the strictures of its rule. The various branches of this huge and multifaceted organisation each come with their own awesome powers, unique customs and hidden secrets.

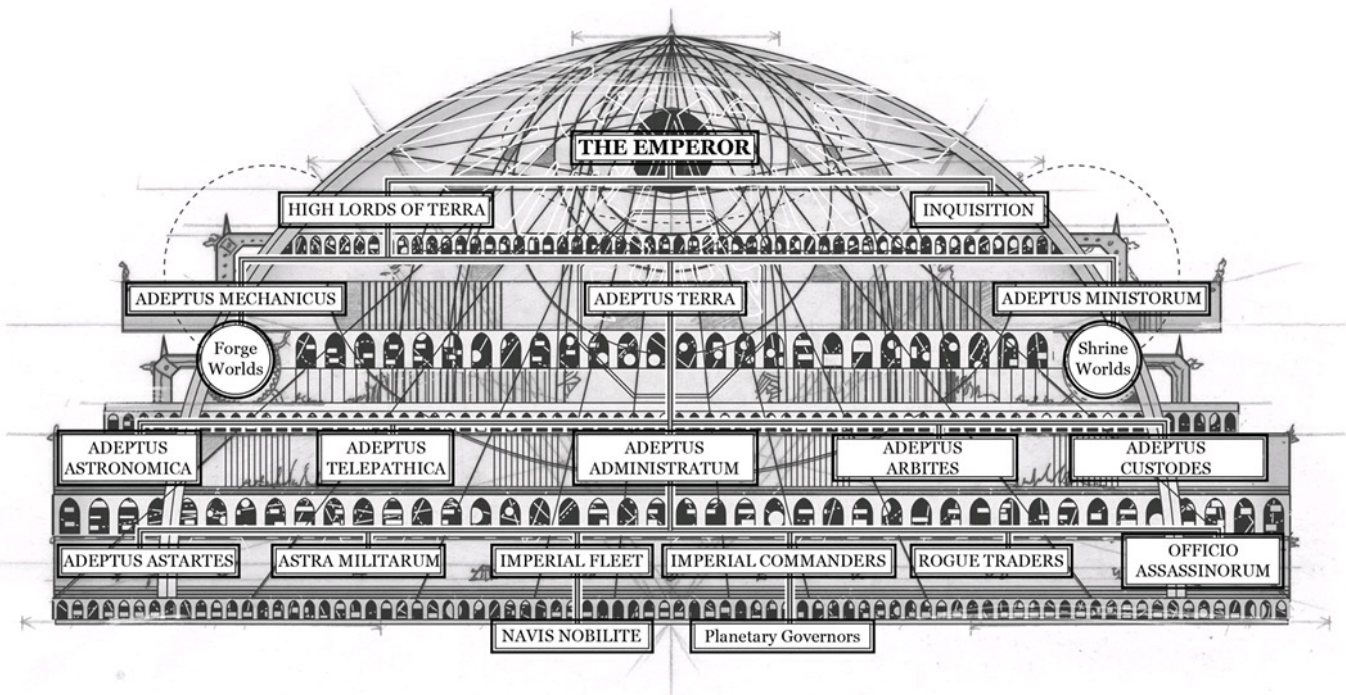
Ten thousand years of ritual and endeavour have built an edifice that now dominates human society. Across the vastness of the galaxy, information is gathered; laws are enforced; taxes are levied. So it has been done and so it will be done in the future. Like an ancient and ponderous clock, the cogs of bureaucracy grind ever forwards, carried onwards by their own momentum, gears spinning without thought or consideration.



++ In an hour of Darkness, a blind man is the best guide. In an age of Insanity, look to the madman to show the way. ++

IMPERIAL HIERARCHY

The Imperium is so colossal, and the distances between planets so vast, that delays, confusion and misinterpretation of information is rife. Simple communication is so obtuse that centralised rule and accurate census procedures are impossible. The many Imperial organisations are so complex and labyrinthine that to detail even a fraction of them would prove exhausting. The Curators of the Estate Imperium cannot even list all the departments of the Adeptus Terra, let alone the composition of the Adeptus Ministorum.



THE INQUISITION



The Eye that sleepeth not.

A highly secretive organisation, the Inquisition is bound by no Imperial law or authority save its own. The only mission of the Inquisition is seeing to the protection of Humanity. Inquisitors are empowered to investigate any potential threat to Mankind and to take whatever measures they consider appropriate to destroy the danger. This is sometimes alien in origin, but Humanity's own ranks are most often the chief threat – genetic deviation, political corruption, the machinations of planetary governors, incompetence, treason and heresy keep the ranks of the Inquisition permanently occupied. Inquisitors have earned the names of witch-hunter, torturer and worse, for any means justifies an end so vital and so endangered.

HIGH LORDS OF TERRA



They govern the destiny of Mankind.

These twelve powerful individuals rule the Imperium in the Emperor's name, and it is they who send the Imperium's fleets to war and direct its nigh-inexhaustible armies. Their task is to interpret and enact the silent will of the Emperor, relying on his potent mind to guide their thoughts and inspire their actions.

ADEPTUS MINISTORUM



Promulgators of the Imperial Creed.

To countless billions, the Emperor is nothing less than a god to whom they devote their entire lives. Over the aeons, this faith has spawned a powerful organisation – the Adeptus Ministorum – more commonly known as the Ecclesiarchy. The Ecclesiarchy is not part of the Adeptus Terra but is a wholly separate Imperial institution, and it hosts numerous subgroups of its own, the best known of which are its military wing (the Adepta Sororitas), its orthodox training orphanages (the Schola Progenium), and its missionaries who often accompany Imperial exploratory vessels (the Missionarus Galaxia). The Adeptus Ministorum has a long and bloody history, replete with political power struggles and sometimes fully-fledged civil wars, but for almost 8,000 years, it has maintained and spread the only officially recognised religion of the Imperium of Man. They wield great power across the galaxy and the Ecclesiarch, their leader, has a permanent seat among the High Lords of Terra.

ADEPTUS MECHANICUS



The Lords of Mars and Disciples of the Omnissiah.

The Tech-Priests of the Adeptus Mechanicus are the keepers of ancient knowledge and arcane technology. It is they who preserve the Emperor's Golden Throne and they who operate the forge worlds that feed the Imperial armouries with weapons, armour, munitions, vital spaceships and war machines. The Priesthood of Mars blends the mystic rites associated with the Cult Mechanicus and the worship of the Omnissiah with the intricate invocations, and arcane ceremonies required to build, assemble and maintain their precious machines. Unlike many of the other major Adeptus organisations, the Adeptus Mechanicus is not headquartered on Terra, but instead upon the original and greatest of all the forge worlds, the red planet of Mars.

ADEPTUS TERRA



The Masters of the Earth. Their will be done.

The Adeptus Terra is the central bureaucratic organisation of the Imperium and not really an agency itself. It is made up of many autonomous departments that receive the orders of the High Lords of Terra, passing them down to the different branches that will enact the commands. There are only a few organisations in the whole of the Imperium that do not fall under this central command, most notable of which are the Inquisition, the Adeptus Mechanicus and the Ecclesiarchy.

ADESPTUS ASTRA TELEPATHICA



Their Voices pierce the darkness and cross the Stars.

The role of the Adeptus Astra Telepathica is to recruit, identify and classify psykers and then train those found worthy. To do this, the Adeptus Astra Telepathica is divided into two bodies: the League of Black Ships and the Scholastia Psykana; the Master of the Adeptus Astra Telepathica presides over both. The Adeptus Astra Telepathica classifies many grades of psykers, the highest of which are primary psykers, rare individuals marked to serve the Imperium in high capacity roles. The most common grade is that of Astropath, those who send and receive telepathic messages over interstellar distances. Other acceptable grades are channelled along to the Adeptus Astronomica, while those unable to pass the battery of harsh tests take a final path to fulfil other, less savoury, duties.

ADEPTUS ASTRONOMICA



They fuel the guiding Light of the Emperor.

Capable psykers not talented or disciplined enough for the Adeptus Astra Telepathica are handed over to the Adeptus Astronomicus for a different kind of training. The survivors provide the raw psychic power of the Astronomican, the psychic homing beacon that enables Navigators to steer their ships through the Warp. To operate the Astronomican requires a choir of at least ten thousand psykers, and the process of constantly transmitting quickly destroys them, but there are always more being trained to take their place.

ADEPTUS CUSTODES



They guard Mankind's past, present, and future.

The Custodian Guard are the Emperor's personal bodyguards, created using the same arcane methods that begat the Adeptus Astartes. Stronger than Space Marines and instilled with unshakable loyalty to the Emperor, the Adeptus Custodes now guard the Imperial Palace, having effectively become a defensive army. Three hundred Custodians, the Companions, still protect the Emperor as guardians of the Golden Throne.

THE ADEPTUS ARBITES



The keepers of the Great Book of Judgement.

The Arbitrators and Judges of the Adeptus Terra enforce law in the Imperium. Equipped for a localised war, they maintain order in a way that is absolute and unforgiving. In the ranks of the Adeptus Arbites, fanaticism for the enforcement of the governmental edicts and rigid adherence to the letter of the law are paramount – only the most loyal can succeed.

ADEPTUS ADMINISTRATUM



Upon them turn the wheels of governance.

The largest organisation in the Adeptus Terra, the Adeptus Administratum is itself divided into many branches. The greater majority of its constituents have no concept of how their work fits into any overall scheme, or even that they are part of the same bureaucracy. Their work is an end to itself and the single most important factor in their lives. It is enough to perform the task; understanding is neither required, nor welcome. It is said by the soldiers of the Imperial Guard that for each fighting man there are a dozen scribes and at least two minor officials toiling away, recording petty details that no one will use or consider.



ASTRA MILITARUM



Hammer of the Emperor, the Imperial Guard.

The Astra Militarum is the largest fighting force of the Imperium. It is divided into innumerable armies and scattered throughout the galaxy across thousands of war zones. They rely on incredibly vast numbers of soldiers, armoured battle tanks and devastating artillery to smash their foes, grinding them down through attrition and the brutal application of devastating and unrelenting firepower.

The provisioning of the Astra Militarum is provided by the Departamento Munitorum, the munitions and supply wing of the Administratum. Even this colossal organisation has no real idea of exactly how many troops are under arms, as the numbers are too vast and variable; even before considering the continuous toll of casualties, the influx of recruits can run into many billions each day.

THE SPACE MARINES



They know no fear, the Angels of Death.

The Adeptus Astartes, more commonly known as the Space Marines, are the most powerful and dreaded of all Humanity's warriors. In many respects, however, they are themselves no longer human at all, but instead superhuman beings forged by almost mythical levels of genetic modification, training and the rigours of strict discipline.

The Space Marines are the Imperium's fighting elite, a corps of highly mobile shock troops trained to deploy quickly and to do battle anywhere. Space Marines are organised into Chapters and each is an army unto itself, able to provide its own spacecraft, atmospheric fighters and deployment craft, along with armoured vehicles and the best equipped infantry known to Mankind. The Space Marines carry the fight to the foe with precision, skill and deadly swiftness, always drawing the hardest missions, against the most impossible odds. Although they are few in number, they are never daunted; the

valour and dedication of the Space Marines is without measure, for they are Angels of Death, and none may stand before them.



THE OFFICIO ASSASSINORUM

The dagger in the dark, the silent answer.

The Office of Assassins is an important, if little known, tool of the Imperium. The different temples that make up this mysterious agency are all cloaked in secrecy. The locations where they train their matchless killers are hidden, not revealed even to those who assign them targets. It takes a two-thirds vote from the High Lords of Terra for an Imperial Assassin to gain an assignment and no one is safe from the attentions of their deadly work.



THE IMPERIAL FLEET

They who ply the stars, life bringers and warmongers both.

All shipping within the Imperium falls under the purview of the Imperial Fleet, with the exception of that carried out by the Adeptus Astartes and a few other Adeptus organisations. The larger part of the Fleet is the Navy, battleships that escort essential cargo across the galaxy and serve as the first line of defence in any invasion or insurrection. The Imperial Fleet also transports the billions of soldiers, incalculable tonnes of food, wargear and munitions required to fight the Emperor's foes.



THE NAVIS NOBILITE

Passage-makers, Bearers of the Third Eye.

The Navis Nobilite, also known as the Navigator Houses, make up the Terra-based organisation from whence come Navigators. One of the few sanctioned breeds of mutant, Navigators pilot human starships through the roiling madness of Warp space. The leader of all the great families of the Navigators is the Paternova, the most powerful of his kind – though he can never leave the Palace of Navigators. Chief amongst the servants of the Paternova is the Paternoval Envoy, a position that is granted a seat as one of the High Lords of Terra.



PLANETARY GOVERNORS

They rule in his name.

Individual planets are ruled by local leaders who hold nominal membership in the Adeptus Terra with the (often hereditary) title of Imperial Commander. Their responsibilities may be likened to feudal lords: they must provide troops for the Imperial Guard, they must maintain order over their domain, they must carry out the Imperial decrees and they must pay all tithes levied upon them by the Administratum. Although bound to the Adeptus Terra, an Imperial Commander is essentially an independent ruler. So long as quotas are met, he is free to reign in any manner he chooses; hence, the wide variety in styles of rulers between different planets or systems.



ROGUE TRADERS

The hand that draws the map.

Most of the galaxy remains unexplored – unknown, but ripe with resources the Imperium can harness. Such is the duty of the Rogue Trader. Licensed and equipped to explore the uncharted regions of the galaxy and beyond, the Rogue Trader is the Emperor's emissary to the unknown. He holds full authority to negotiate, barter, subjugate or utterly destroy in pursuit of feeding the Imperium's rapacious appetites for information, territory, alien artefacts and raw materials.



EMPIRE AMONG THE STARS

There is no greater mystery in the galaxy than the strange and foreboding dimension known as the Warp. It is at once a great boon, allowing the Imperium's spacecraft and communications to travel hitherto unimaginable distances quickly, and it is also a living nightmare – a haunted realm where evil and predatory things watch and wait. For good or ill, Humanity's ultimate fate is tied to that shadowy domain.

The greatest human colonisation of the galaxy began many thousands of years before the Age of the Imperium, when it was discovered that it was possible to breach an alternative dimension, known as Warp space, the Immaterium or simply the Warp. It became possible for ships to be propelled into and through this realm, which soon led to faster than light, interstellar travel.

The sheer mind-boggling impossibility of the Warp defies explanation, and those who attempt to delve further into understanding its ways inevitably slip into madness. Of the little that is known is that Warp space does not conform to the laws of physics as we know them. As a result, a ship that enters the Immaterium can cover the equivalent of many thousands of light years of distance within a relatively short time, dropping back into realspace far away from their point of origin. Thus, a journey that would take many dozens of centuries in realspace can be traversed in a matter of weeks through the Warp.

Despite the obvious uses, however, the Immaterium is a dangerous place that is never entered lightly, for there are many hazards that can wreck spacecraft or carry them far off course. There are patches of unexpected turbulence, intense storms and mysterious eddies that can trap a ship in the repetitious loops of eternity. Even slight miscalculations can cause bizarre and inexplicable results, exposing passengers to madness, mutations and jumps forwards or backwards in time. These threats, though considerable, are nothing compared to the greater and unimaginable dangers that lurk in Warp space.

To better understand these dangers, it is necessary to realise two important truths about the nature of the Warp. Firstly, the Immaterium is composed entirely of emotion and psychic energy. It is this energy that a psyker draws upon to use his powers, channelling the otherworldly forces to send telepathic messages hurtling to far distant worlds, or to propel a psychic bolt of energy against a foe. Secondly, Warp space is not an empty void, but an infinite and incomprehensible realm inhabited by many strange entities, the most powerful and dangerous of which are the four Great Gods of Chaos – Khorne, Tzeentch, Nurgle and Slaanesh – and their legions of Daemons.

Daemons are destruction and anarchy incarnate and they lust after the flesh, blood and very souls of living creatures. They want only to destroy, to drag any living essence they can capture back to their shadowy realm, to obliterate the material universe and engulf it within Warp space. Fortunately for Mankind, this is difficult to accomplish. Daemons

cannot easily leave the Immaterium and can only do so when they find gateways that bridge the gap between their dread domain and realspace. Such coveted gateways exist, but are rare.

The most vulnerable portals linking the Immaterium with the material galaxy are human psykers. A psyker's mind registers visibly in the Warp, and by using his powers, a psyker opens up a bridge between reality and that uncanny realm, a path that a Daemon can follow back to the psyker himself, and into realspace. Without a great will or the benefits of training, there is little protection against such prowlings, and the effect on the psyker is horrific. Sometimes it takes the form of massive physical changes, distorting and twisting their bodies in an orgy of destruction. Insidious and cunning, other Daemons possess their subjects more subtly and use them to inveigle themselves into human society, keeping their true nature hidden while they nurture plots to further their own ends. Luckily, Daemons cannot exist for long in the material universe without the unnatural energies of the Warp to sustain them. Chaos entities will therefore seek to enlarge any rifts, prolonging the amount of time they can exist there. To this end, dark entities reach out from the Warp, whispering in the ears of the weak and impure, calling Men to heresy and sowing the seeds of corruption.

Such are the dangers of the Warp – at once a boon and an unimaginable horror. Without the ability to travel through Warp space, the Imperium would collapse and Mankind would fall victim to the endless perils that threaten to destroy it. Without psykers, the whole system of astrotelepathy would be non-existent and each planet would be cut off, unable to heed warnings or call for aid. Only the Warp allows the far-flung fleets and armies of the Imperium to be coordinated and moved against its enemies; it is essential to the Imperium's very existence. Yet the Warp also represents the most hostile of realms and the direst of all threats. So all-pervading and profound are the dangers harboured in Warp space that those in the Imperium who understand the perils keep that knowledge a closely guarded secret. Only a few truly realise what dangers await Humanity just beyond the veil of realspace. For so grim is the outlook, so complete is the annihilation that lurks in the Immaterium, that were men to realise the immensity of their enemy, it would drive them to anarchy and madness.



VOYAGES THROUGH THE IMMATERIUM

Man's ability to exploit the Warp has resulted in their many crusade-like expansions that have, over the millennia, periodically swept out from Terra, penetrating all the way to the outer reaches of the galaxy. In terms of the star systems and planets under its control, the Imperium is by far the largest empire – indeed the worlds under its dominion are dotted across the galaxy, some clustered together, others far-flung outposts scattered across the frontiers of wilderness space. Yet as massive as the Imperium has grown, it can not exert control over the whole galaxy, nor even claim the majority of the habitable systems encompassed within its borders. Within the large unexplored tracts, there are many things to be discovered – natural resources beyond imagination, lost human colonies and the ruins of long dead races waiting to be explored. The galaxy also contains many alien civilisations ruling smaller and less coherent empires of their own.

The staggered pattern of human settlement undoubtedly owes much to the nature of space travel through the Immaterium. Because of the turbulent nature of Warp space, some parts of the galaxy are harder to reach than others. Violent currents of movement within the Warp isolate some zones, requiring circuitous routes to reach them or, at the worst, making any nearby travel impossible until one of the unpredictable lulls momentarily stills the region. More bizarre still, some parts of Warp space act like power vortices, sucking helpless spacecraft to their doom and tearing them apart with impossible forces.

Over time, Mankind has learned to, at least partially, navigate the Warp. This has been achieved only at great cost and with great daring, yet Warp travel has allowed Humanity to colonise many distant areas and then to move vast quantities of troops to where they are needed in order to defend their widely strewn realm. When it comes to space travel, the advantage Humanity enjoys over the other, more Warp-restricted, races is born of three factors: the technology of the Adeptus Mechanicus, the steering ability of the Navigators, and the guiding light of the Astronomican. The first is the maintenance of ancient technology by the Adeptus Mechanicus; the Tech-Priests of Mars preserve the lore of ancient science on behalf of the Adeptus Terra. By engaging their Warp engines, spacecraft can enter or exit the nebulous realm of the Immaterium with a degree of reliability. The second factor is the existence of Navigators – a race apart which has been specially bred to pilot a ship within Warp space. Their third eye is sensitive to the tides and currents of the Immaterium, enabling them to manoeuvre their ships through the roiling madness to their eventual destinations. The third factor that makes Warp travel possible is the powerful psychic beacon called the Astronomican. Broadcast from Holy Terra by a choir of psykers and focused by the Emperor's will, this beacon reaches through Warp space allowing Navigators to follow its guiding light or plot courses through the directionless murk of endless Chaos. Without the Astronomican, not even

the most powerful of Navigators could pilot a ship or plot a course for the immense voyages required to cross but a quarter of the breadth of the Imperium.

In essence, the realm of the Imperium of Man is defined by the reach of the psychic beacon of the Astronomican, the great Light of Terra. Should a Navigator attempt Warp travel outside the great radius from which the Astronomican can be seen, he must do so in utter blindness, greatly increasing the risk of mishap or madness, or a fate worse than either. At great distances, the Light of the Emperor is not visible. This limitation produces areas such as the Eastern Fringe or the Ghoul Stars, vast regions that are largely unexplored, save by a few Rogue Traders who have used conventional space travel to probe beyond where the Astronomican can reach. What waits for Mankind out in that blackness is unknown...

Few of the alien races encountered by Mankind access the Warp. This reduces the reach of their space travel and therefore the size of the realms they control. Those few races that do dare the Immaterium do so less reliably than Mankind, utilising endless corrective manoeuvres to travel even short distances, or trusting to guesswork to reach their destination. For instance, the brutal alien race known as Orks can sometimes achieve the technology to enter Warp space, but without anything like Navigators or the guiding Astronomican, their methods of steering can be described as haphazard at best. While Orks are the most prolific of the galactic races encountered by Humanity, their limited and random use of Warp travel usually prevents their individual empires from fully uniting to match the might of the Imperium.



NAVIGATORS

Navigators are a stable breed of human mutants whose existence predates the Imperium by many thousands of years. Founded some time during the Age of Technology, the Navis Nobilite, or Navigator Houses, survived through the Age of Strife to the present day, where they currently thrive as a vital part of the Imperium.

Navigators have unique physiques, some of which can be quite varied and extreme, but all are marked by a third eye in the middle of their foreheads. It is this orb that is the key to their power and value, for it is used to see the shifting currents of the Warp, enabling a Navigator to steer a spacecraft through the maelstrom of madness that is the Immaterium. The mutation is neither spontaneous nor natural, but rather the result of ancient genetic experimentation and engineering. Amongst humans, only Navigators can pilot spacecraft through the Warp with any reliable degree of direction. Without Navigators, the Imperium would fragment into thousands of separate stellar empires, each only a few dozen light years across, whose spacecraft would be obliged to risk many tiny, blind jumps to cover any great distance of interstellar space.

++ The Emperor's Command illuminates the galaxy. ++



Cocooned within the cold confines of the ship's command deck, Navigator Stillmar lay perfectly still. He was only dimly aware of the darkened stasis cell around him, surrounded as he was by the humming energy fields and the oppressive psi-shields that separated him from the rest of the venerable spacecraft, the Pride of Noctress. This was the final barrier between him and the creatures of the Warp should they ever manage to breach the outer hull. It was best, thought Stillmar, not to dwell on such things, for once in Warp-transit, fear was his worst enemy. Fear alone could cause his ship to deviate in

its trajectory so that when they re-entered realspace, it would be thousands of light years off course, or worse. During his years of training, he had repeatedly learned that fear was the gateway by which the creatures of the Warp could enter his mind, so Stillmar cast aside his morbid thoughts and doubts to instead concentrate on the roaring passage of the Immaterium around the ship's outer stasis envelope.

As he returned to his trance-like state, Stillmar's third eye opened. Once more he could see the strange but familiar flowing of the Warp, sensing the waves the Pride of Noctress made as it traversed the shadow realm of the Immaterium. Stillmar could feel the elongated tear drop shape of the Gellar field that surrounded them and the Warp closing in behind the ship, leaving eddies of current spinning into the blackness. Amidst those eddies, he could hear vague things made real by the thoughts of the crew, incorporeal hopes and fears embodied within the Warp and then sloughed away by the ship's own passage. For a moment, Stillmar could hear his own voice calling to him, a thin cry of warning and terror, 'Go back, go back' before it was swallowed forever.

Stillmar was used to such things; his own ghosts had long since ceased to unnerve him. He often wondered, however, what happened to the drifting and congealed emotions given form by his own mind? Did they simply dissolve back into the Warp, as was commonly supposed, or did they wander forever? If so, what were they like, these creatures which were dragged into life by the countless random processes of his subconscious? Sometimes a ship encountered tides of ghostly things that clawed and scrambled at their Gellar fields, making the Warp engines scream. Were these the same kind of creatures, given life by millennia of passing ships and cast adrift on the currents of the Immaterium? What was it they wanted? What drew them with such frenetic energy towards the spacecraft?

Stillmar knew he was being distracted and also knew it was best not to follow any of the spectres too closely with his mind-sense. Doing so could cause the ship to drift off course and, perhaps more ominously, it allowed him to feel the shadows of other, more predatory things lurking at the periphery of the ship's passage. What these apparitions were, he did not know, but their presence filled the Navigator with such a dire sense of foreboding and dread that only a strict regimen of hymnals and a rigorous cleansing of his mind could restore his confidence.

Although Stillmar did not know what those entities out in the Warp could be – he knew they were drawn to him and his ship and could not shake the feeling that they were stalking them like voracious beasts following a blood trail.



THE WORLDS OF THE IMPERIUM

Spread across the galaxy are over a million planets colonised in the name of the Imperium. To ease some of the problems inherent in running an empire across such great distances, the Imperium is divided into five segmentums, which in turn are broken down into numerous sectors and sub-sectors. Some planets are well connected to other Imperial worlds or, in rare cases, part of a united star system such as the Realm of Ultramar or the stellar systems surrounding Terra. Many Imperial worlds are clustered around regions of space more easily accessible through the Warp, often branching out from prime planets that serve as key travel or communications hubs. These worlds and their colonies form tightly-knit alliances for trade purposes and mutual protection. The majority of inhabited worlds, however, are separated from the greater Imperium by immense voids of distance, patchy histories of isolation and cultures grown (or regressed) in disparate directions.

The exact number of planets inhabited by the Imperium is not precisely known as, given the immense distances, communication issues and the volatile nature of the galaxy, even if a thorough census could be completed, it would be obsolete soon after it had begun. New planets are colonised on the many frontiers all the time, yet it can take hundreds of years for that information to filter back to Terra. In that time, the new territory could have expanded further or been attacked and wiped out. Suns die, Warp rifts open and countless isolated worlds fall to the predatory xenos species that hunt throughout the galaxy. It is not uncommon for Imperial fleets to arrive at a planet's coordinates to find a once teeming world transformed into a blasted and barren landscape, or once advanced civilisations reduced to feral hunters. Warp storms, daemoninc incursions, stellar phenomena, alien invasions and more can make a mockery of the piled datascrolls tediously archived and studied by legions of scribes. So why do the relentless cogs of the Imperium grind on, forever collecting and cataloguing the data? This indelible drive stems from Terra itself, for naught in the Imperium is more important than the collection of tithes.

The Imperium is constantly at war, and each of the segmentums contains dozens of raging war zones, to say nothing of countless planetary raids, xenos probes, rebellions and other threats untold. Only by continuous and aggressive recruiting can the demand for the armed services be met, and in the midst of ongoing campaigns, even harsher measures are employed to replace high numbers of casualties. On the most war-torn planets, the entire population is destined for a military life; the recruiting and birth rates are synonymous. The need for resources to arm and equip the fleets and armies of the Imperium is unceasing, and untold billions of Imperial citizens toil endlessly simply to keep pace with the endless demands. Only by tithing – a charge on manpower levied upon every colonised planet – can the Imperium continue to exist, holding at bay its many enemies while simultaneously seeking new worlds and resources to conquer.

THE IMPERIAL TITHE

Also called Terra's Due or the Grand Harvest, the Imperial Tithe is a complicated contract worked out according to each planet's ability to pay. A great many branches of the Adeptus Administratum are involved in the process, and different organisations might be tasked with sacred duties such as assessing tithe rates, measuring collections, and monitoring any fluctuations. It is the duty of each planetary governor to ensure the Imperial Tithe is paid. Such ministrations are tyrannically enforced, but as long as all tithe responsibilities are met and enemies of the Imperium are rejected, a planetary governor may rule his planet in any fashion he sees fit with little or no interference. In return for this fealty, the planetary governor can call upon the Adeptus Terra in times of need to request aid. Over the long centuries, many planets have established their own unique customs and traditions for how they supply their tithes. For instance, Vostroya, a manufacturing planet, supplies every firstborn son to service in the Imperial Guard, while the four planets of the Nepstrum system take volunteers from the established family-holds for the Imperial Navy and press-gang the remaining numbers from the worker class.

Failure to deliver the Imperial Tithe is met with harshly. Even the slightest breach in protocol will often result in the execution of the planetary governor and a swift and thorough regime change. Despite the number of agencies tracking tithes, sometimes it takes time for discrepancies to surface and be acted upon. This is inevitable given the difficulties of space travel and communications, to say nothing of the vast bureaucracy within each of the many organisations that make up the Adeptus Administratum. Once tithe anomalies are spotted, however, the Imperium moves with brutal finality. None can say how many worlds' rulers are unfairly replaced due to minor accounting errors, but the Imperium is at war, battling not for planets or even star systems, but for the survival of the human race itself.



++ The Universe has a cold, unforgiving heart and cares not for the lives of men.

++



THE CULLING

In addition to manpower, there is one more all-important part of the Imperial Tithe imposed upon every world colonised by Mankind. It is Imperial law that each planet must keep its population free of psykers, though, depending on the world and the abilities they manifest, they are also known as witches, cultists, mutants, precognistics, mindmovers, telepaths, pyrocasters, projectors, sunderers and more. As in all aspects of governance, how this tithe is met is up to each planetary governor and therefore methods vary widely. Many choose harsh repression – planet-wide witch-hunts, in which the undesired individuals are labelled as contagious heretics that are dangerous to know or harbour, leaving them nowhere to hide. Other planets employ even less savoury approaches. Regardless of method, when the Black Ships arrive, a planet must yield up its psykers for collection so they might be assessed and dealt their fate.



PLANETARY TYPES

Over the long ages of their journeys through the stars, Mankind has colonised all manner of worlds. Humanity has claimed ownership over cold, airless rocks, sweltering lush worlds that teem with myriad life forms and nearly everything in-between. During the Age of Technology, colonies were even founded upon hitherto uninhabitable orbs, such as gaseous giants where settlements were anchored amidst the endless mists, tethering vast cities miles above endless storms. While the secrets to taming such inhospitable environments have been lost to wars, catastrophes, or the erosion of time, there are still many worlds that cling to existence thanks to ancient and much revered (if little understood) machinery. The life giving hab-domes upon the fire-riven world of Surtur or the immense atmosphere sifters that make the poison air of the Aspian Moons breathable, are prime examples of this.

Yet planets do not differ just in their environments, such variances as founding dates, technological advancements or the amount of contact with other life forms also serve to widen the differences. As an example, Pizarro is a recently settled Imperial outpost attempting to colonise a verdant new world on the edge of unexplored space. It has little in common with Heraclea, a planet founded during the dawn of space travel, a worn out

world that has plundered all its resources and rebuilt itself many times over during its history, which stretches beyond record. Save for their mutual worship of the God-Emperor and payment of Imperial Tithes, the people of the two planets would share little in common. From wild frontiers full of lawless savagery and the unexplored, to ancient civilisations with cultures so refined that every nuance of speech carries meaning beyond translation – all are part of the Imperium.

There are many branches of the Adeptus Administratum tasked with classifying the colonised planets. Some use numeric systems, others simplify worlds into broad environmental categories, or base ratings on history, level of industry, accessibility through Warp space, percentages of psykers or other endless variables. By cross referencing such data, it should be possible to gain an accurate portrait of a planet, but the Administratum offices are large and disconnected, most not even realising that the others exist. There are few who can navigate such labyrinthine complexities to access the data and so, often, decisions are made with what scant information can be gathered. Entire armies have been sent to war zones not knowing the climate of their assigned planet, or even if it has breathable air, yet the political history, religious cults or mutation rates of their target might be exhaustively detailed in long datascrolls.



FORGE WORLDS

Forge worlds are the domain of the Adeptus Mechanicus, planets dedicated to heavy industry and the superstitious religion of science. Known as the Priesthood of Mars, the Adeptus Mechanicus arose from the original factory hive built upon Mars, and the heart of their order, as well as the Fabricator General, still reside there. Over long millennia of expansions, other forge worlds have been established, such as Goethe Majoris and Lucius, and all such planets are wonders of the galaxy. Wreathed in pollution, they are places where the technological secrets of Terra's past are hoarded. They are covered in thousands of years of built-up progress, continent-sized machine factories, volcanic furnaces and the workshop-fortresses of the Titan Legions.

The Adeptus Mechanicus supply print outs of STCs, or Standard Template Constructs, so lesser factory worlds can churn out the standard weaponry for the Imperium, yet none of them can match the quality and quantity of a forge world's output. There, revered designs have survived since the Age of Technology and are followed, using proscribed mystic rites and invocations, to craft wondrous weapons and the most advanced equipment used by the Imperium. They are responsible for crafting tanks, fleets of battleships and even the mechanical behemoths known as Titans.

Every machine on a forge world is watched over and repaired by Tech-Priests who intone the blessings of the Omnissiah – the Machine God – with every strike of their hammers or turn of their wrenches. Notoriously secretive, the Adeptus Mechanicus rarely permit outsiders upon its coveted forge worlds, although Tech-Priests do venture out to provide the Imperium with technical expertise, as well as to explore for themselves, forever seeking lost technology, forgotten since the dreadful Age of Strife.



UNIMAGINABLE SCALE

The scale of the Imperium and the grandeur of its enormity is unmatched by the realms of any other race in the galaxy. Due to its vast magnitude, the Imperium can afford for entire worlds to become specialised places where a majority, perhaps even the entirety, of the population is devoted to a single task. This could be heavy industry, military training, manufacturing, mining or agriculture. Planet-wide dedication serves to simplify logistics and increase outputs. On one of these so-called agri-worlds, for example, the whole population toils to produce crops or breed creatures for food. Without the fertile plains of Delphenia, the beslimed leech fields of Grianah or a thousand others like them, whole sectors of the Imperium would suffer starvation.

Nowhere is the enormous scale of the Imperium better seen than in its monuments. Entire planets have been dedicated to commemorating great battles – the surfaces of these worlds are covered in statues, tombs for the fallen and triumphal arches. It is possible to see the Great Column, a titanic memorial on the planet Ultima Macharius, from a high orbit. It is a monumental site dedicated to the high point of Lord Solar Macharius' crusade – at the time of its capture from xenos, the planet was the Imperial holding most distant from Holy Terra.

One of the most widely known planetary classifications is that of hive world. These long-settled planets have become so built up and populated that they are marked by vast, continent-spanning cities that reach high into the skies, with levels literally built atop previous foundations. These building practices have gone on for so long that lower levels are no longer recognisable, with architecture and technology from eras long forgotten, sometimes even proving to be of xenos-build. The fact that their own hive was built atop ancient ruins overtaken by their ancestors has passed out of knowledge. Not all hive worlds go upwards; others descend many dozens of miles into the ground, the surface world remaining unseen for so long it is considered legend. Some hive worlds, such as Armageddon, have many different urban conglomerations separated by swathes of polluted wastelands, while others, like Megheim, have the entire surface encased in towering edifices.

The massive populations of hive worlds periodically become unmanageable, as the masses boil over against their constant repression. Such bustling mega-cities are always rife with anarchic and destructive forces that ensure only the hardest can survive. Yet this too works for the Imperium, for their tithes supply rich sources of fighting men for the Imperial Guard.

The majority of the Imperium's planets are self-sufficient, as they are so regularly cut off by the vagaries of Warp travel that they have to be. Many of these defy broad categorisation, such as Cyclopean Prime – a colossal planet a hundred times the size of Terra. It is so vast that its full rotation takes over 12 Terran years, creating extreme climatic circumstances that change from frozen plains of ice to blazing arid deserts over the course of a rotation. Scattered across its hundreds of enormous continents are hive

cities, industrial zones and grainfields, all configured against the inevitable changes in weather. Or consider how the planet of Ferroxiann would be listed – it is a mining world full of the purest ores, yet its environment is so harsh that it also serves as a penal planet; working in its deadly confines is a cruel torture considered worse than death.

Some planets aren't classified by their environs, but rather by their technology. It is not uncommon to enter zones once cut off by Warp storms to discover badly regressed Imperial planets – so-called feral worlds – which have, through warfare, long isolation or disaster, reverted to barbarism. Most people of such planets have forgotten the Imperium, or if they remember, have reduced it to an apocryphal tale or legend of warriors who came from the skies. On the most deteriorated planets, Mankind is at its most primitive, using stone-tipped spears, whilst other worlds have perhaps advanced to medieval levels. Decline is common, although there are a few bright points, such as the progressive electro-societies of Zaxxis or the chem-savvy founders of Prassium. Regardless of how backwards a planet might be, it is still assigned a planetary governor. Often, in such cases, these rulers prefer to live in seclusion, although some stride their realms like living gods, cowering the superstitious natives with their technology and weaponry. So long as the tithes are paid, the Imperium cares not.

Sometimes a world is too dangerous to colonise, but its potential for exploitation is too high for the Imperium to ignore. This is true of the hollow world of Haxan Prime and the plague-ridden planet of Gonomondium. For now, the resources and mysterious secrets of those planets are out of reach, either wreathed in acidic vapours or contaminated by virulent disease, which prevents planetfall. These quarantined worlds, of which there are no small number, are placed under surveillance or even blockaded to prevent any intruders getting in, or any of their secrets getting out, until such a time as the Imperium can properly utilise them. Naturally, such information has a way of getting lost, resulting in horrible colonisation accidents.



DEATH WORLDS

Death worlds are planets deemed by the Adeptus Administratum classification system as too dangerous to support conventional human settlements. The death world label could be applied for many reasons, most likely because of atmospheric reasons, the landscape, or the ecosystem. One of the best known of all death worlds is Catachan, a planet infamous for its continent-spanning jungles and myriad forms of particularly ferocious carnivorous life. It is almost as if all the biomass of the planet has turned into some sort of man-eating creature. Amidst the countless predators, some have attained legendary status across the galaxy, such as the Catachan Devil, a monstrous insectoid whose

savage exploits are the stuff of nightmare. Yet anyone who has seen a brain leaf in action, or witnessed the venus mantrap, knows that it is not just the fauna on the planet that is deadly, for even the flora eagerly hunts the human population. The death world known as Praxeti, however, is not infested with maneaters; its danger takes a different form. It is a blasted rockscape riven with ion storms so powerful that they can shatter metal. Other death world threats are stranger still – the living planet of Croatoa, the psychic storms of Sycorax, or Cesstium's vampiric condensation, to name but a few.

Many death worlds have some intrinsic value – either strategic or mineral – that necessitates the provisioning of outposts or other exploratory facilities. Thus, despite the name, many death worlds support at least some measure of human population. However, living in such harsh environments is inevitably harsh and dangerous, and life expectancies are notoriously short. Those humans who do manage to eke out an existence on a death world are natural born survivors, hardened to the cruelty of the galaxy at a young age, and because of this, they make ideal recruits for any number of the branches of the armed forces of the Imperium.



IN THE DEPTHS OF SPACE

The Imperium is not made solely of planets and star systems. Defensive emplacements and man-made stations of all sorts are scattered about the galaxy, floating freely in space and guarding against alien onslaught. Most often, these bases are in close proximity to Imperial planets, although some protect the more commonly used routes between them. There are ancient and complex bases, artificial moons and doomsday bastions, as well as simple hazard zones made of asteroids chained together and kept in place by occasional thruster bursts.

In deep space, the Imperium also maintains battle stations – planet-sized ports that tether ships of the line. At various strategic points can be found larger starforts – the lynchpins of Imperial expansion since the days of the Great Crusade. Even further into the wilderness of the void drift an array of listening probes and exploratory stations. Across the galaxy, as far as the beam of the Astronomican can be seen, great exploratory fleets can be found, whole flotillas plumbing the dark depths, seeking to stake claims for the Imperium. To reap the mineral-rich nebula clouds and asteroids of new-found metals, mining stations are launched. Far from the light of any star, these space-faring rigs siphon off the great dust clouds for wealth or bolt themselves onto asteroids for dangerous mining operations.

DRIFTING MENACE

The airless vacuum of outer space is an unforgiving environment. Malfunctions, mutiny, pirate raids, or mishap can leave a ship adrift, its crew slain. For ships that utilise Warp space, the risks are multiplied a hundredfold. As the vastness of space and the perils of the Warp preclude most salvage operations, these lifeless vessels are often just left to float aimlessly. Over long millennia, the derelicts are moved by natural eddies until they are swallowed by Warp storms – the colossal furies that periodically erupt out of the Immaterium. The energies of those titanic tempests crush everything together and the resultant mangle of ships, space stations, asteroids and detritus is known in the Imperium as a space hulk. Some space hulks are small, perhaps only a few ships compacted together, while others are vast conglomerates larger than many moons. Space hulks wander on unpredictable currents, sometimes dropping out of the Warp to materialise in realspace for a short time, before winking away once more. Such drifting derelicts are hard sought after, for they can be treasure troves – rich bounties whose cores might date from the Age of Technology, or perhaps contain cargo holds full of xenos mechanisms from long lost civilisations. The lure is strong, but not for the unwary, for many space hulks have picked up unwanted passengers, becoming lairs for monstrous things.



EXTERMINATUS

The order for Exterminatus is a death knell for a world, a last resort for the direst of situations. It calls for the complete eradication of all life on a planet. Such a command can only come from the highest ranks of the Imperium – a Space Marine Chapter Master, Lord High Admiral of the Imperial Navy, Lord Commander of the Imperial Guard or an Inquisitor.

It is a grim measure, and the orders unleashing such catastrophic destruction are only issued when the threat is so prevalent that no solution or redemption can be seen. It has been used to combat planet-wide heresy, rampant, uncontrollable mutation or disease, to prevent the opening or widening of Warp rifts, or when xenos are so entrenched that the resources (population included) are beyond salvation.

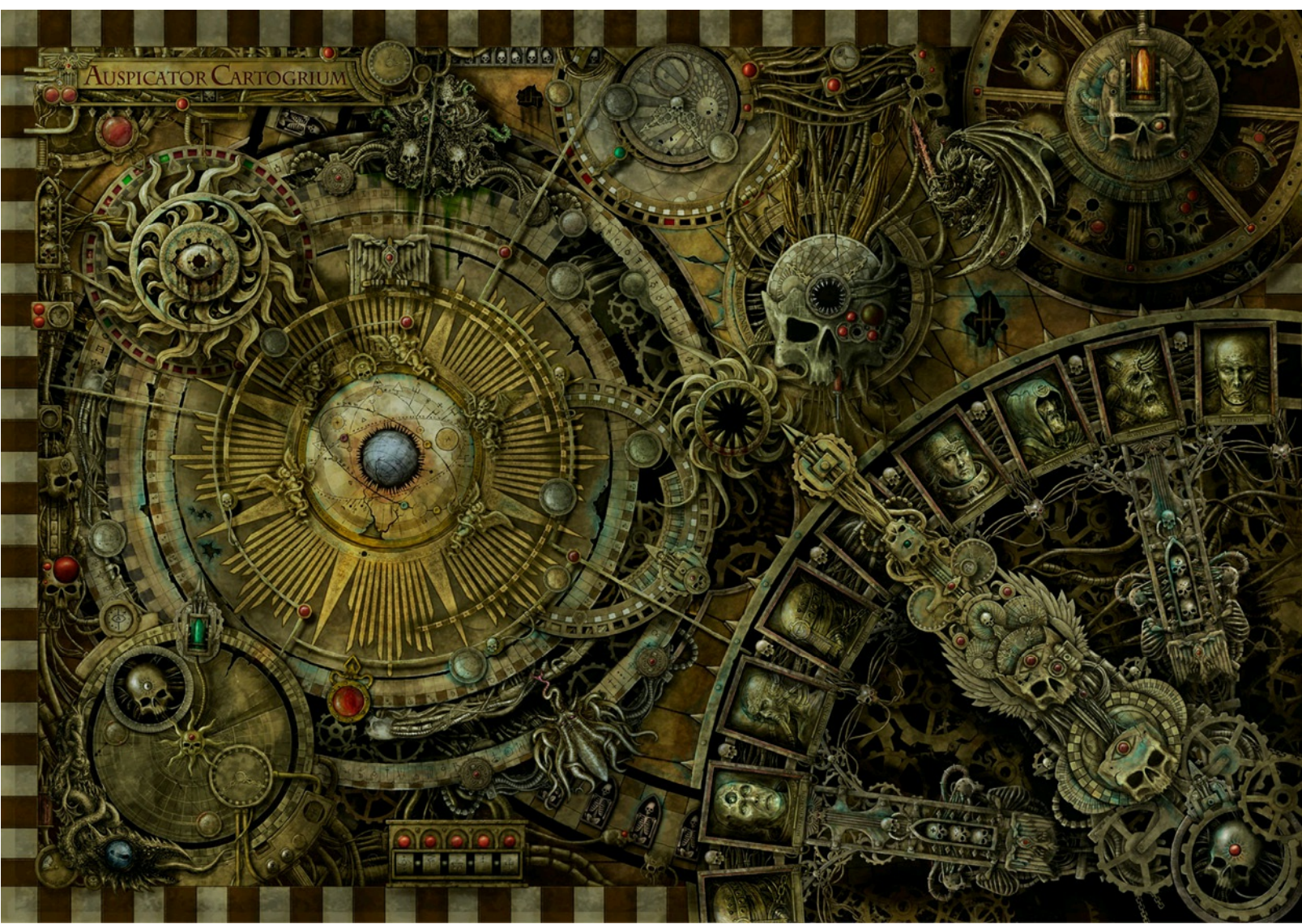
The methods of delivering this ultimate sanction vary depending on the source of the order and the organisation that delivers the sentence, but all are equally uncompromising. The Adeptus Astartes tend towards delivering an Exterminatus device to the planet's surface. Such a mission takes the carefully picked kill team right to the heart of the foe, where they can ensure the absolute death of the world. By contrast, the Imperial Navy prefer sustained bombardments, using battleships to hammer the world until its very structure collapses. The grim corvettes of the Inquisition favour esoteric weapons such as cyclonic torpedoes and atmospheric incinerators.





“Some may question your right to destroy ten billion people. Those who understand realise that you have no right to let them live.”





THE ECCLESIARCHY

Necessity and fear alone cannot bind a million planets together, and from the earliest days of the Imperium, many have tried to unite Mankind through faith. From a small cult full of superstitious and zealous disciples, the organisation known as the Ecclesiarchy has grown to provide the state religion for the whole of the Imperium. A force unto itself, the Ecclesiarchy has now spread into nearly every facet of Imperial life.

It was recognised long ago that the man known as the Emperor was something extraordinary, and as he led Humanity back to the stars, he was much venerated as a leader and visionary. On the most regressive planets rediscovered during the Great Crusade, no few of the primitive peoples considered the Emperor to be a living god – a fiery saviour that came from the skies. On others, his coming heralded the fulfilment of ancient prophecies. After his battle with Horus and subsequent incarceration atop the Golden Throne, the Emperor became the object of open worship even on so-called civilised planets.

The culmination of the civil war known as the Horus Heresy not only robbed Mankind of

the Emperor's physical guidance, it brought about other changes as well. In addition to the devastation brought about by so many years of war, there was general panic in the newborn Imperium, a fear of traitors within Humanity's midst and growing trepidation for the warping powers of beyond. Suddenly, the bright light that the leader of Mankind had worked so hard to rekindle was replaced with worry, suspicion and dread. Once again, the far-flung empire felt vulnerable. Into this vacuum came a new reassurance of faith.

Over the tumultuous decades following the Horus Heresy, many prophets rose up throughout the Imperium citing visions and revelations regarding the Emperor, and cults dedicated to his worship began appearing everywhere. These sects differed in practice, interpreting the now-silent Emperor's will in myriad ways, but they were all united by their deification of the Emperor and the proliferation of the principles of human survival that he had instigated in the creation of the Imperium. Concerning mutants, psykers and aliens, anything that stood in the way of Humanity's future was to be destroyed without mercy or hesitation.

As the vengeance campaign known as the Scouring swept back over the human-controlled parts of the galaxy, these new sects followed closely behind. Within a few hundred years of the Emperor's sacrifice, the multitude of smaller cults had been absorbed into the largest and strongest sects, the most powerful of which was known as the Ecclesiarchy, after its elected leader, the Ecclesiarch. This aggressive body grew so large and dominant over the years that, early in the 32nd Millennium, it gained the status of official religion of the Imperium and the concomitant title of Adeptus Ministorum.

THE OFFICIAL FOUNDING

The first official step of the Adeptus Ministorum was to tighten its control over the practices of the masses by persecuting any remaining cults that refused to amalgamate beneath its broad banner. Those who refused to join were declared unbelievers and the population was stirred to violence against them. The might of the Ecclesiarchy was such that it could call for vast Wars of Faith – military campaigns capable of overturning planets or whole systems. Often, this was done to further the Imperium's goals, ridding it of heretics, seditious unbelievers or alien subversion, but history is equally replete with examples of the Ecclesiarchy instigating bloody wars for its own gain. There have been many instances like the Grommoden Massacre, or the War of the Three Treasons that secured enough wealth to build the first of the shrine worlds. Lavish cathedrals, massive statues and monolithic triumphal arches heaped praise upon the almighty Emperor but, more importantly to many, these pivotal hub planets granted vast political sway and rich mineral resources. The Ecclesiarchy's influence spread throughout the Imperium and few dared to question its motives.

With the backing of the Adeptus Terra, the growing Ecclesiarchy increased its hold on Imperial citizens until, by the end of 33rd Millennium, there was no open worship in the Imperium save for that condoned by the Adeptus Ministorum. The only exceptions were

planets controlled by the Space Marines and the Adeptus Mechanicus, who were begrudgingly allowed to keep their unique traditions. This is still the case in the 41st Millennium, although in the long ages since, this has led to some distrust, strife and occasionally even open war between the differing parties.

THE HOLY MISSION

The servants of the Ecclesiarchy are fanatical in their quest to spread their religion. Given the size of the galaxy, the random nature of Warp storm isolation and the widely varied levels of cultural and technological advancement within the Imperium, the Adeptus Ministorum finds many belief systems already established on planets they visit for the first time. This is not an impediment for the Ecclesiarchy, for they have become adept at assimilating all manner of creeds into the Cult Imperialis – the worship of the Emperor. This might mean erecting great cathedrals to impress hardened hive-dwellers, or teaching the hunting tribes on feral worlds that the sun-god they worship is, in fact, the glorious light of the Emperor. The nuance of how the people bow before the Master of Mankind is not nearly as important as the act itself, and in this the Ecclesiarchy is content to play the long game. Their strategy, over time, reins in the more barbaric customs and gradually usurps complete religious control for themselves. Any local religions that resist bending before the might of the Ecclesiarchy are ruled heretical and are actively crushed by political or military means, whichever proves the most prudent.

ORGANISATION

The incumbent leader of the Adeptus Ministorum and spiritual head of Humanity is called the Ecclesiarch and, since the middle of the 32nd Millennium, he has had a seat as one of the High Lords of Terra. Below this is a convoluted chain of hierarchal positions that fluctuate based on political influence and wealth. The Ecclesiarch is elected from amongst the Cardinals, spiritual leaders of which there are many thousands, divided into various ranks. All of the Cardinals are invited to join the Holy Synod, the ruling council of the Adeptus Ministorum chaired by the Ecclesiarch. Otherwise, a Cardinal oversees a diocese, a district that can be as large as an entire star system.

A diocese is divided into parishes, each of which is centred on an Imperial shrine and run by a Preacher. Especially vigorous Preachers are anointed as Confessors, free-roaming zealots who use their evangelical platform to agitate the crowds that turn up to hear them. Under the spell of an Arch-Confessor, swathes of citizens will rush forwards to confess their personal heresies, reveal their hideous mutations and betray their comrades as psykers or other untrustworthy deviants. In addition, there are Pontifices, Deacons, Relic-keepers, Shrouded Cenobites, Chapel-masters and more. There is a strict hierarchy, but the reality is not necessarily straightforward, as lesser titles in a larger diocese can outweigh loftier positions elsewhere.

A Missionary is a particularly fervent individual who finds himself at the forefront of

Imperial expansion. Sent to rediscovered worlds or to accompany a crusading army, it is his task to bring the Emperor's light to lost civilisations. Once settled upon a new world, Missionaries often open and run an institution, typically a hospital or school, in places where such things are rare or unknown. Such good deeds are not done without an ulterior purpose. Missionaries are excellent recruiters and ideally positioned to observe a local population, granting them the ability to keep watch for signs of genetic deviation, cultural pollution, alien influence or witchcraft. Perhaps the most famous Missions are the Schola Progenium, orphanages established to train the children of those Imperial officials who have given their lives in service. Their orthodox teachings create particularly loyal citizens, and many go on to have careers as officers or Commissars in the Imperial Guard. Some will drift towards becoming Preachers or Missionaries themselves, and a few will even rise to the rank of Inquisitor.

Since the upheaval caused during the Age of Apostasy, the Adeptus Ministorum's military wing has been the Adepta Sororitas, also known as the Sisters of Battle. It is these fiery and zealous female warriors who form the spearhead of the Wars of Faith, and are the frontline of defence for the many shrine worlds of the Adeptus Ministorum.



++ *Beyond the Emperor's reach lies only darkness and despair.* ++

BEGINNING OF THE END

++ Do not waste your tears. I was not born to watch the world grow dim. Life is not measured in years but by the deeds of men. ++

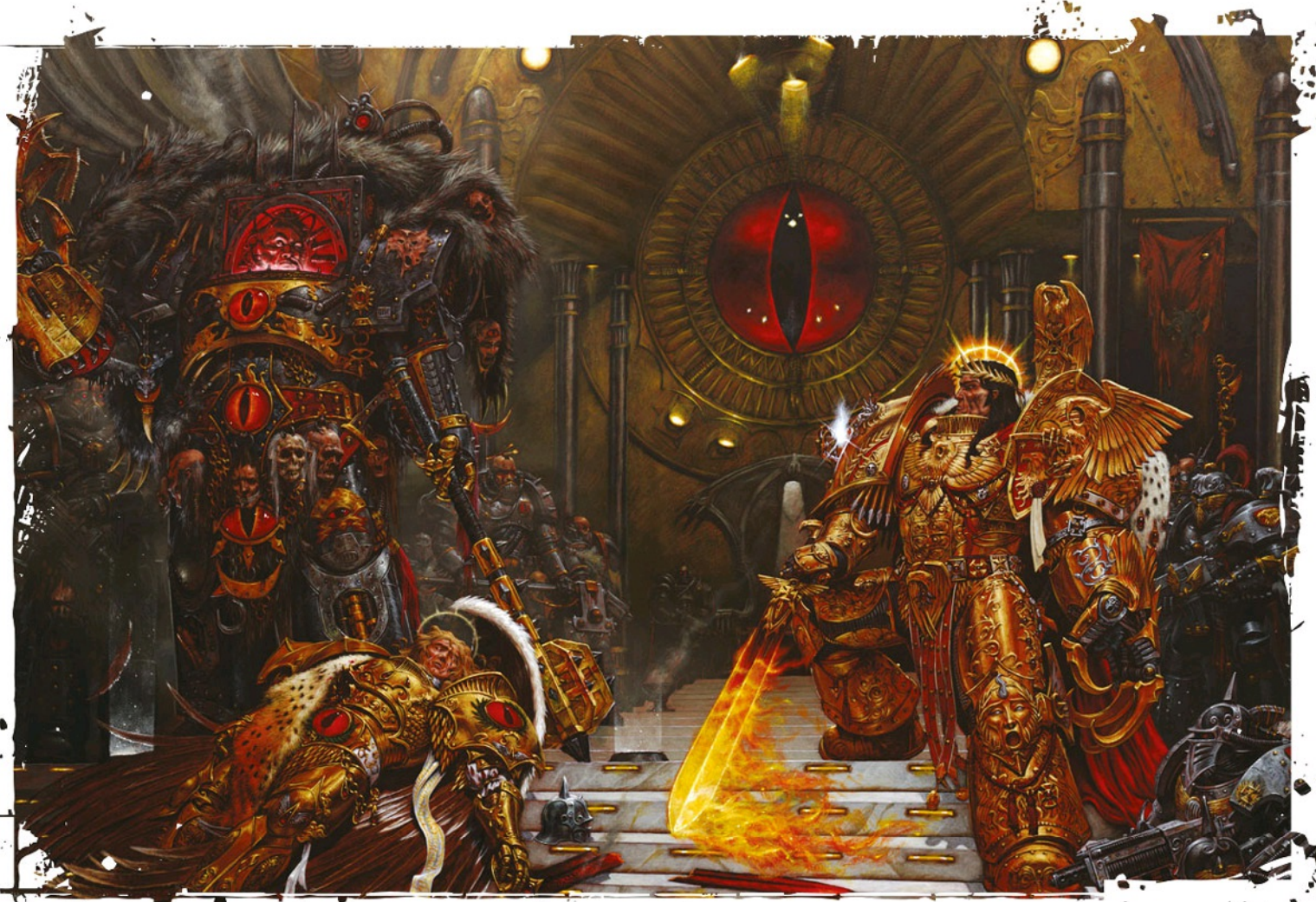
During the time now regarded as the Age of Strife, the far-flung colonies of the human race were isolated by Warp storms of unprecedented ferocity. Thousands of years passed in which limited or no Warp travel was possible, causing Mankind to become hopelessly fragmented. Many planets fell to alien predators and outlying worlds sank to the levels of base barbarism. As the Warp storms finally abated, many changes were set in motion that rippled across both realspace and the Immaterium. A new era was beginning...

When the Warp finally settled enough to once again allow travel, the time was right for one to rise up and lift Mankind from out of the anarchy of a bleak and regressive age. The man who came to be known as the Emperor had long foreseen and prepared for this moment and he emerged to unify the warring factions of Terra, the cradle of Humanity. Next, the Emperor stretched out his hand to reconcile with the estranged Tech-Priests of Mars. With their help, he rearmed his newly created Space Marine Legions, and they strove outwards to bring order again across the galaxy. Known as the Great Crusade, the Emperor's troops spread out from Terra, relentlessly reuniting old territories, expunging aliens and claiming new systems. It was they who once again united Mankind, laying claim to the largest empire in the galaxy. Thus began a new epoch for the race of Man, setting the stage for what would become the Age of the Imperium.

THE HORUS HERESY

This new dawn for Mankind, this expansive new era, was only just beginning when great sacrifice was demanded. Turning his back on the teachings of the Emperor, it was the Warmaster, Horus, the Emperor's most trusted and gifted commander, who committed the ultimate betrayal. Embracing the will of the Dark Gods and infused by their ruinous powers, the traitor Horus led a great rebellion that set the galaxy aflame with bitter civil war. A full third of the Imperium's forces joined Horus, including half of the Space Marine Legions. So it was that brother fought against brother, creating myths and grudges that exist to this day, for on both sides there strode warriors out of legend, and the very planets cracked apart beneath their titanic struggles. Seeking to slay the Emperor, the traitors carved their bloody way to Terra itself, investing the Emperor's Palace, howling their rage in an orgy of slaughter and war. Yet finally, heroically, the tables were turned and, at last, Horus was struck down – but not before he dealt the Emperor a mortal blow. The shattered body of the Emperor remained intact, however, held strong by his indomitable spirit until it could be interred within the recently-forged machinery of the Golden Throne.

There, deep within the Imperial Palace, towering banks of arcane technology sustain the Emperor's spirit to this day so that it can continue to watch over Humanity. Although his withered form is bound, the Emperor's psychic powers are unfettered and he is still the Master of Mankind and custodian of the human race.



NO VICTORY WITHOUT TOLL

Only the Emperor's mind is powerful enough to survive directing the raw forces supplied by the servants of the Adeptus Astronomica to shape the psychic beacon of the Astronomican. The same survivability does not hold true for those members of the Adeptus Astronomica themselves, for their fate is a sad one. The efforts of generating so much mental energy soon destroys them, leeching their souls and reducing them to empty husks. Many die every day, but they are not the only psykers who are asked to make the ultimate sacrifice, for the Emperor cannot eat as men eat, or drink or breathe air. His life has long since passed beyond the point where such things can sustain him and the only viable sustenance for the Emperor is human life force – souls – and he has an insatiable appetite.

Not just any human will suffice for the Emperor's table, for the donor must have psychic powers. Therefore, the Imperium is scoured by the vast flotillas of the Black Ships in a

tireless search for emergent psykers. During their long, crowded journey back to Terra, some of the psykers will be found to have the strength of mind to be recruited into the Adeptus Astra Telepathica or become trained by the Adeptus Astronomica, but many more will serve their Emperor in a more gruesome way. They are given wholly to the weird machinery that surrounds the Master of Mankind and their souls are siphoned, slowly and agonisingly, to feed his mighty spirit. Many hundreds, even thousands, must die in this way every day for the Emperor, the Imperium, and all of Humanity to survive.

The Emperor's dream of a new age of enlightenment, a time when Mankind was freed from superstition and ignorance, has turned into something far different. His Imperium has long endured, but only by virtue of an oppressive and necessarily harsh rule carried on his name. It is an age of tyrants and of unreason, an era of stagnation and intolerance. His people have regressed into religious obfuscation while the Emperor sits immobile, his thoughts unknown; the creature whose will extends over a million worlds is unable to lift a shrivelled finger.

THE AGE OF THE IMPERIUM

THE SCOURING

The bitter fighting of the Horus Heresy was only the beginning of a new age founded in blood, battle and the living enshrinement of the Emperor. After the death of their leader, Horus, the traitors splintered and dispersed, but many hard battles remained. It was the time of the Scouring and it demanded countless victories before the fledgling Imperium was wrested back from the brink of destruction. Eventually, the traitors and heretics that weren't destroyed outright fled before the vengeful wrath of the loyalist forces. Many made good their escape into unexplored space or disappeared into the Eye of Terror or other, lesser-known Warp rifts. In bitter exile, those who had turned to Chaos licked their wounds and cursed the Emperor, vowing one day to finish what they had started. Yet there was no time to rebuild the devastated Imperium, for in the wake of the devastation wrought by the Horus Heresy and the Scouring, Mankind found itself weakened and vulnerable. With so much of its strength siphoned off fighting heretics, many colonised planets were ripe for invasion. Sensing this, predatory aliens closed in on all sides until, on every frontier, worlds burned and were lost. Not even systems once thought unassailable were safe from the rapacious xenos threat.

In the midst of this turmoil, the hierarchy of the Imperium was also undergoing fundamental alterations, morphing from the direct rule of the Emperor to a realm ruled in his name. Many of the changes came from the rising suspicion that was growing from within. During the long fighting of the Scouring, it was gradually uncovered that far more planets than first thought had been lulled into treacheries of one form or another. The roots of these betrayals ran deep and were often hidden, hard to flush into the light and

harder still to trace back to those who had instigated the heresies. Distrust and paranoia were rampant in the wake of such sedition and a new era of unease, fear and mistrust grew into being – for the seed of doubt was planted.

Changes swept both the military and the offices of government. The Space Marine Legions, the vast fighting formations so instrumental in Mankind's victories during the Great Crusade, were broken down into many smaller Chapters. Overseen by Roboute Guilliman, the Primarch of the Ultramarines Legion, this transition allowed for greater tactical flexibility without placing the command of an entire Space Marine Legion into the hands of one individual – never again would the awesome power of one hundred thousand Space Marines be misused.

Another vast change wrought upon the Imperium's mighty military redefined the nature of the Imperial Army. Once including both the great battleships that plied the stars and the countless soldiers that landed to fight planetside, now the two were divided into the Imperial Fleet and the Astra Militarum. Across all the agencies of the Imperium, offices and institutions were split, their previous responsibilities fractionalised into separate functions and departments. Many of the countless branches within the sprawling Adeptus Administratum were spawned at this time. With the instigation of these changes, it was not unusual for two separate organisations, each unaware of the other, to be tasked with the same jobs, such as vericator scribes and tithe enumerators poring over the same data, each producing the same reports. These byzantine systems were put in place as fail-safe measures, which have since spiralled out of control into administrative excess. Beyond any such bureaucracies, and standing watch over all, was the newly formed Inquisition, a secretive organisation outside the established hierarchies. Ever vigilant, their role was to question everything in their constant search for threats to Humanity. None save the Emperor himself escape their uncompromising and watchful gaze.

++ Facts are chains that bind perception and fetter truth. For a man can remake the world if he has a dread and no facts to cloud his mind. ++



THE IMPERIUM ENDURES

Since those mythic days, the Imperium has churned onwards, managing to survive all the threats that have been thrown against it. As explorer fleets burrow deeper into the black void of space, the Imperium grows further still. New inhabitable planets are found and colonised, and long-lost worlds are brought again into the Emperor's light. But always the victories are short lived, tempered by some newly emerging crisis.

Throughout the long years, the alien menace has not abated – manifesting as countless flare-ups along the frontiers as well as sudden attacks on territories deep in the midst of Imperium-controlled space. Old enemies continue their onslaught and more races of hostile xenos are discovered with alarming regularity. The Imperium has displaced, repulsed and ground over aliens across the galaxy, but also watched their own planets and star systems fall victim to inhuman attackers. In a few desperate instances, Mankind has had to call upon all their sprawling might to defend against the largest xenos invasions recorded in human history. Not a single segmentum has been spared and even Holy Terra itself has come close to falling into inhuman hands several times.

The Warp storms, which had quieted during the rise of the Emperor and the Great Crusade, began to stir more frequently in the post-Heresy period. Once more, tempests burst forth unpredictably from the Immaterium to cut off portions of the galaxy, thwarting attempts at stability. The unsettled Warp space reflected the rising strife within the realm of men. Without the Emperor to physically guide them, the High Lords of Terra have often disagreed on the direction of the Imperium, quarrelling amongst themselves. Internecine politics, petty jealousies and personal ambitions have boiled over many times, pitting man against his brethren time and again. And always, looming over all other threats, has been the growing menace that lurks inside the Warp. Rising seemingly from nowhere, sprouting up as if from a buried hydra's teeth out of fables, Chaos has repeatedly emerged in new and hideous forms. Constantly growing in magnitude, the havoc wrought by the Dark Gods has driven Humanity nearer and nearer to its doom.

++ Bringers of Doom; Avenging Angels of Death; they are the Space Marines.++

The Age of the Imperium, the present age, has lasted for ten thousand years – a vast gulf of time. It is an age unlike any other, an era of bloodshed and doubt, a time that combines both progress-defying stagnation and ever-evolving change. In many respects, it is a time of superstition in which great and unfathomable technology has been enslaved to the forces of mysticism and madness. To the ordinary humans of these times, the peasants in the fields and the warriors amongst the stars, scientific thought represents an abhorrent perversity, a corruption of honour and religious virtue. Even to those few humans who deal with the material of technology, science and magic have become largely inseparable; the Warp engine must have runes upon its side and the lasgun requires the blessings of the Emperor or the Omnissiah.

Despite the changes in belief and the replacement of logic with faith, or perhaps because

of such unorthodox implementations, Humanity has not just survived the many disasters, heresies, and invasions that have plagued it over the millennia; it has managed to grow amidst the ruins. The realm of Mankind has never been larger, its borders never wider. Yet the Imperium has never been so beset by such a multitude of threats as it is now: incessant alien attacks, the proliferation of psykers, the growing rips in the veil separating Warp space from reality and the daily corruption of its own citizens take their toll.

To maintain control over an empire constantly poised to be shattered, the Adeptus Terra has grown progressively harsher, their rule has grown ever more iron-fisted and tyrannical. Now is not the time for half-measures, for the fate of Humanity is at stake. Besieged and assailed, the Imperium has transformed into an increasingly oppressive realm, a place where rules trump reason and where scale and remoteness removes objectivity. Even death is no certain escape from service to the Imperium, for the fallen often continue their work as servo-skulls, data slaves or flickering bio-luminas; every resource is required.

At its worst, what the Imperium has become is an uncaring bureaucracy gone mad – entire planets are turned into factory worlds, their immense populations enslaved and literally worked to death to produce materials no longer needed. Unending rows of scribes record statistics, following procedures as sacrosanct, although their recorded truths go unread, archived into continent-sized data banks that are filled, scrubbed blank and filled again. Lives, untold billions in number, are wasted out of ignorance, inertia or uncaring neglect. But what does it matter? The populace of planets, nay, entire star systems, are not even drops in an ocean compared to the staggering weight of Humanity's masses. Losses, no matter how senseless or enormous, are acceptable so long as the Imperium continues.



ON THE PRECIPICE

Mankind stands on the verge of an evolutionary change tens of thousands of years in the making. If Humanity can survive the trauma of change, it can cast off the mundane shackles of its current form to begin a new epoch of psionic mastery, an era of wonderment and the dawning of a hitherto unseen golden age. Throughout the Imperium, the tide of psychically active humans continues to rise on a daily basis, yet that Mankind will survive this deluge at all is by no means certain.

Against this backdrop of a galaxy at war, the Imperium faces an unrelenting doom. If the ever-increasing numbers of rogue psykers are not controlled, what they unwittingly unleash will further strain the fabric that holds the Warp at bay. Should too many holes be punctured through reality, should that gap ever be too widely bridged, then the powers within the Warp will burst forth to consume the galaxy.

A time of endless night presses in and, everywhere, the enemies of Mankind gather like eaters of carrion. Only the Emperor's foresight and preparations stand a chance of seeing Humanity through such end times...

Shrouded in billowing alchemical gases, connected by miles of wires and tubes, the Emperor understands and faces the dangers that threaten to engulf Mankind. Utterly cut off and alone, he has assumed the role preordained for him as guardian of Humanity and protector of its metamorphosis. The Master of Mankind knows that he must survive, must live forever if necessary, or until such a time as psychic humans have evolved sufficient strength to withstand the dangers they face from the Warp without him.



There is a tower in the Emperor's Palace called the Tower of Heroes: a black tower which rises high into the sky like a spike. At the summit of that tower hangs the Bell of Lost Souls. It is an ancient thing, massive as a building and adorned with dark runes, its peal like the scream of an anguished god. It is tolled but once when a great hero of the Imperium dies. Its wailing moan of grief lasts long and reaches the ears of millions, and its tones penetrate the unifying ether of Humanity turning the thoughts of countless billions towards Mankind's loss.





A DEADLY EVOLUTION

Most humans do not have the conscious ability to manipulate psychic energy, yet almost all have the potential. Since the great Warp storms of the Age of Strife ended, the rate at which humans develop tangible powers has been steadily increasing. These untrained psychic minds can manifest a wide range of abilities, but the Adeptus Terra recognises them all as psykers, and each is subject to the demands of the Imperial Tithe. This obliges the rulers of every Imperial planet to set aside a levy of young psykers for transport aboard the Black Ships to Terra.

Every day, the vast armada of the League of Black Ships plies the void, either racing to collect their precious cargo across the galaxy-wide Imperium, or rushing homeward to Terra, their holds crammed full of frightened and raging psykers. In addition to the Black Ship captains, each a high ranking member of the Adeptus Astra Telepathica, Inquisitors often travel aboard the ships, as they provide a good opportunity to investigate planets' potentials for corruption. Even with psychic dampeners and vigorous checks, such journeys are fraught with danger, for all on board must be evaluated and their powers contained. The threats are constant and ever-changing, as Warp travel has a way of jarring or unhinging unwary minds, sometimes causing psykers to collapse, releasing untold horrors.

An untrained psyker's only chance of surviving the threats of the Warp is to go unnoticed by the powers that stalk there. This is very difficult to do, even with training; the minds of psykers appear as bright flames in the murky realm of the Immaterium, ripe sweetmeats for the pandemonium of planeshifters and Enslavers, and the worst of the astral predators, Daemons. Without the rigours and disciplines taught by the Adeptus Astra Telepathica and its Scholastica Psykana, a psyker has no chance to defend himself against a hungry Warp presence. The dangers of new tears in the veil that separates reality from the Warp are omnipresent.

Many psykers are innocent of the scope and malign implication of their abilities, although this doesn't necessarily make them less dangerous. Others, far fewer in number, are not only aware of what hunts them, but actively court the dreadful attentions of Warp entities, tempting a terrible fate for morsels of knowledge or power. Those psykers whose minds are tainted – or worse yet, already harbouring Daemons – must be quickly eliminated.

THE SOUL BINDING

No ordinary psyker can transmit a message through the Warp, nor receive a telepathic message over such distances. Only those called Astropaths learn this ability, and they only do so after many years of training at the Scholastica Psykana. Such teachings mould their powers and strengthen their minds against psychic dangers, culminating in a special ritual known as the Soul Binding. Taking place inside the Imperial Palace, the psykers are

led before the Emperor one hundred at a time. There, they kneel before the Golden Throne and are briefly subjected to the full-spectrumed greatness of the Emperor's boundless mental energies. In the midst of this agonising process, the tiniest mote of the Emperor's boundless power is transferred to the Astropath.

Despite the long years of preparation, not all psykers survive the painful blessing bestowed by the Emperor. Even those that manage to maintain their sanity often sustain some type of loss from their brief exposure to purest power. In particular, the sensitive nerves of the eyes tend to suffer catastrophic damage, often melting entirely away, leaving nearly all Astropaths blind. Additionally, after their experience, many lack any sense of smell, touch or hearing and become increasingly frail of body.

Soul Binding is said to affect Astropaths in other ways as well, and it is commonly claimed that once his mind has touched that of the Emperor's, an Astropath may gain a new understanding and insight into the nature of the universe. Certainly, their increased psychic skills and fortitude make up for their sensory losses and, indeed, most Astropaths are able to function as well as if they had full sight. Indeed, they would not seem blind at all were it not for their distinctively distorted, sunken and empty eye sockets.



FORCES OF THE IMPERIUM

Over ten thousand years of constant warfare has honed Mankind's military might, for the galaxy is a hostile place and only by force of arms is the Imperium held together. It is an age of war and only the strong and the ruthless can hope to survive. Out amongst the stars there can be no mercy, no weakness and no respite from the unending war for survival.

Backed by the weight of over a million worlds, the Imperium can draw upon a vast military institution deployed amongst the segmentums and arranged in a variety of organisations. Some of these, such as the stalwart Imperial Guard or the legendary Space Marines, are generally known, their efforts lauded and praised by the common man. Others, such as the shadowy Officio Assassinorum or the Ordo Malleus, are wholly unknown. Their existence is only guessed at by a small percentage of those in the upper echelons, but their role is no less vital than the others. Though myriad and diverse, the forces of the Imperium all work towards ensuring Mankind's continued survival in a galaxy full of perils using their own equipment, techniques and strategies. Each branch is independent, functioning on its own to carry out its duties, but for large battles, the forces of the Imperium often find cause to work in conjunction with each other.

For the most massive conflagrations, such as defending against the Chaos invasions known as the Black Crusades or the ongoing wars raging in the Antioch sector, representatives of all of Mankind's military institutions join the fray. A planetary defence force holds the line until it can give way to the colossal might of the Imperial Guard, whose soldiers and tanks seek first to stabilise a front and then piledrive the foe into submission. In addition to ferrying the infantry to and from war zones, the Imperial Navy supplies orbital bombardments and fleet after fleet of atmospheric aircraft. Fighter craft, such as the Thunderbolt, arrive in waves to dominate the skies of a planet before launching Marauder heavy bombers to soften up the foes on the ground for the infantry. Into the thickest of the fighting are hurled Space Marine strike forces; they streak in to devastate key enemy positions, slay powerful leaders or capture key terrain features – their targets are left in smoking ruin. Then the Adeptus Astartes are quickly off again, deploying elsewhere for another rapid strike that rips the heart and soul out of the Imperium's foes. In the most sprawling of conflicts, the Titan Legions are also deployed, their world-shaking firepower reserved for the most impregnable of fortresses and the direst of enemies. Fanatical shock troops, the Sisters of Battle mercilessly purge any who would deny the Emperor's true way, while unseen and unheard Imperial Assassins ply their deadly craft. Where the denizens of the Warp are involved, the mysterious Grey Knights might turn up to a fray and, always, the intricate webs of the Inquisition are everywhere, their agents watching everything.

To coordinate such diverse forces upon linked battlefields that might stretch across whole star systems or sub-sectors, it is typical for the Imperium to assign a supreme

commander to direct the various branches. If given the opportunity of time, foresight and planning, such assignments can be made by the High Lords of Terra themselves, allowing them to appoint an officer carrying the right mix of strategic acumen and fighting fury. However, given the nature of warfare, communication and space travel in the 41st Millennium, many war zones blossom in anarchic madness and different Imperial elements arrive pell-mell into hellish conditions. In such cases, an overall commander is typically selected through impromptu war councils, meetings between the different military offices on location to decide tactics and battle plans. It might seem obvious to simply take the highest ranking officer in the battle zone, but this in itself can be confusing – each of the different branches has their own hierarchical and naming nuances, meaning that it is difficult to compare like to like. For instance, it is possible to equate a Lord Admiral of the Imperial Navy to a Lord Commander of the Imperial Guard, but the vast ranks of the Imperial Guard also use titles of Lord Marshall, Lord Castellan, Lord Margrave, Captain-General, Kriegking and more. In such a far-flung and disparate empire, there are any number of variant hierarchical orders and comparing them in the heat of battle has been known to cause catastrophic delays.



ORDOS OF THE INQUISITION

The Inquisition is divided into many different factions each known as an Ordo, each specialising in combating a particular threat to Mankind. The Ordo Malleus, known internally as Daemonhunters, stalk all creatures of Chaos and the Warp. The Grey Knights work closely with this branch to overcome those daemonic incursions that cannot be prevented. The Ordo Xenos are alien hunters who combat non-human elements and their influence within the galaxy.

When a fighting force is needed, the Ordo Xenos often calls upon the Deathwatch, xenos-hunting specialists made up, as need arises, of Space Marines drawn from various Chapters. The role of the Ordo Hereticus is that of witch hunting, dealing with psykers, mutants, and traitors within the Imperium itself. As this task takes the Inquisitors amongst the ranks of Imperial institutions, the Ordo keeps close ties with the Sisters of Battle, whose zeal and particular hatred of heretics make them firm allies to the Inquisition when humanity must be protected from itself. Though there are other Ordos, these are the largest and most active, and the differing branches are often so focused on their own affairs that they are unaware of the means and methods of the other divisions.

Even within an Ordo, the range of missions and techniques can vary widely and many threats are complex, containing elements under the purview of more than one Inquisitorial branch. While cooperation is the ideal solution, Inquisitors are not a trusting lot. There is no shortage of internal strife between and among Ordos, as attempts to safeguard mankind collide and disagreements regarding methodology erupt into new accusations and sometimes war.

++ The galaxy echoes with the clash of their weapons and the thunder of their mighty guns. ++

Where there is equal or unfathomable hierarchy, seniority and length of military service is often used to determine from which branch of service the overall commander will be selected. If the Space Marines are involved, this always gives their officers a chance take control. With their genetically enhanced bodies, Space Marines live extended lifetimes – if they do not fall in battle, they can easily live two to three times longer than a normal man, and sometimes far longer. Even in an age of constant warfare there are few amongst the defenders of the Imperium who can claim to have seen even a small portion of the battles won by veteran Space Marine Captains or the illustrious Chapter Masters. However, as the role of overall commander in an ongoing campaign or crusade isn't often one of front-line fighting, many Space Marines leave the coordinating, supply and

reinforcement-haranguing role to others, preferring instead to take a command on the battlefield itself where their tactical acumen and fighting prowess can win the day more directly.

In the midst of disasters during the Second Armageddon War, Lord Commander Dante, Chapter Master of the Blood Angels Chapter of Space Marines, was lauded after he arrived and claimed the role of overall force commander by dint of his rank and battle record. Commander Dante is said to be 1100 standard Terran years of age and his vast service record of victories fills entire libraries with material. It was Commander Dante, along with Commissar Yarrick, who rallied members of the Imperial Guard, Space Marines, Titan Legions and countless others in the defence of the embroiled planet against the relentless advances of the Orks.

Despite the advantage of experience that Space Marines undoubtedly carry, one of the most famous campaign leaders of the last millennium was an Imperial Guard officer – perhaps the greatest of them. This man eventually became known as Lord Commander Solar Macharius, the Chief Military Commander of the Segmentum Solar and a member of the High Lords of Terra. One of humanity’s leading military minds, Lord Solar Macharius drove a coalition of Imperial forces with astonishing success and speed across the stars, clearing vast swathes of territory in the name of the Emperor. Not since the days of the Great Crusade itself had a man gained so much territory for the Imperium, and all in the span of seven years.

Throughout the Imperium’s tumultuous history, however, not all instances of combined forces have ended in harmonious victory. The stakes for such highly acclaimed positions are high both in the prizes of victory and the cost of defeat. Many petty disputes and claims against honour have been made, as old grudges, needless races to steal glory, or simple miscommunications have caused many a disastrous setback for the Imperium.

It is said that when Chapter Master Stibor Laezaerek of the Fire Hawks, the most senior officer present, was passed over in favour of Lugft Huron, the Chapter Master of the Astral Claws, for command of the Lycanthos Drift Campaign, it set in motion not just a lifelong grudge between the two factions, but the seeds of doom for both Space Marine Chapters. Similarly, the short-lived Donubus Crusade was brought about by feuding Lord Commanders and, even after their lethal duel, the entire border between their segmentums was plunged into civil war for three centuries. The crown of command does not sit lightly on those who preside over such monumental forces.



TEMPLES OF THE ASSASSINORUM

The Imperium’s secretive agency of trained killers consists of many different

Assassinorum temples. Each specialises in honing the skills of their charges in a specific murderous art or in tracking and eliminating specific types of targets. Of the four largest temples, a Vindicare Assassin is trained in marksmanship, able to hit targets at great distances with utmost precision. Agents of the Callidus Temple use every manner of deception to inveigle their way into the heart of enemy institutions and power structures. Once there, the element of surprise and close proximity they have achieved allows them to strike when their target is most vulnerable. Eversors are not nearly so subtle; their genetically modified bodies are sent into chemically induced states of violent rage, meaning they tend to be unleashed on groups rather than aimed at particular individuals. Culexus Assassins, by far the rarest, are chosen from those few individuals who possess the Pariah gene, making them null-entities in the Warp. This ability, coupled with refined training and equipment, makes them uniquely qualified to take out psykers.

Smaller temples, of lesser renown, also ply their trade across the galaxy's war zones (the poison experts of the Venenum Temple or the intelligence gatherers of the Vanus Temple, for example) and only a handful of individuals know the actual number and nature of all of the Assassinorum's enclaves. Their locations, training methods and targets are kept so secret that, even internally, members of one temple are unaware of the status of the others.

This has more than once seen multiple Assassins sent after the same mark, sometimes resulting in deadly, but largely unseen, competitions amongst agents from different temples. This is no bad thing, however, as in the unpredictable theatre of war that is the 41st Millennium, ensuring the enemy is eliminated sometimes means taking a variety of different approaches; where one Assassin may find the way closed to them, another might see deadly opportunity.

++ A dagger in the dark is worth a thousand swords at dawn. ++



Like Angels of Death, the superhuman Space Marines sweep into battle as if from nowhere, shattering their foe in a blaze of fire and death before leaving as abruptly as they came. The foremost of humanity's defenders, the Space Marines are revered across the Imperium. Their glorious deeds are venerated with shrines and monuments on civilised worlds, and they are treated as gods of battle on primitive planets. Although held in awe as Mankind's saviours, Space Marines inspire more fear than wonderment. They have always stood apart from those they protect, and of all the Imperium's servants, they are the most fell-handed. They are death bringers, the deliverers of the Emperor's merciless judgement. Their sudden appearance speaks of calamity, and for Imperial citizens to catch a glimpse of a single Space Marine, even at a great distance, is a dire portent and most likely one of the last things they will ever see.

Space Marines are the most powerful of the Imperium's warriors and they are expected to accomplish almost impossible battlefield duties, lead vital assaults, confront the most horrendous of foes and hold their positions no matter how hopeless the odds. Though their numbers are not great, they are sufficient for any task. Space Marines are masters of the lightning assault, though they embrace any role required to achieve victory; they were made for war, trained for victory and are armed for battle. They have given up their very humanity, nobly sacrificing that very thing they are duty bound to defend.

Space Marines are organised into independent armies, called Chapters, of which there are roughly one thousand spread throughout the galaxy. Each Chapter has its own fleet, heraldic uniforms and distinct identity. All Space Marines in a Chapter belong to its warrior cult, in some cases following practices and traditions that date back to the earliest days of the Emperor's reign. Space Marines of the same Chapter are therefore spiritual brothers as well as brothers-at-arms, and this dual existence, physical and spiritual, is what forges Space Marines into such dedicated warriors. Most Chapters operate from a Chapter Planet – a world within the Imperium governed by the Space Marines who maintain a base there and exempt from the ordinary tithes to the Administratum. Others are not planet bound, their base being a vast fleet, an asteroid or a space station.

Like all legends, there is a mythology woven around the Space Marines, and the line between fact and fabrication is often blurred. This is no surprise, as the Space Marines were created at the very dawn of the Imperium's history, by the Emperor himself. Some of the most storied Chapters can trace their history directly back to that time, members of the fabled First Founding, when Space Marines were organised as vast Legions. Since the discovery of traitors in their midst and revelations about increasing numbers of mutations amidst some Chapters, many organisational changes have been enacted.



FOUNDING CHAPTERS

The genetically-tailored progenoid gland that is implanted into every Space Marine aspirant's body is descended directly from one of the Emperor's masterworks – the Primarchs. In a very real sense, the blood of the Primarchs still flows through the veins of newly-created Space Marines some ten thousand years later. However, there have been times when gene-seed has been used to create entirely new Chapters of Space Marines – a ritual known as a Founding. Often, these 'successor' Chapters will maintain nuances or regalia from their progenitor Chapter, although this is not always so. Much history has been lost or overwritten, especially during the Age of Apostasy, making it hard to ascertain with accuracy the details of all of the Foundings – when Chapters were created, which gene-seed was used, or exactly how many were completed. What is known is that the most recent Founding was the twenty-sixth and that more than half of the Chapters in existence today are descended from the Ultramarines Chapter.

Legion: Name of Legion when founded

Primarch: Name of Primarch from which Legion allegedly drew its gene-seed

World: Where Legion was based

Known Successor Chapters: Chapters named in Apocrypha of Davio [M33]

Excommunicate Traitoris: Those Legions who turned during the Great Heresy as reported in the Grimoire Hereticus [M35]

Legion: Dark Angels

Primarch: Lion El'Jonson

World: Caliban

Known Successor Chapters: Angels of Absolution, Angels of Redemption, Angels of Vengeance

Legion: Emperor's Children

Primarch: Fulgrim

World: Chemos

Known Successor Chapters: Excommunicate Traitoris

Legion: Iron Warriors

Primarch: Perturabo

World: Olympia

Known Successor Chapters: Excommunicate Traitoris

Legion: White Scars

Primarch: Jaghatai Khan

World: Mundus Planus

Known Successor Chapters: Marauders, Rampagers, Destroyers, Storm Lords

Legion: Space Wolves

Primarch: Leman Russ

World: Fenris

Known Successor Chapters: Wolf Brothers

Legion: Imperial Fists

Primarch: Rogal Dorn

World: Terra

Known Successor Chapters: Black Templars, Crimson Fists, Soul Drinkers

Legion: Night Lords

Primarch: Konrad Curze

World: Nostramo

Known Successor Chapters: Excommunicate Traitoris

Legion: Blood Angels

Primarch: Sanguinius

World: Baal

Known Successor Chapters: Angels Encarmine, Angels Sanguine, Angels Vermilion, Blood Drinkers, Flesh Tearers

Legion: Iron Hands

Primarch: Ferrus Manus

World: Medusa

Known Successor Chapters: Red Talons, Brazen Claws

Legion: World Eaters

Primarch: Angron

World: No Record

Known Successor Chapters: Excommunicate Traitoris

Legion: Ultramarines

Primarch: Roboute Guilliman

World: Macragge

Known Successor Chapters: Novamarines, Patriarchs of Ulixis, White Consuls, Black Consuls, Libators, Inceptors, Praetors of Orpheus, Genesis Chapter, Doom Eagles, Silver Eagles, Eagle Warriors, Mortifactors, Aurora Chapter, Silver Skulls

Legion: Death Guard

Primarch: Mortarion

World: Barbarus

Known Successor Chapters: Excommunicate Traitoris

Legion: Thousand Sons

Primarch: Magnus the Red

World: Prospero

Known Successor Chapters: Excommunicate Traitoris

Legion: Luna Wolves

Primarch: Horuys

World: Cthonia

Known Successor Chapters: Excommunicate Traitoris

Legion: Word Bearers

Primarch: Lorgar

World: Colchis

Known Successor Chapters: Excommunicate Traitoris

Legion: Salamanders

Primarch: Vulkan

World: Nocturne

Known Successor Chapters: None Known

Legion: Raven Guard

Primarch: Corax

World: Deliverance

Known Successor Chapters: Black Guard, Revilers, Raptors

Legion: Alpha Legion

Primarch: Alpharius

World: No Record

Known Successor Chapters: Excommunicate Traitoris

++ The Emperor's Judgement is a blessing for the faithful. ++



ULTRAMARINES



SALAMANDERS



RAVEN GUARD



WHITE SCARS



IRON HANDS

++ Our works are blessed by the Emperor's favour. ++

ULTRAMARINES



Defenders of Ultramar, First Amongst Equals.

The Ultramarines are an exemplary Chapter – arguably the purest, noblest and most honoured of their legendary kind. From the fledgling days of the Imperium, when they liberated more planets during the Great Crusade than any other Legion, to more recently, when they alone held the foe at bay at the beginning of the Tyrannic Wars, the Ultramarines have covered themselves in glory. It was the Ultramarines’ Primarch, Roboute Guilliman, who established the Codex Astartes, the tome that laid the foundation for the Space Marine Chapters. Due to their storied success and stable gene-seed, they have served as progenitor for more successor Chapters than any other.

BLOOD ANGELS



The Sons of Sanguinius, the Angelic Host.

Created during the First Founding, the Blood Angels are one of the oldest and proudest of all Space Marine Chapters. They are well known for their bloodthirsty zeal, favouring close combat and the use of jump packs, and for their unceasing quest for perfection – from the flawless execution of a battle plan to the aesthetics of their wargear. Yet for all their nobility, the Blood Angels are deeply marred. Since the death of their winged Primarch, Sanguinius, the Blood Angels have been haunted by a curse that drives them to death and madness. Although feared and mistrusted by those they protect, the Blood Angels continue to smash the Imperium’s foes, compiling a battle history second to none.

DARK ANGELS



The Unforgiven, Hunters of the Fallen.

The Dark Angels were the first Legion created by the Emperor. Theirs is a mysterious and proud Chapter, their every action steeped in secretive traditions and rituals. What is known about the Dark Angels is that time and again they have stubbornly stood their ground against overwhelming odds until they eventually emerge victorious. Despite a history full of such heroics, they are viewed suspiciously by many in the Imperium, who claim that the Dark Angels follow their own clandestine agenda. Such allegations are never answered – or even acknowledged – the Dark Angels remain silent and brooding.

The organisation of the Dark Angels differs from the practices laid out by the Codex Astartes. This is most notable in their first and second companies – elite formations known internally as the Deathwing and the Ravenwing.

SPACE WOLVES



The Sons of Russ, Warriors of Fenris.

The Space Wolves are a fiercely independent Chapter of Space Marines that has served the Imperium with distinction since the First Founding. Courageous to the extreme, each Space Wolf strives to perform great deeds on the battlefield worthy of song. Made feral in thought and appearance by the genetic heritage of their legendary Primarch, Leman Russ, the Space Wolves revel in their unorthodox nature. They have little patience for fawning religious rites or strict adherence to any code, preferring to follow the warrior-traditions from their savage homeworld of Fenris. Despite their long and excellent service, the only known successor Chapter of the Space Wolves was the ill-fated Wolf Brothers.

IMPERIAL FISTS



Defenders of Dorn, Golden Avengers.

The Imperial Fists have earned battle honours against every major alien race and have been instrumental in holding the Imperium together through some of its bleakest times. Like all Space Marines, the Imperial Fists can execute any aspect of warfare, though, they are known as particular experts at both besieging and defending fortresses. This has brought them into combat with their arch rivals, the renegade Iron Warriors, many times.

Rogal Dorn, the Primarch of the Imperial Fists, was tasked by the Emperor to design the defences of the Imperial Palace on Terra, and one of the Chapter's finest hours was defending it during the Horus Heresy.

GREY KNIGHTS



The Incorruptible, the Chamber Militant of the Ordo Malleus.

Amongst the elite brotherhood of Space Marines, there exists a Chapter destined to stand apart from their battle-brothers, for it is their sworn duty to fight Chaos in its most terrible form.

The Grey Knights act as the military arm of the Ordo Malleus, the Daemonhunters who form the oldest branch of the Inquisition. Founded on an order from the Emperor himself, each Grey Knight is a potent psyker, pure of heart and just of cause. This is essential, for in their battles they confront the most horrible of Daemons wherever the Warp fiends appear. Privy to the darkest secrets of Mankind and armed with deadly Nemesis Force weapons and the most advanced gear in the Imperium, the Grey Knights

are the ultimate counter to the Warp-spawned minions of the Ruinous Powers.



THE PRIMARCHS

The Emperor unlocked the secrets of life, using his foresight and genius to unravel the mysterious energies of the Warp and refashion them to his purposes. He had long experimented with genetically improved human warriors, but his greatest creations were twenty supreme beings whose powers equalled, and in some cases exceeded, his own. With these super-beings, these Primarchs, he would unite Mankind and reclaim the galaxy, but the Emperor's plan was known to the Chaos Gods. The servants of the Ruinous Powers stole the foetal superhumans, casting them adrift in the Warp.

All was not lost, for the Emperor used imprints of his beloved Primarchs to create the first Space Marines, Legions ten thousand strong made from each, an act that was to be known as the First Founding. Leading the mighty Space Marines himself, the Emperor began his Great Crusade – epic wars that reclaimed world after world in the name of Mankind. During those battles, each Legion was reunited with its Primarch, almost indestructible warriors that could scatter entire armies. In the end, it was the Primarchs, leading the first Space Marine Legions, that effectively created the Imperium as it is today.

However, Chaos had somehow tainted some of the Primarchs, leaving them with weaknesses and flaws. It was Horus, Primarch of the Luna Wolves, who would lead the great revolt, although many of his brethren followed. The story of those battles is told elsewhere, but in the end, only six Primarchs survived the Horus Heresy. The remainder were slain in the fighting or fled with their traitorous Legions into the Eye of Terror, where some still exist today, eternally damned to serve the foul gods of Chaos. The surviving Space Marines Primarchs helped rebuild the Imperium.

Although long-lived, the Primarchs were not immortal, but it is hard to ascertain fact from the legends that surround such god-like beings. Certainly, each spearheaded a host of victories and heroic deeds across the galaxy, leaving behind innumerable deeds of mythic proportion. Who knows if Leman Russ, Primarch of the Space Wolves, really did best a Cyclopean Draxbeast single-handedly? And if Ferrus Manus didn't forge the Iron Pyramids of Medusa, then who did?

One by one, they disappear from the annals of history, the last of their kind reputedly disappearing by M32. Whether the many extraordinary, and sometimes contradictory, accounts told about the Primarchs hold any truth or

are just apocryphal tales, they are preserved in the lore of each Space Marine Chapter. Others are still remembered on the Primarchs' adopted home planets. Today, the Primarchs are worshipped as gods, and pilgrimages are made along the trails they blazed across the stars, often ending at tombs or great memorials, places of ancient history that hold revered relics of their bones or wargear. Many still insist that their Primarchs will arise again, in the Imperium's direst need, for a final battle.





ASTRA MILITARUM

The unnumbered, the unstoppable, the Imperial Guard.



The Imperial Guard is Mankind's primary and most numerous defence. With soldiers, battle tanks and artillery beyond number, they are the sledgehammer force that, though slow to deploy, delivers a devastating payload when its cumbersome blows land. Soldiers of the Imperial Guard are men, not gene-enhanced superhumans. They fight not with the most finely crafted armaments in the galaxy, but with the weapons and armour that can be cheaply and easily mass-produced. They are the largest coherent fighting force in the galaxy, able to move massed regiments and armoured vehicles across the segmentums to join any fray. As many foes of the Imperium have learned, the courage and sacrifice shown by the numberless ranks of the Imperial Guard combined with the sheer hell-storm of firepower they unleash, can sweep any battleground of foes, leaving only smoking craters and wet stains.

The Imperial Guard is divided into innumerable armies, which can be found scattered throughout the galaxy guarding particularly vital planets and heavily concentrated into war zones where great battles rage across entire star systems. At need, the vast deposits of manpower are shifted to where the fighting is fiercest and behind them comes an unending train of reinforcements. Immense transport ships unload fresh armies all the time, delivering more grist for the gods of battle. The vast size of the Imperial Guard is some indication of the scale of Mankind's constant struggle, for hostile xenos races are everywhere, an unending threat. Sedition too, is a constant drain, for who knows which planetary governor will be prepared to risk war to further his own personal fortunes, or where dark cults will rise up to lead citizens astray? Yet whatever the threat – xenos, traitors and Warp-spawned horrors alike – all shall be crushed beneath the pummelling power of the Imperial Guard.

RECRUITMENT

As part of their annual tithe, planetary governors are required to send a percentage of the fighting force raised on their planet to the Imperium. These soldiers are formed into regiments of the Imperial Guard, typically identified by the name of their home world and a number. For instance, the Rastarian 437th were the four hundred and thirty-seventh regiment taken from the planet Rastar. As recruitment is ongoing, it is not uncommon for a regiment's number to be recycled following its destruction. On proud martial planets, this is a ceremonious event with much fanfare, flag raising and rituals passing over old relics and ancient military traditions. On most planets, however, the recycling of regimental numbers is overlooked out of sheer ignorance of the past, or perhaps grimly accepted by the number's new inheritors as yet another bit of back luck.

Methods of how manpower is raised differ vastly from world to world. For instance, some planets are obliged to send the best of their planetary defence force – a planet-bound army under command of the planetary governor that is used to see off pirates, quell unrest and hold out until stronger forces arrive. Other planets, however, might draft entire generations, press hive gangs into service, or offer an escape from planet-wide factories to age-qualifying citizens. On some worlds, it is an honour to join the Imperial

Guard, with troops literally fighting it out for the distinction of making the tithe numbers, while the rulers of other planets might see the tithe as a chance to off-load convicts and the other dregs of their society. These regiments will vary in size from a few hundred to hundreds of thousands. Regardless of who they are or where they are from, the Imperial Guard ships them to a posting, often providing training in transit. Most recruits never leave their own home world before this and have no idea where they are headed, potentially being deposited anywhere across the galaxy where one of the endless wars is being fought.



COMMISSARS

Commissars are political officers in the Imperial Guard whose duty it is to maintain the morale, discipline and fighting spirit of their assigned regiment by any means possible. They are grim authoritarian figures who punish cowardice and incompetence, typically doing so with well-aimed shots from their bolt pistols. Unlike individual regiments that are levied from their home worlds, Commissars are raised in the Schola Progenium. There they are trained to a high level in military tactics, weapons proficiency, and on all matters concerning the Imperial Creed. It is their blind devotion to the cause and the inability to see the men they join with any compassion that allows them to maintain an unwavering and resolute code of honour. This fanaticism can inspire the men who serve with a Commissar, allowing them to perform battlefield feats beyond what is rationally possible.



++ The only necessary reaction to treachery is vengeance. ++

THE WEAPONS OF WAR

When the Imperial Guard go to war, they do so organised into regiments. Each of these regiments is largely uniform in composition, meaning an infantry regiment (the most common type of formation) will be made up primarily of foot soldiers, with little in the way of heavy artillery or armour. Likewise, an artillery regiment will be composed of little else, made up entirely of great serried batteries of big guns and other long ranged

weaponry, but it will contain little, if any, infantry.

If an Imperial Guard regiment were forced into battle individually, it would struggle, for each homogenous force is vulnerable without support. For instance, infantry by themselves can be smashed by armoured foes, while tanks alone are poor at holding ground, finding themselves prone to ambush, especially in areas of dense terrain. Such is the immense size of the forces deployed by the Imperial Guard, however, that the idea of lone regiments is preposterous. An Imperial Guard army is composed of many regiments and a wise Commander General will marshal his myriad divisions to fight as a combined arms force – drawing men and vehicles from different regiments as suits the needs of the battlefield.

Within the mighty arsenal of an Imperial Commander at the head of a large war zone are a staggering number of war machines and armoured vehicles. Should he so choose, he can deploy entire armoured regiments – clanking mechanical armies whose firepower can topple Titans, or ordnance formations that are capable of flattening whole hive cities. The largest of Imperial Guard armies might even contain regiments of super-heavy tanks – colossal tracked vehicles, each of which contains as much destructive capability as entire companies of other troops. Assembling and moving such regiments is cumbersome at best, however, the resulting onslaught they produce is almost always worth the logistical issues.

Despite the prodigious battle tanks and thunderous artillery of the Imperial Guard, it is most often the common soldiers that win the battle. Rising up from trenches, manning firing lines, or advancing in waves, the cruel truth about manpower in the Imperial Guard is that it is the cheapest currency in the Imperium. Commanders spend the lives of their men for the smallest of goals, committing to appalling numbers of casualties to attain the least gain of ground, or merely to appease the upper chain of command's desire for an offensive.

The Imperial Guard can afford huge losses, expending the lives of their men more carelessly than it does ammunition. During the Third War for Armageddon, whole tank regiments were thrown into the fray unsupported, merely as a diversion, a delaying tactic to allow proper battle formations to be established further behind the front lines. So many Catachan regiments were fed into the meat grinder known as the Damocles Gulf Crusade that the xenos munitions couldn't keep up – they were literally running out of fuel, bullets, and rechargeable power sources.

The Imperial Guard way of war is not subtle, but it is effective, for the overwhelming pressure it creates; the application of extreme force into a single strategic point achieves victories – bloody ones, costly ones, but triumphs nonetheless. It is a ponderous way of fighting, and can take years, decades, or even longer to amass the forces necessary to hold the foe in place and then to inexorably demolish them. The cost of such victories is high, but it is a price the Imperium is willing to pay. For across the entire galaxy, they have not yet met their match, crushing smaller empires beneath them, defeating all who dare confront them in ongoing wars of attrition.



MILITARUM REGIMENTOS

Imperial Guard regiments come from a range of different planets and their native cultures, styles of dress, technological backgrounds and warrior traditions differ accordingly. Although many customs are strange or barbarous, such as taking scalps as trophies or marking territory with fearsome symbols, they are all accepted by the Imperium; such rituals bond the troops and kindle their battle-spirit. Due to the size of war zones, the vagaries of Warp travel and the needs of recruiting, it is not unusual for radically different regiments of Imperial Guard to be thrown side by side into a battle. Savage soldiers from feral worlds might be flanked by forces recruited from hive city gangs on one side and horse-riding warriors from steppe worlds on the other; the officers ensure the men save their fighting for the enemy. In addition, the Imperial Guard has been known to use abhumans, human-descended creatures whose appearance and mental capacities are quite distinct from their ancestors. For instance, Ogryns are thickly muscled and nearly twice as tall as a man from Terra, but their thinking abilities are greatly reduced.

Despite the great variance in troops, the wargear they are issued is standardised, although different manufacturing planets may instil minor or cosmetic differences. The weapons employed by the Imperial Guard are deliberately straightforward and durable so that even the most backwards members of the human race can wield and maintain them with a minimum of training.



IMPERIAL KNIGHTS

The Sword and the Shield, the Vengeful Past, The Glory of Ancient Days.

An Imperial Knight is a towering behemoth, a vast bipedal fighting machine clad in a demi-god's raiment of war. With arms and armour fit to face an entire army of lesser foes, each Knight suit is further protected by a crackling ion shield. Directed by the Knights' noble pilots, these relics of Imperial techno-science can stave off almost any attack amid coruscating showers of vivid sparks. Knight suits proudly display the panoply of the noble house to which they belong, and an entire army of these vast, glorious war engines on the march is enough to drive many foes from the field in terror.



AN ANCIENT HERITAGE

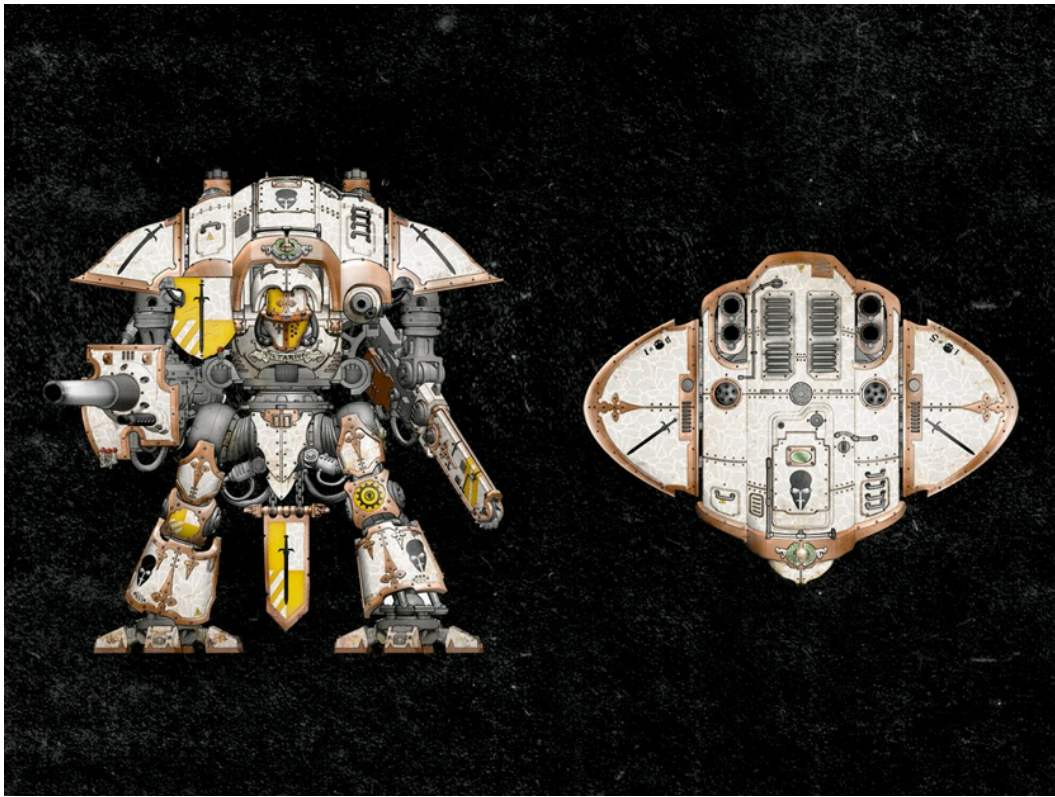
The Knight worlds were amongst the first settled during Mankind's expansion out into the stars. Yet the darkness of Old Night fell upon the human race, leaving each world adrift upon an ocean of madness and death. During these dark days, many Knight worlds regressed into feudal societies that suffered neither the mutant nor the witch to live. As the populace of these planets became superstitious peasants, so the warriors who piloted their Knight suits became feudal lords. By the time the surviving Knight worlds were brought into the Imperial fold during the Great Crusade, they had become hidebound and conservative realms where the self-styled knightly houses ruled with an iron fist.

Since those days, the Knights have formed a potent if somewhat inconstant weapon in the Imperium's arsenal. Due to the technological nature of their Knight suits, the nobles who pilot these machines are heavily dependant upon the aid of the Adeptus Mechanicus. It is only through the work of the Sacristans, a specially trained order of Tech-Priests, that the Thrones Mechanicum – through which the Knights are piloted – continue to function at all. This, coupled with ancient charters and rites of allegiance, binds many knightly houses to the will of the Adeptus Mechanicus and the worship of the Omnissiah. Yet this is not true of all, and at least as many Knight worlds pledge primary allegiance to the Emperor as to the Machine God of Mars.

FREEBLADES

There are Knights who reject their houses, or face rejection by them. Some Nobles are disgraced through word or deed. Others find themselves no longer able to face the tedious traditions and dreary observances of life within a knightly house. Others still may suffer some tragic loss, whether the death of a close and valued comrade or the extinction of their entire noble line. For such a Noble, the life of a Freeblade beckons. Taking their own personal heraldry, and a suitably evocative and enigmatic name, these individuals roam the Imperium, fighting for whichever cause takes their fancy. Whether they seek redemption, revenge or simply release none can say, but the aid of a Freeblade Knight is so mighty a boon that few Imperial commanders will stop to question the provenance of their unexpected ally.





The White Warden, piloted by the bullish Lord Neru Degallio, is the last surviving Knight of Alaric Prime's ruling dynasty. Since losing his people to an Orkoid invasion, Degallio has roamed the Imperium as a Freeblade thirsty for revenge.



ADEPTA SORORITAS

The army of the Ecclesiarchy, the Sisters of Battle.



Foremost amongst the warriors of the Ecclesiarchy are the Battle Sisters of the Adepta Sororitas. The troops of this devout Sisterhood are raised from infancy to adore the Emperor of Mankind and to believe in the utter righteousness of their cause. Their fanatical devotion and unwavering purity is a bulwark against corruption, heresy and alien attack, and once battle has been joined, the Sisters of Battle will stop at nothing until their enemies are utterly crushed. Not even death can stay the wrath of the Adepta Sororitas – indeed, the blood of martyrs only strengthens their resolve, spurring the survivors to ever greater acts of heroism in the name of the honoured fallen.

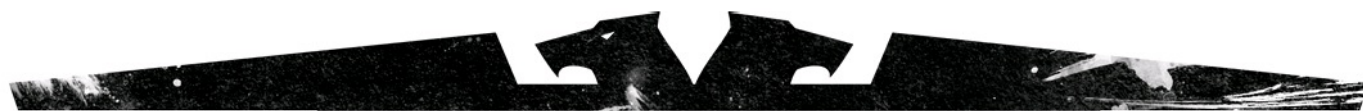
The Adeptus Ministorum is rich in power and holdings, which attracts many enemies. The cardinal worlds of the Ecclesiarchy are as prone to xenos attack as the rest of the Imperium, and the tight grip their organisation holds over the populace has assured them no shortage of internal foes. So the Sisters of Battle, the military arm of the Adeptus Ministorum, has proven essential to their defence. Armed and armoured by the incredible wealth of the monolithic Ecclesiarchy, it is the Sisters of Battle's unquenchable devotion that makes them such a formidable force.

The Adepta Sororitas are divided into several major Orders Militant, the fighting strength of each numbering several thousand warriors. There are also many lesser Sisterhoods comprised of around a few hundred Battle Sisters. An Order's warriors are rarely all together in one place, but are instead commonly spread throughout the galaxy, guarding various shrine worlds and prosecuting Wars of Faith and other battles. Nevertheless, the Sisters of Battle are an elite military force that ranks amongst the Imperium's most fanatical defenders, for their superb training, superior wargear and unshakeable faith can overcome all but the most terrible foes.

The duties of the Adepta Sororitas are many and varied. Every concentration of the Ministorum's power must be defended, and a force of Battle Sisters will be present to guard every shrine and fortress-cathedral in the Imperium, as well as the priceless sacred relics housed within them. The composition of these garrisons may vary from several hundred warriors to guard a reliquary-stronghold to a single Battle Sister maintaining a constant vigil over the bones of a fallen saint. The Adepta Sororitas also provide the protectors of the Ecclesiarchy's priesthood, and they are tasked with providing them with any military support they may need. At the behest of such powerful figures, the Sisters of Battle are called upon to escort hierarchs through war zones, eliminate heretical leaders or launch surgical strikes to recover long-lost artefacts from enemy hands. When the Ecclesiarchy declares a War of Faith, it is the fanatically loyal Sisters of Battle who provide its military might, slaying the Emperor's enemies without mercy or compassion, heedless to the blasphemous protestations of innocence that assail their ears.

When not actively involved in one of the Ecclesiarchy's wars, the Battle Sisters of the Orders Militant divide their time between training and worshipping the Emperor. Indeed, to the Adepta Sororitas, the disciplines are nigh inseparable, for whilst combat drills and studies of battle tactics can hone the body and the mind, only penitent prayer can bolster the spirit, and all three are required to defeat the Imperium's foes.

The combination of combat doctrine and prayer is most evident on the battlefield where Battle Sisters loudly proclaim their faith in hymn and verse as they march to war, calling upon the Emperor to aid them in the fight against their enemies. The fervid, unquestioning nature of this faith is a potent weapon indeed, manifesting as divine inspiration that drives the Sororitas to unprecedented feats of prowess. Sisters of Battle gripped with holy fervour banish worldly fears from their minds, shrug off mortal wounds and summon preternatural strength to smite their foes. Those who witness such battlefield miracles are left in no doubt that the spirit of the Emperor indeed walks with these pious warriors.



HOLY RELICS

The history of the Ecclesiarchy stretches back to the dawn of the Imperium. During this time, the Adeptus Ministorum has seen many saintly heroes and heroines who have vanquished the foes of the Emperor. Artefacts left behind by these great individuals after their death or disappearance have taken on the status of holy symbols, objects with great power and mystery surrounding them. In the Imperium today, there are many thousands of these relics, some of which are reliably connected with the likes of Saint Constantine of Alamar, Cardinal Gherick and Confessor Dolan. Others have a less certain past, and cynical members of the Inquisition claim that if you put together all the sacred bones of Sebastian Thor that are presently adored throughout the Imperium, the Ecclesiarchy would be shocked to find that its most prominent saint was a many-headed, multi-limbed, triple-jointed giant...

Despite these claims, many cathedrals, temples and shrines house immense reliquaries, and shrine worlds may harbour hundreds of these holy artefacts. Many of these objects are incorporated or fashioned into holy icons known as a Simulacrum Imperialis, which are occasionally bestowed, temporarily, upon a warrior of great purity, faith and dedication.

It is considered a great honour to carry one of these revered items into battle, and even if they do not possess mystical powers themselves, the effect that a Simulacrum Imperialis has upon Sisters of Battle can be just as magical. With such a potent icon of faith to follow, the Battle Sisters will hurl themselves into the fray with even more fanatical devotion, finding inspiration in even their darkest hours and overcoming their foes with seemingly superhuman acts of courage and heroism. Likewise, the loss of any of these will see a swift convergence of the faithful, as no effort is spared in securing their retrieval.

++ *For the Emperor!* ++

THE AGES OF MANKIND

Knowledge of the long ages of human history has been wreathed in shadow, buried beneath the aeons or simply lost over the expanse of time. Some Historitors continue to seek knowledge, but their work is like holding a candle against the dark abyss. Be that as it may, presented here are the ages of Mankind's history as currently termed and understood.

Throughout the ages of Mankind, there have been many cataclysmic events of such magnitude that the human race has been brought to its knees. Ork Waaaghs! have threatened Holy Terra itself before being defeated, Space Marine Chapters have been destroyed only to be restored to glory thousands of years later, and entire sectors have been overthrown by xenos and daemoniac threats only to be reclaimed in the Emperor's name. Many times has the Imperium suffered a blow thought dolorous and yet recovered. Each time, the storied histories have been lost, corrupted or rewritten by the victors of great campaigns. This leaves the majority of the Imperium's people unaware of the galaxy-spanning wars that have been fought to secure their humble place amongst the stars.

The Historitors of the Adeptus Administratum seek, gather and dutifully collect the history of each planet within the Imperium. Once, perhaps, this was done with purpose. Now, however, it is most often an indiscriminate compilation of data, a process where scribes unthinkingly copy content onto scrolls, preserving complete records in constant fear of missing a single inconsequential letter. The ability, or even desire, to translate what these facts mean in any larger sense is almost entirely absent, found only in a few individuals who are eyed suspiciously, or perhaps punished for their enthusiasm.

The largest and most complete collection exists beneath the surface of Terra. There, the colossal under-halls stretch out of sight – endless vistas of datascrolls tower upwards like mountains. With flickering candlelight provided by floating servo-skulls, long processions of curators, scribes, and ciphers wind through the valleys, attempting to illuminate that which was. Over the years, there have been many adjustments, by revisionists from the Adeptus Ministorum, the Inquisition and some say the High Lords of Terra themselves.



Age of Terra: M1 – M15

Little is known of this period save that Mankind had begun taking its first forays into space. Mars became the first planet to be terraformed when it was settled by industrial cartels. The red planet soon became synonymous with technical expertise and scientific advancement. Colonies had to be self-sufficient, as many were isolated from Terra by long, dangerous journeys.

Age of Technology: M15 – M25

This era is referred to as the ‘Dark Age of Technology’ so often that its original title might seem incomplete. There are few reliable records and even they seem to contradict themselves with regularity. What is known is that from roughly M18 onwards, Mankind discovered the Warp and how to enter it. Slowly, through many disasters, Humanity learned to use the Warp to make faster than light journeys out of their own star system. During this time, the first alien races were encountered.

Soon after, Mankind embarked upon the discovery, development and cultivation of the

human Navigator gene, a controlled mutation that allowed human pilots to make longer Warp jumps than previously thought possible. Navigator families, initially controlled by industrial and trade cartels, became individual forces in their own right by M19. By M20, Humanity had proliferated and settled many of the countless star systems.

It was a golden age for scientific achievement; technology provided all the answers. Thinking machines aided civilian and military production, allowing enormous labours to be accomplished at a frenetic pace. Perfection of the STC system permitted an explosion of colonisation that reached the furthest limits of the galaxy.

For the rest of the age, Mankind spread across the stars, becoming widely dispersed and divergent. There is evidence of many wars, but none that threatened the stability of human space. The existing records list xenos enemies long since extinct, along with more familiar names such as Eldar and Orks. Interplanetary trade was established and great fleets carried goods to and from the ends of the galaxy. As planets became overpopulated, the recently invented construction mediums of plasteel, plascrete, ferrocrete and rockcrete were used to build colossal cities: the proto-hives.

As quick as Mankind's expansion had been, it was eclipsed by the speed of its collapse. The decline was so rapid, so utter and so nearly complete that little of those colonies or the civilisations they spawned remain. Speculation is rampant, but there are few facts. What is known is that human psykers were first mentioned towards the end of M22, making a sudden appearance on almost every human world within a relatively short span of time. By the end of M23 there was widespread anarchy, descriptions of what must be daemonic possessions and great turbulence in the Warp. Some records also cite betrayal by the machines and a great war with robotic armies. Whether factual or allegorical, the histories leave no doubt on one point: the golden age had come to a spectacularly swift and brutal end.

Age of Strife: M25 – M30

Marked by terrible wars and massive invasions that tore Humanity apart, this age was a time of collapse. Warp storms of unprecedented ferocity isolated Mankind's colonies. The great distances prevented contact with other colonised planets, and those who remained in communication often became embroiled in internal battles for control.

The separated human cultures rapidly diversified. Humanity itself began to evolve, with mutations regularly appearing on most planets and, on some worlds, altering into something new altogether: the first of the abhuman races. Civilisations that persecuted the recently developed psykers fared the best. Worlds where such abilities were encouraged were destroyed altogether. Some of the wonders of the Age of Technology were lost or destroyed in the flames of conflict while others fell into neglect. Mankind was brought to its knees and this horrific state continued for nearly six millennia.

When it finally started to emerge from the long darkness, Humanity was forever altered.

Science was no longer the answer, but something to be feared. As the legends go, late in the Age of Strife a force united the warring factions of Terra and the long war with Mars was ended. This new leader was known only as the Emperor, and even as he prepared to reclaim the galaxy, a final mighty surge of the Warp storms lit up the skies. When the scintillating burst died down, it left behind the Eye of Terror.

With the sudden quelling of the Warp storms that had raged unabated for nearly the whole of the Age, the Emperor and his newly formed Legions of Space Marines turned their attentions to the stars, beginning the Great Crusade. This defining moment brought an end to the dismal despair of the Age of Strife and began a new period of human history.



THE AGE OF THE IMPERIUM

++ A small mind is a tidy mind. ++

M30 – Present

From out of the ruin of the Age of Strife rises a new era. Humanity becomes

bound within the organisations and institutions of the Imperial administration. After the betrayal of the Horus Heresy, the Emperor reaches the end of his natural life; his existence is now maintained by the artificial means of the Golden Throne and continual human sacrifice. Psykers continue to emerge in ever growing numbers and are barely controlled through constant suppression and vigilance. It is an era of war and constant battle, and the menace from the Warp looms ever larger.

c. M30 Creation of the Space Marine Legions

The Emperor forges his greatest weapons – genetically engineering the superhuman Primarchs. In a terrible accident they are scattered across the galaxy, but the Emperor creates the Space Marine Legions from their gene-seed.

The Time of Rebirth

This is the dawning of the galaxy-spanning Imperium and the rebirth of the domain of Mankind. Almost immediately following its inception, the newborn Imperium must rise from the ashes of the Horus Heresy. Now shorn of the Emperor's leadership, nearly everything is reorganised and many fail-safes are put into place. Countless doctrines, the most famous of which is the Codex Astartes, are drawn up and implemented in the hope of ensuring that large-scale military rebellion is never again possible.

c. M30 Birth of the Astronomican

The Emperor creates the great psychic beacon that allows Navigators to steer within the Warp and travel great distances. Originally powered solely by the Emperor, that duty is eventually shifted to a great choir of 10,000 psykers instead, heralding the birth of the organisation that would become the Adeptus Astronomica.

c. 800.M30 The Great Crusade

The Emperor emerges from the anarchy of sundered Terra and leads the campaign to reunite Mankind. The Great Crusade is spearheaded by the newly formed Space Marine Legions, who are armed by the recently allied factories of Mars. Battles unnumbered are fought and the Space Marines, supported by the new Imperial Army, prove unstoppable. Aliens and Warp creatures are driven back, planets are reclaimed and the missing

Primarchs are found. The Emperor preaches three great truths in his reconquest of the galaxy: genetic corruption must be sought out and eradicated; psykers are to be rooted out, kept in control, and handed over to Imperial agents for evaluation; and destructive aliens are to be rendered powerless.

As the Primarchs take control of their Legions, the Great Crusade separates, moving in many directions and reaching far across the galaxy. The Emperor returns to Terra, leaving Horus, foremost amongst the Primarchs, to finish off the great drives of human expansion. It is these deeds and countless battles that create the Imperium of Man.

c. M31 The Horus Heresy

The Emperor's most trusted servant, the Warmaster Horus, turns traitor. With half of the Space Marine Legions, many Titan Legions and an untold number of formations from the Imperial Army, Horus makes for Terra, aiming to take the Emperor's place as ruler of Mankind. It is a bitter civil war; across space and upon many planets, brother fights brother. Immortalised by many legends the Battle of Terra and Siege of the Imperial Palace mark the epic finale of the Heresy, with countless heroic actions and notorious deeds. In the end, Horus is slain, but not before the Emperor is mortally wounded, forcing him to retire for evermore to the life-sustaining Golden Throne.

c. M31 The Scouring

This is a campaign of vengeance fought against the heretic traitors still found across the galaxy. Loyalist forces, led by the Ultramarines and Space Wolves Legions, drive back those traitors who survived Horus' fall. The corrupted forces find refuge within the swirling Eye of Terror. This time period also marks the grim realisation of just how many planets were lured into helping the traitors. Some are corrupted, others merely misled or beguiled. Guilt and recrimination henceforth become rife in the new Imperium of Man.

c. M31 Second Founding

In the midst of the Scouring campaign, the remaining loyal Space Marine Legions are disbanded to form the far smaller 1000-man organisations known as Chapters. A portion of the Space Marines maintain their parent Legions' original names, badges and colours while the remaining Chapters take on new names and heraldry. The majority of these Second Founding Chapters still serve the Imperium today.

c. M32 Rise of the Adeptus Ministorum

The Emperor, always an object of veneration, only increases his following after being joined to the Golden Throne. Many Imperial cults arise over the following centuries, the majority of which are united into a larger body known as the Ecclesiarchy. This powerful

body gains momentum until, in the thirty-second millennium, it is granted the status of official religion of the Imperium and the title of Adeptus Ministorum. It is only a few centuries later that Ecclesiarch Veneris II receives a seat amongst the High Lords of Terra, and after 300 years, the seat reserved for the Ecclesiarch is made permanent.

544.M32 The Beast Arises

The Orks rampage across the Imperium on a massive scale. The number of attacks grow until it becomes the greatest greenskin invasion that the galaxy has ever known, eclipsing even the one defeated by Horus upon the world of Ullanor, which earned him the title of Warmaster. Nothing is safe from the Orks' primal desire to conquer the galaxy, and their widespread advances are only halted when the Imperium resorts to the most extreme of measures, at great cost to the Adeptus Astartes.

546.M32 The Beheading

The internecine politics of the Imperium take a calamitous turn when the High Lords of Terra are slain to a man at the orders of Drakan Vangorich, the Grand Master of the Officio Assassinorum. This marks the beginning of a hundred year period of anarchy. At great loss, a Space Marine retribution force delivers the Emperor's justice to Vangorich.

The Forging

The Imperium expands and binds its most important star systems under ever tighter control. Astropath choirs are set in relay positions across the galaxy, with major hubs on the best-garrisoned worlds such as Armageddon, Bakka and Macragge. The Adeptus Ministorum becomes the official religion of the Imperium, adding new measures of control over the masses. A few long-lost STCs are rediscovered, and for a time, the technological decline is stabilised. Without the Emperor's guidance, there is much room for interpreting the best direction for the Imperium. To avoid prolonged dissension, strict rules are put in place and punishments for disobedience are swift and brutal. Fear rules the highest levels of authority, and ignorance rules the lower menials. The established rule becomes harsher and more widespread than ever.

646.M32 Reunited

Agnathio, Chapter Master of the Ultramarines, unites over fifty leaders from other

Chapters of Space Marines and arrives upon Terra. Such a show of power and faith puts an end to the squabbling for the contentious seats of the High Lords of Terra that has consumed the differing factions since the Beheading. In locked council with the mightiest of Mankind's warriors, such matters were quickly sorted. None know exactly what was done or said, but when the Space Marines departed back to their far-scattered missions, there once again sat twelve High Lords of Terra. If there was further dissension, none dared speak it aloud.

888.M32 The Astropath Wars

910.M32 The Firestorm

c. M33 The War of the Confessor

In a particularly violent display, the Adeptus Ministorum exerts its newfound strength. Many key shrine worlds are added to their holdings during this holy war.

c. M33 The Apocrypha of Davio

A great document attempts to list all of the Space Marine Chapters of the Second Founding.

313.M33 Siege of Eternity's Gate

615.M33 The Blade of Infinity

The *Blade of Infinity*, a pre-Heresy cruiser, emerges from the Warp, its re-entry signature suggesting that it had left realspace over twenty thousand years previously. This predates the Warp drive's invention in the Age of Technology and suggests radical time stream disorders. Transmissions picked up suggest the *Blade of Infinity* is trying to communicate some type of warning, but before much can be deciphered, it once again disappears into the Warp. In its wake comes an invasion fleet of Chaos Space Marine Legions, fell foes that wreak much havoc. The ship *Blade of Infinity* re-emerges several more times in subsequent years, always as a harbinger of further Warp incursions.

831.M33 The Year of the Ghosts

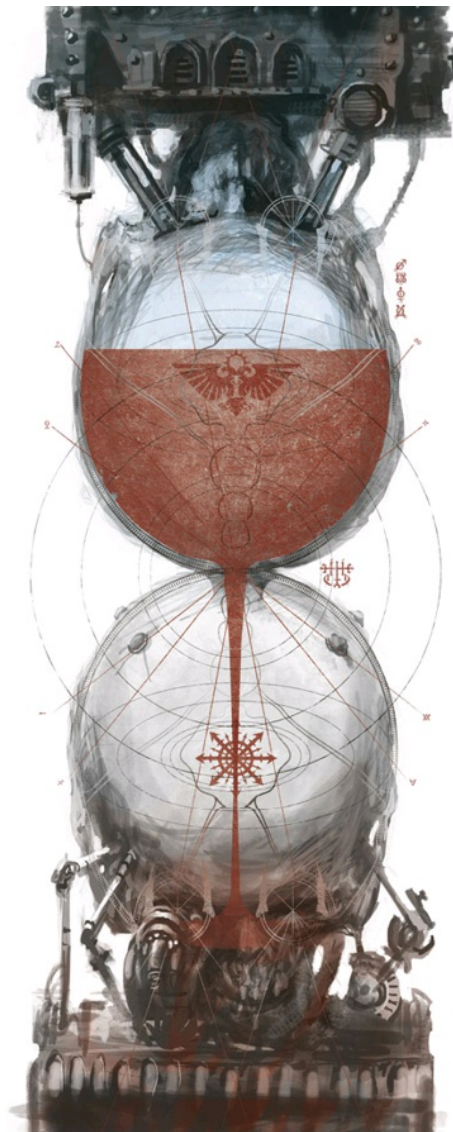
In the Segmentum Solar, the honoured dead rise up to drive back the terrors of the Warp.

c. M34 The Pale Wasting

In the early years of M34 a great threat arises beyond the Ghoul Stars. Even today its true nature remains suppressed. The ravages are said to cause the extermination of a score of Space Marine Chapters and souls unnumbered.

401.M34 The Howling

Black Templars Space Marines end the Catelexis Heresy by executing the Cacodominus, an alien cyborg whose formidable psychic presence allowed it to control the populace of thirteen hundred planetary systems. Alas, the Cacodominus' death scream echoes and amplifies through the Warp, burning out the minds of a billion Astropaths and distorting the signal of the Astronomican. Millions of ships are lost in the resulting upheaval and entire sub-sectors slide once more into barbarism without the dictates of the Adeptus Terra to keep them in line. It is a steep cost for victory.



++ *Analysis is the bane of conviction.* ++

Nova Terra Interregnum

The time of the twin Empires. The Ur-council of Nova Terra denounces the High Lords of Terra and claims rule of the Segmentum Pacificus. For nine centuries the Imperium becomes a realm split in twain. The Age is marked by ongoing civil wars for reunification and disputes over old trade terms, tithes and wavering allegiances.

666.M34 Warp Stars

Following a fierce storm bursting from the Eye of Terror, the first of many Warp Stars are sighted. The tendrils of their power pull any ships or small planets that fall within their reach to a grisly, if spectacular, doom.

934.M34 The Warnings of Ulthwé

c. M35 Moirae Schism

During the dark days of the Nova Terra Interregnum, this conflict tears apart the Adeptus Mechanicus, dividing the Machine Cult in a way unseen since the Horus Heresy. The forge world of Moirae is blasted to dust, but not before the schism spreads throughout the Cult of Mars, the Titan Legions and several Space Marine Chapters with close ties to the Adeptus Mechanicus. Over two thousand years of bloody strife pass before the baleful doctrine is considered fully purged.

975.M35 The Cataclysm of Souls

The Ecclesiarchy begins to rebind the sundered Imperium as a religious state that transcends political differences. Billions die in the religious wars when the Ur-council of Nova Terra rejects the Ecclesiarchy's teachings.

980.M35 Hrud Rising

991.M35 The Cursed Founding

The notorious 21st Founding of Space Marines goes horribly wrong and the Grey Knights are called in by the Inquisition to expunge the threat.

104.M36 The War of Recovery

Patchy reports cite technological wonders on the planets of the Mortuum Chain. Hoping

STCs can be recovered, the Adeptus Mechanicus launch an expedition, which begins an escalating war lasting over a century. Aided by the weaponry they recover, they free the human colonies from xenos occupation and several first generation copies of STCs are returned triumphantly to Mars.

The Age of Apostasy

Foreshadowed by the split of the Nova Terra Interregnum, a new age of dissent and power struggles follows. Zeal eclipses reason, and misrule reigns supreme. The word of the Emperor is subverted wholesale by corrupt ideologues, each struggling to usurp total control for themselves. The strong prey upon the weak.

200.M36 The Reign of Blood

Goge Vandire, Ecclesiarch and High Lord of the Adeptus Administratum, falls from the Emperor's light and sparks a civil war that lasts for seven decades. Only when loyal citizens rally to the banner of the preacher Sebastian Thor is the strife ended. Though Vandire's blood has long since been washed away, his memory stains the Emperor's Palace still.

310.M36 The Plague of Unbelief

754.M36 Web of Intrigue Disaster

989.M36 The Golden Throne Hungers

As the Eye of Terror and other Warp rifts visibly expand, the Tech-Priests servicing the Golden Throne demand an increase in the number of psykers needed to fuel the Emperor's growing appetite. The Black Ships increase in number and frequency of voyages. According to some records, four times the number of psykers are sacrificed daily to maintain optimal levels of power to the Golden Throne.

010.M37 Wrath of the Chaos Sun

The red giant star at the heart of the Maxil Beta system explodes in an expanding cloud of Warpflame. The inhabitants of every world for hundreds of light years are either mutated

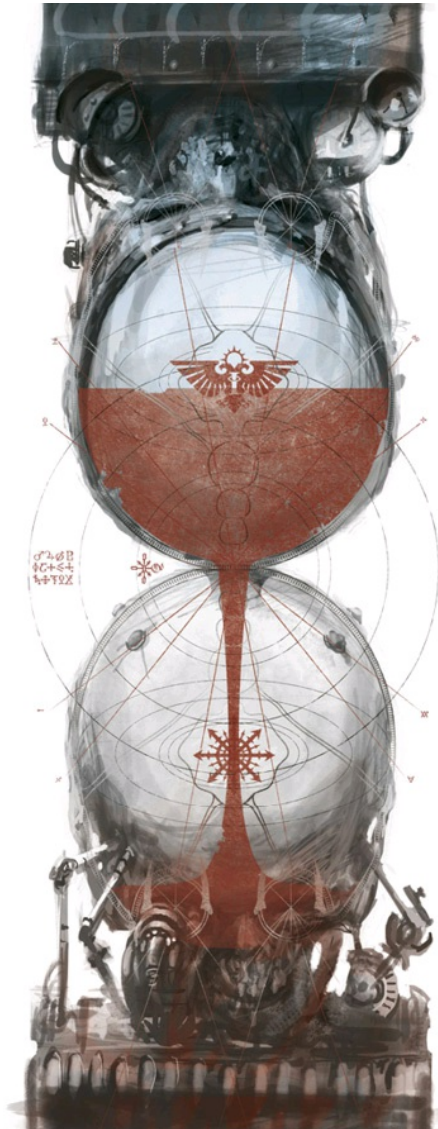
beyond recognition or possessed by the denizens of the Warp. In response, the High Lords order the mobilisation of whatever forces are close at hand. So it is that the Grey Knights are joined by a dozen other Chapters, countless Imperial Guard regiments, and the nascent Orders Militant of the Sisters of Battle. The resulting battle does much to heal the wounds opened by Vandire's treachery.

020.M37 The Great Cull

In their mercy, the High Lords of Terra begin a systematic extermination to ensure that such a corruption of faith can never occur again.

321.M37 The Abyssal Crusade

The judgement of Saint Basillius finds thirty Space Marine Chapters wanting in faith. The guilty are given a choice between instant death or embarking upon a crusade into the Eye of Terror. All choose the latter mission.



++ *Chaos consumes all.* ++

The Age of Redemption

The sins of apostasy are purged in blood and the Imperial cult grows in power. Heretics burn on a thousand worlds as the populace of the Imperium mortify their sins. Crusade after crusade is launched, and as the fervour peaks, thousands of worlds are left with inadequate defences as sector fleets, Space Marine Chapters and Imperial Guard regiments are drawn into long and terrible campaigns.

550.M37 The Occlusiad

The northwestern fringe is ravaged by the Apostles of the Blind King, rogue Tech-Priests who view humanity as an affront to the Machine God. The Apostles uncover artefacts lost in the Dark Age of Technology that allow the creation of supernovae from the hearts of living suns. Constellations are forever changed as the Apostles purge the outer sectors of Segmentum Obscurus. War rages for a decade, until Navigator Joyre Macran discovers the palace-warship of the Blind King hidden in a fold of Warp space. Macran guides the Emperor-class battleship *Dominus Astra* to the palace's location and the Blind King is slain. Without his prescience, the Apostles are quickly overcome.

754.M37 The Dissidence Dreams (The Lost Crusade)

On thousands of planets, menials rebel against their dreary drudge with wild-eyed leaders espousing a better way of life – a galaxy of tolerance. The movement is especially popular amongst the youth, earning it the title of Children's Crusade. Billions of earnest pilgrims are lured to seek transport to Terra; some are waylaid by pirates but the majority disappear into the Warp.

956.M37 Heavenfall Massacres

034.M38 The Bloodtide Awakens

112.M38 Judgement of Basillius

Having purged more than four hundred worlds within the Eye of Terror, the survivors of

the Abyssal Crusade return to Imperial space. Without pausing to claim the honours due for such a successful and protracted crusade, Chapter Master Konvak Lann of the Vorpall Swords declares the now ancient Saint Basillius a false idol and adoration of him tantamount to betrayal. In less than a year, every known sepulchre and shrine of the false saint is destroyed. After his execution, his bones, along with countless relics, books of doctrine and thousands of living worshippers are placed on a derelict bulk-freighter and launched directly into a nearby star.

666.M38 Grim Harvest

A great armada of misshapen hulks drifts out of the Warp near Terra. Some of the twisted and fused ships can still be identified as transports carrying pilgrims from the Lost Crusade. The Inquisition works feverishly to cover up the fleet's existence and its cargo of abominations.

001.M39 The Conflict of Helica

103.M39 Mausolean Cataclysm

The Waning

With the Imperium's armies exhausted by the Redemption Crusades, many worlds and systems fall to Ork invasions, Chaos insurgencies, or new alien menaces while internal strife embroils countless star systems across the galaxy. To combat the spreading anarchy, the Adeptus Terra imposes ever-stricter rules and doles out ever-harsher punishments. Many systems are turned over to direct governance by Space Marine Chapters to preserve stability.

++ Only a fool refuses the Emperor's Blessing. ++

131.M39 The Redemption Crusades

In each of the segmentums of the Imperium a great hero emerges. Like unto the Primarchs of old are these warriors, and the combined efforts of their crusades push back the borders of the Imperium further than they have been for nearly five hundred years. And then, fifty years later, the five heroes vanish without a trace, spurring Ecclesiarch Inovian III to declare them saints returned to the Emperor's side.

139.M41 Gothic War

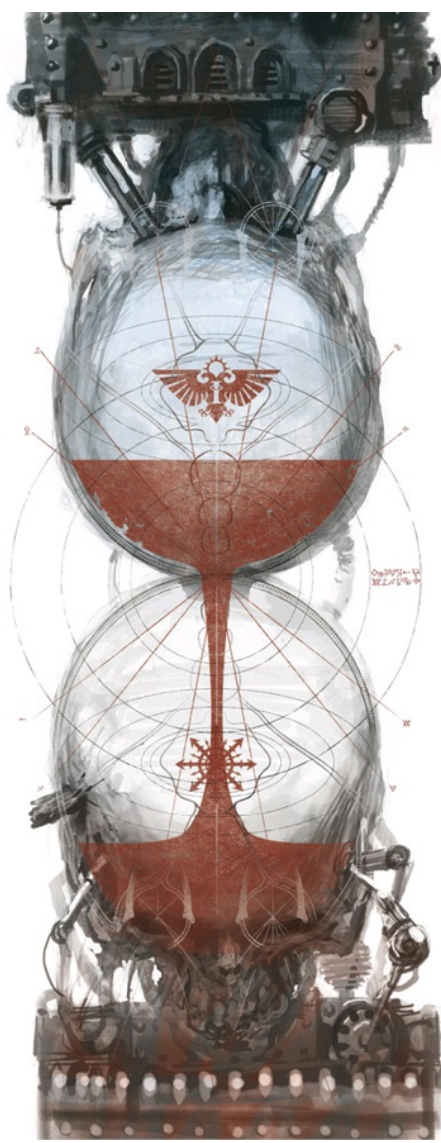
Known by some as the 12th Black Crusade, a vast attack is launched by Abaddon the Despoiler. It involves many sprawling battles across dozens of star systems, most of which are in the Gothic Sector of Segmentum Obscurus. Lasting over twenty years, it involves large naval conflicts and hundreds of planetary invasions. On the Imperial side, dozens of Space Marine Chapters, nearly a hundred Imperial Guard regiments and the better part of three Titan Legions take part, along with every naval vessel the segmentum can muster. The forces of Chaos, made up of Traitor Legions, renegade Chapters, Daemonic hosts and rebellious cults are eventually pressured by an endless stream of Imperial reinforcements to fall back into the Warp.

392.M41 The Macharian Conquests

Lord Commander Solar Macharius musters the greatest army the galaxy has seen since the Emperor united all his Primarchs beneath him in the Great Crusades. In seven years, Macharius reconquers a thousand worlds on the western reaches, and his glory carries him into the darkest sectors, places where the Emperor's light had never before been seen. Upon his death, the whole Imperium weeps for the fallen commander, but Macharius' territories soon collapse into rivalry and war. The Macharian Heresy, as this time has come to be known, lasts for seventy years and is only ended through the combined efforts of one hundred Space Marine Chapters.

500.M41 The Tears of the Emperor

The Imperium is swept by visions of the Emperor's tears. From backwards planets to hive worlds, a million versions of the same story are told by holy men, street agitators, shamans, priests, and mystics. Primitives point to storm-filled skies, claiming that the drops falling from them are the tears of their mighty god. Upon cardinal worlds, Arch-Deacons to lowly pilgrims claim to have seen statues of the divine Emperor shed tears. Chapter Masters and hive city urchins alike have visions of the Emperor stirring upon his throne, tears running from his empty sockets. Although the dreams take myriad forms, all know that the Emperor weeps not for himself, but for Mankind.



THE TIME OF ENDING

++ Death serves the Emperor. ++

744.M41 - Present

As 744.M41 dawns, Taggarth, the Seer of Corrinto, proclaims the approach of the End Times. He prophesies a time of unprecedented upheaval, in which even the light of the Emperor is swallowed in darkness. Though Taggarth is swiftly executed for heresy, his message of doom echoes across the galaxy. These are the last days of the Imperium, but whether glorious apotheosis or eternal damnation awaits, none can say...

745.M41 The Great Devourer

The Tyranids enter the galaxy and the Tyrannic Wars begin. Hive Fleet Behemoth destroys the Tyran and Thandros systems. Later that year, the alien horde descends upon the Realm of Ultramar. As Macragge itself falls under the shadow of the merciless swarm,

the Ultramarines fight to defend their homeworld. Marneus Calgar is gravely wounded by the horror known as the Swarmlord, and the Ultramarines' 1st Company are slain to the last man, but their sacrifice buys time for two Imperial battlefleets to converge upon Macragge and finally end the Behemoth's threat.

762.M41 The Kato Campaign

The Catachan MXIV 'Unseen Lurkers', led by Colonel 'Steel Eye' Black, battle Orks of the Deathskulls clan on the shadow world of Kato. Dire visibility and exceptionally rough terrain reduce the war to a never-ending string of bloody skirmishes that test the skills of the Catachan infantry to their limits. Neither side is able to gain an advantage until Sentinel teams locate and destroy the Orks' Stompa factory, hidden in the depths of the Widow Valley.

The Deathskulls respond by launching an all-out final offensive that threatens to overwhelm Imperial forces with its sheer ferocity. However, the Orks' attack is caught in the jaws of a series of Catachan ambushes, the coolly strategic Colonel Black dissecting and destroying the remaining Ork forces over three days of bloodshed.

777.M41 Labyrinth of Iron

Black Legion traitor Space Marines lead a raid in force out of the Eye of Terror. Though the renegades cut a swathe through the defenders of the Cadian Gate, they are eventually smashed at the battle of the Iron Labyrinth by a coalition of Cadians and Imperial Fists Space Marines.

783.M41 Rise of the Ancients

Eldar from the Ulthwé Craftworld destroy an Explorator fleet above the dead world of Maedrax, but not before several probes have been released and a distress hymnal despatched. Some months later, the Blood Angels' 3rd Company arrives to investigate the fleet's disappearance and becomes embroiled in ongoing war between Ulthwé's forces and the Necrons that the Explorators inadvertently awoke on Maedrax's surface. Determined to retrieve the Explorator flagship's ancient machine spirit from the fleet's wreckage, Captain Tycho agrees a truce with the Farseer Q'sandria and joins the battle against the Necrons.

793.M41 Operation Solemnace

Five full regiments of Catachan infantry are requisitioned by Inquisitor Helynnia Valeria for undisclosed operations upon the world of Solemnace. Though Inquisitor Valeria returns from her mission mere months later, none of the Imperial Guardsmen who accompanied her to Solemnace are ever heard from again. Requests from Segmentum

Command for clarification are met with stony silence.

797.M41 Green Tide Over Ultima

Throughout the Ultima Segmentum, countless Ork invasions threaten to mass into the colossal Waaagh! Ragg. The Imperium's forces are stretched to their utmost to contain each individual war zone. Notable actions include Marneus Calgar, Chapter Master of the Ultramarines, holding the gate alone for a night and a day against the greenskin hordes in the Siege of Zalathras (although this story is later dismissed as propaganda in many regions), the Ultramarines 2nd Company's utter devastation of Warboss Brug's planet stronghold and the final defeat of Warlord Ragg on the blades of Knights from House Terryn.

822.M41 Abaddon's Quest

In search of the long-lost Skull of Ker'ngar, Abaddon launches the brutal occupation of the maiden world of Ildanira. Forewarned of the Warmaster's coming, Illic Nightspear's Rangers lead the planetary population in a guerrilla war against the invaders. Unable to best the Eldar in the dense crystal forests, Abaddon orders Ildanira bombarded from orbit, but is forced to withdraw when an Alaitoc warfleet emerges from the webway to aid the beleaguered world.

831.M41 Waaagh! Gazbag

Gazbag, a Speed Freek Warlord noted for his tenacity if not his navigational skills, guides his Waaagh! toward a group of Eldar paradise worlds. The vengeful Eldar of Craftworld Biel-tan descend upon the invaders, but are eventually forced to withdraw, the flames of battle having reduced the paradise worlds' once verdant plains and jungles to smouldering ruins that Warboss Gazbag finds much more to his liking.

855.M41 Assault on Black Reach

Waaagh! Zanzag invades the hive world of Black Reach. By the time Captain Cato Sicarius and the 2nd Company of the Ultramarines arrive in orbit, the Orks have already overrun much of the planet. Sicarius and his battle-brothers immediately deploy to reinforce Ghospora, the besieged capital hive city of Black Reach. Ultramarines Drop Pods land hard on the heels of an orbital bombardment and, in a brief but bloody battle, cast the Orks from Ghospora's walls before setting off in search of Zanzag himself.

Captain Sicarius prosecutes a deadly search-and-destroy mission, razing several Ork forts along the Blackwallow River, but Zanzag continues to evade him. When Sulphora Hive comes under attack from a massive Ork horde, Sicarius hands the hunt over to Veteran Sergeant Telion and his Scouts. Telion soon discovers that the Orks are transporting

warriors and weapons across the Blackwall River by means of crude submersibles and tracks them to a vast natural cavern – Zanzag’s base of operations.

Sicarius immediately gathers what forces can be spared and boards a Thunderhawk Gunship to assault the lair. It takes an hour’s bloody fighting to secure the cavern, but the Orks are finally defeated when Sicarius cuts the Warlord’s head from his shoulders, thus ending the threat of Waaagh! Zanzag.

871.M41 The Liberation of Quintus

Kor’sarro Khan tracks the Daemon Prince Kernax Voldorius to the planet of Quintus. Upon making planetfall, the White Scars find unexpected allies in the form of Kayvaan Shrike and the Raven Guard 3rd Company. Despite the rivalry that exists between their two Chapters, the White Scars and Raven Guard put aside their differences to defeat Voldorius’ army of traitor legionnaires.

876.M41 The Bloodtide Returns

Chaos comes to the world of Van Horne. The Bloodthirster Ka’jagga’nath, Lord of the Bloodtide, breaks free of his bonds and unleashes a tide of gore that corrupts everything it touches. For eight days and nights, the orgies of blood continue, each fresh death luring yet more Daemons to the mortal world. Only when the Grey Knights 4th Brotherhood arrives can the Bloodtide be abated, and then only at great cost. Ka’jagga’nath is cast back into the Warp, and the psychic backlash banishes both the Bloodtide and the Daemons it had drawn forth.

883.M41 Fire and Blood

Dark Eldar from the Kabal of the Black Heart attack the garrison world of Kyobin. Despite the determination of Major Kamen’s Cadian shock troops, the raiders leave the planetary defences in smouldering ruin, massively destabilising the Imperium’s presence in the Loki sector and allowing the Crimson Slaughter’s Igrax Offensive to open up a dozen new battlefronts.

886.M41 Hope’s End

Earth caste engineers of the Tau Ke’lshan Sept proudly reveal an immense new colony seeding craft. This monolithic spacefaring vessel is named, in the Tau language, *Hope’s Light*. On its maiden voyage, and with over three hundred thousand Tau colonists and warriors on board, *Hope’s Light* is boarded by the Ork fleet of Megaboss Morkrog and lost with all hands. For the next decade, Ke’lshan Sept faces brutal raids from Morkrog’s vast new looted warship *Taukilla*.

888.M41 The Crusade of Wrath

A Black Templars crusade, under the command of Marshal Gerhart, drives the Word Bearers Legion from several star systems in close proximity to the Maelstrom. Fighting is fiercest on the enslaved shrine world of Benevolence, where the forces of Chaos have covered the entire surface with blasphemous temples to the Dark Gods. The Black Templars put every single traitor to the sword.

894.M41 The Sanctarro Campaign

Korovoskh, Overlord of Sanctarro, looses his Necron legions against the ash-choked worlds of the neighbouring Vjalborg system. Korovoskh has no pressing need for the worlds, but hopes to challenge Imotekh for rule of the Sautekh dynasty. Thus do billions of Imperial citizens die solely to prove Korovoskh's military aptitude.

Wherever Korovoskh's forces attack, Cryptek geomancers send tectonic disruptions rumbling through the bedrock; hives topple into ruins, and subterranean fortresses are crushed flat. Only when the 14th Alphic Dragons and the Raven Guard 3rd Company arrive at Vjalborg do the Necrons meet their first defeats. Nevertheless, Korovoskh's phalanxes are seemingly without number, and the new arrivals are badly beset.

Ultimately, the tide of the campaign is turned by the arrival of Strike Force Ultra, under the command of Severus Agemman. Leaving the Raven Guard and the Tempestus Scions to defend Vjalborg, Agemman leads a demi-company of Ultramarine veterans to Sanctarro itself. Though numbering fewer than fifty Space Marines, the strike force succeeds in breaching the flux-shields around Korovoskh's palace and, in a final battle beneath the Oblivion Gate, destroy Korovoskh and his royal court.

900.M41 Steel and Flame

Led by Kardan Stronos, a mighty force of Iron Hands and Brazen Claws attacks the Necron legions upon Sazalor. While Stronos leads Clan Garrsak in a headlong assault against the alien monarch's personal guard, Clan Company Raukaan face the wrath of a Transcendent C'tan.

Set loose by the Necron Overlord in an act of desperation, the star god scythes through the Iron Hands' ranks, hurling tanks through the air like toys and blasting battle-brothers to ash. It is finally brought low when venerable Ancient Furnous coordinates the Clan Company's Dreadnoughts into a single unstoppable assault wave. Though several of the Chapter's most venerated heroes fall, in the end it is the C'tan that is torn apart in a blaze of cosmic energies, leaving Clan Raukaan bloodied but unbowed.

901.M41 The Badab Wars

Lugft Huron, master of the Astral Claws Chapter, announces his secession from the Imperium, declaring himself the Tyrant of Badab.

911.M41 The Fall of Ka'Bandha

Grey Knight prognosticators predict that Ka'Bandha, Bloodthirster of Khorne, will shortly return to the mortal world. Knowing Ka'Bandha to be a dangerous foe, and moreover one who has earned the bitter enmity of the Blood Angels, the Grey Knights bring this news to the attention of Commander Dante and propose a joint strike.

So it is that a combined strike force of Blood Angels and Grey Knights assail his fortress on the Daemon world of Kalagazaar. Ka'Bandha is banished, the Daemon armies destroyed and Kalagazaar itself subjected to Exterminatus. At the campaign's end, the surviving Blood Angels have their memories wiped – a price Dante agreed with the Grey Knights at the mission's start.

913.M41 Knowledge Unbound

The Chaos Sorcerer Ahriman sacks the Librarium on Jollana. When a relief army of Imperial Guard and Invaders Space Marines arrive on the planet, Ahriman's sorcerous traps detonate. The Guard are immolated to the last man, and the Invaders scattered through the ruined Librarium. Worse, the walls between mortal and immortal worlds are so weakened that Daemons claw their way through, and the Invaders are grievously beset. The tide is only turned when a brotherhood of Grey Knights, under the command of Caddon Varn, intercede. Even so, by the time the Daemons are banished, only a dozen Invaders are left alive, and the Librarium is all but irreparable.

++ There is no fear in conviction. ++

c. 925.M41 The World Engine

A violent coup on the Necron tomb world of Borsis sees its introspective Overlord replaced by one of a more expansionist bent. Thus are Borsis' long dormant engines fired into life once more, signalling the start of a devastating purge that destroys eighteen planets in the Vidar Sector, including the forge world Lentrel Prime. The entire Vidar Sector fleet and no less than fifteen Space Marine task forces, including elements from the Ultramarines, the Astral Knights, Invaders, Blood Angels and Aurora Chapters oppose the World Engine as it reaps its bloody harvest.

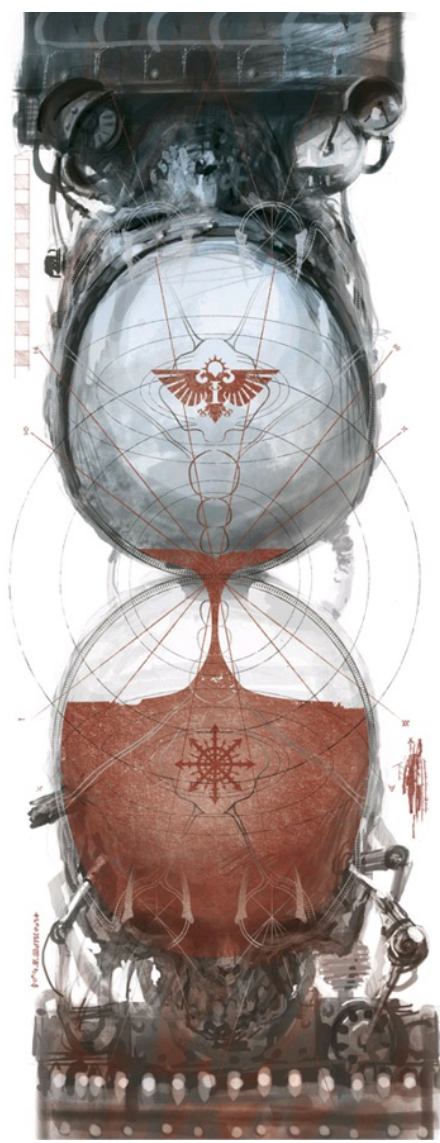
Ultimately, Borsis is only destroyed through the gallant sacrifice of Artor Amhrad and his battle-brothers of the Astral Knights. Ramming their Battle Barge through the World Engine's defence screens, they destroy vital systems to bring down Borsis' defences, allowing their allies to destroy the planet with volleys of cyclonic torpedoes.

926.M41 The Vaxhallian Genocide

The Chaos renegades known as the Purge choose the verdant Imperial world of Vaxhallia as their next victim. The planet's surface is soon riddled with consumptive disease and crippling famine. Over the course of a single month, the Purge engineer the destruction of no fewer than fourteen billion Imperial citizens.

This atrocity does not long go unnoticed; Vaxhallia had served as an Astropathic relay hub and a fortress-planet, vital to the defence of the Herakles System. As a result, when the Imperium finally responds, it does so in grand style. The entire Hammers of Dorn, Fire Lords and Crimson Fists Chapters initiate the planetstrike, reinforced by twelve Cadian battle-groups and the Knights of House Raven. Soon Vaxhallia is a roiling caldera of war that draws in forces from across the sector.

Vaxhallia's fate grows yet more dire when the plague ship *Terminus Est* arrives in orbit, disgorging hundreds of Plague Marines and countless millions of plague zombies onto the planet's surface. Typhus leads this fresh assault and, with each day that passes, more of the Cadians succumb to the zombie plague – soon the Space Marines and Knights find themselves fighting alone against a tide of traitors and walking dead. When a second Imperial battlefleet arrives, its commander deems the world irretrievably lost and begins preparations to evacuate the survivors and commence Exterminatus.



++ Knowledge is Power; Power Corrupts.++

932.M41 Last Stand at Jollov

Techno Magus Stannum Vir discovers fragments of an STC device on the agri world of Jollov. However, a Tyranid hive fleet tendrils threaten to consume the world before the STC can be recovered. At the Tech-Priest's behest, a courageous defence of the planet's spaceport ensues. Colonel Straken of Catachan co-ordinates five regiments of Imperial Guard in order to buy enough time for the Adeptus Mechanicus to flee with the invaluable technological relic.

933.M41 Bane of Daemons

The Somaro Starfort is overrun by Daemons in a matter of hours, leaving a dangerous breach in the defences of forge world Venta Secundus. As Kairos Fateweaver prepares to unleash his minions on the vital planet, Inquisitor Wolfe orders the Grey Knights into battle. Only when Kairos falls to the blade of Chapter Master Kaldor Draigo is the threat ended.

937.M41 The Wolf at Bay

Mustering five companies of Space Wolves, as well as the Cadian 301st and the Tallarn 14th, Inquisitor Pranix attempts to reclaim the nine Hollow Worlds of Lastrati from the traitorous Red Corsairs. The Drop Pods of the Space Wolves crash straight through the primary world's algae-crust surface, and war soon rages throughout the catacombs beneath. Huron Blackheart collapses preselected portions of his tunnel networks with cold precision and timing, isolating and destroying much of the Imperial army sent against him. The invading forces are forced to withdraw.

941.M41 Second War for Armageddon

Warlord Ghazghkull Mag Uruk Thraka looses a vast Waaagh! that, after much rampaging, meets its match upon Armageddon, a planet vitally important to the Imperium. The Orks are defeated only by the stubbornness of its inhabitants, the combined might of three Space Marine Chapters and the legendary heroics of Commissar Yarrick. Ghazghkull escapes and vows to return one day.

955.M41 The Crusade of Sorrow

Dark Eldar of the Kabal of the Poisoned Heart destroy the Black Templars' Chapter Keep on the jungle world of Delleront and capture a score of recruits. Marshal Gerhart and Chaplain Grimaldus lead a crusade of retribution against the kabal to punish them for their insolence, and though hundreds of Dark Eldar are slaughtered, not a single recruit is ever found.

961.M41 The Pandorax War

A strike force of Dark Angels and Grey Knights arrive in the Pandorax system in an attempt to seal the Damnation Cache and put a stop to the daemonic tide Abaddon has unleashed. The Grey Knights at last reach the Damnation Cache and seal it once more, but Abaddon has already departed Pandorax in search of fresh victories.

968.M41 The Khai-Zhan Uprising

Led by the Night Lords Traitor Legion, rebels capture every major population centre on Khai-Zhan before daybreak. Less than one tenth of Imperial Guard regiments sent to retake the world survive. However, in one of the most brutal urban conflicts in recent memory, the Cadian 122nd and their Imperial Fists allies succeed in recapturing the capital city of Vogen. With this primary starport secured, the Imperium's forces overwhelm the remaining traitors within a month.

973.M41 The Damnos Incident

Beneath the arctic chill of Damnos' surface, a Necron tomb awakens. Before the year is out, Damnos' vast manufactorum cities are in ruins, and the planetary capital of Kellenport is under siege. Under the Command of Captain Sicarius and Chief Librarian Tigurius, the Ultramarines Strike Cruiser *Valin's Revenge* arrives during the final assault on Kellenport.

The Ultramarines strike the Necron onslaught at its heart, scouring the soulless machine-warriors from Kellenport's walls. Sicarius is sorely wounded during the battle, but as his Command Squad stands resolute over their Captain's injured body, the hulking form of Venerable Dreadnought Agrippan strides into the fray and smashes the Necrons' Overlord asunder. As the Necrons are driven back, the orbital defences are cleared, and *Valin's Revenge* extracts the wounded Sicarius.

Tigurius is forced to acknowledge that Damnos is lost and they draw plans to evacuate as many of the planet's inhabitants as possible. The Ultramarines make a defiant stand at Kellenport, holding back the Necrons as the evacuation proceeds. Tigurius is found wherever the Ultramarines are hardest pressed, shattering the advancing Necrons with the fury of his mind and summoning psychic shields to cheat the machines of their prey. Agrippan's actions are just as heroic, and for three hours he holds Kellenport's western gate alone and unaided, obliterating all who oppose him.

By the time Kellenport's defenders are driven back to their last bastion of defence, only forty Space Marines and twenty Guardsmen remain planetside. Agrippan is lost in these last few minutes, his frame pinned between a dozen streams of gauss fire. As Thunderhawks speed Tigurius and the last survivors to safety, Agrippan's reactor explodes, obliterating the spaceport and every Necron within it.

++ *There is no cowardice in faith.* ++

975.M41 Desolation of Skarbrand

The Bloodthirster Skarbrand materialises on the Cadian fortress-planet of Lutoris Epsilon. His berserk rage infects all he surveys, and soon the fortifications are drenched in blood as the Guardsmen turn upon each other in crazed bloodlust. Ranged weaponry is disregarded as the defenders gut each other with bayonets, or claw out the eyes of their erstwhile allies with bloodied fingernails. Lutoris has since been considered cursed and is currently classified as quarantined.

980.M41 Vengeance at Bakka

Aiming to seize additional vessels for his renegade fleet, Huron Blackheart attacks the Imperial shipyards at Bakka. At the height of the battle, a Grey Knights Strike Cruiser

warps into the heart of the Red Corsairs fleet and begins firing on the flagship. Taking advantage of the confusion, Grand Master Mordrak and his bodyguard teleport aboard the Chaos vessel and fight their way to its bridge in search of Lugft Huron.

Badly outnumbered, the fight initially goes against Mordrak and his companions until their efforts are reinforced by the ghosts of battle-brothers slain at Huron's hand. With their aid, Mordrak is able to best Huron's inner circle of guards. Realising his peril, Huron flees the bridge though is seemingly slain by Mordrak before he can vanish into the bowels of his ship. Alas, upon death 'Huron' reverts to its natural form – that of a daemonic doppelganger which presumably exchanged places with Huron in the moments he was out of Mordrak's sight. Furious at his failure, but mindful of his worsening predicament, Mordrak returns to his Strike Cruiser moments before Huron's fleet makes its own escape into the Warp. The Bakka shipyards are saved, but Mordrak's vengeance remains unsatisfied.

981.M41 Last Stand of the Swamp Devils

Isolated on the agri world of Lowamon after three years of bitter fighting, Colonel Kratzer and Inquisitor Roth rally the Catachan XXIII for one last defiant stand against Tau Commander Darktide's Mont'ka assault.

985.M41 Conqueror's Fall

Imotekh the Stormlord's tomb ship, *Inevitable Conqueror*, comes under attack by a Black Templars fleet whilst en route to the Sautekh coreworld of Davatas. The architect of the assault is none other than Marshal Helbrecht, Chapter Master of the Black Templars. A broadside from the battle barge *Sigismund* strips away the *Conqueror*'s shields an instant before the Black Templars' boarding torpedoes strike home and, within moments, the tomb ship's decks are swarming with vengeful Space Marines.

Imotekh makes his escape by teleporting to an escort vessel. Helbrecht is incandescent with fury, but consoles himself by personally setting Imotekh's beloved flagship on a collision course with a nearby star, and blasting to oblivion those other Necron craft too slow to flee.

986.M41 The Swordwind Strikes

The fleet of Biel-Tan lays waste to the shipyards of Magna Cipri. This is the first blow in a flawlessly-executed campaign that culminates in Biel-Tan's aspect warriors scouring all human life from the maiden world of Liss'el – including the company of Flesh Tearers who arrive to aid in the defence.

988.M41 The Redeemer's Quest

Xander Krast murders a fellow Knight following a quarrel over a noblewoman's hand. With ritual execution looming, Xander is freed by an unknown benefactor and flees his ancestral home of Chrysis. Xander's brothers, tainted by familial association, take ship after him. The pursuit rages across a dozen systems, but Xander – now fighting as the freeblade Iron Redeemer – eventually trades his freedom for his brothers' assistance in defending the agri world of Tekara from Waaagh! Garshok. Working together, the brothers stall the greenskin invasion long enough for a strike force from the Iron Hands Clan Raukaan to arrive.

During the climactic Battle of Devil's Gorge, Xander performs a suicide run against the Stompa *Mork Wantz Ya!* and is presumed slain when the walker's reactor undergoes a devastating chain reaction. Many of Clan Raukaan's battle-brothers are slain in the explosion, and the survivors vengefully pursue the beaten remnants of Waaagh! Garshok across the Deinora Sector. Scattered and harried, the Orks leave the exodite world of Selesti – the planet that would have been their next target – wholly unmolested. Watching from deep within the webway, the Shadowseer Sylandri Veilwalker sees her plan come to fruition, and allows herself a brief moment of satisfaction before turning her attention to other matters.

The surviving brothers return to Chrysis, and report that Xander's crime has been washed away in blood. Xander's name is struck from the annals of House Krast, though the brothers are careful to make no mention of the Iron Redeemer.

989.M41 Fall of Rynn's World

Waaagh! Snagrod rampages across the Loki sector, culminating in an assault on Rynn's World that leaves the Crimson Fists Chapter nearly wiped out. Though the Orks are finally driven off Rynn's World, Chapter Master Pedro Kantor declines the opportunity for pursuit, instead throwing his efforts into rebuilding the Crimson Fists to their former glory. Snagrod himself escapes, and proceeds to wreak further havoc across the sector.

990.M41 The Scarlet Hunt

The decadent Dark Eldar noble, Zorothriel of the Flaying Blade, outdoes his rivals by staging a daring hunt upon the Daemon world of Khornax. Breaching a webway portal that leads onto the planet's bone-strewn plains, Zorothriel's armada of skimmers hurtles across the landscape so quickly that the Daemon skull-gatherers below can do little more than roar their anger in response.

Zorothriel locates a roving pack of Flesh Hounds and begins his sport, proving his supremacy over the beasts by vaporising one after another with his craft's darklight weaponry. At hunt's end, the surviving Daemon beasts are joined by a three-headed Flesh Hound larger than the rest. Oddly, the newcomer's low growls lull the frenzied pack into submission. Seeing a potential gift for Commorragh's gladiatorial arenas before him,

Zorothriel orders the beast bound in energy chains and taken back to his warship. It is the last mistake he ever makes. Whilst in transit through the webway, the three-headed beast breaks its shackles, frees its packmates and prowls through the warship's corridors, killing all on board.

993.M41 The Kraken Slain

The Ultramarines quash a rebellion on the industrial world of Ichar IV, only to find themselves at the forefront of a desperate defence against Hive Fleet Kraken. In a replay of history, Marneus Calgar, having narrowly escaped death at the hands of the Swarmlord during their confrontation on Macragge, faces the reincarnation of the same beast on the blood-soaked fields. This time, however, Calgar triumphs, slaying the beast with his bare hands. The Space Marines' victory comes too late to save the planet itself, for the Tyranids had already reduced it to a smoking charnel house of death and destruction.

Simultaneously, another tendril of the same hive fleet ravages Craftworld Iyanden. Iyanna Arienal rouses the dead from their slumbers to fight as ghost warriors, but even so the Craftworld seems doomed. Thousands upon thousands of lives are lost to the Tyranid onslaught. In the end, victory is only won when the exiled Prince Yriel returns to his ancestral home at the head of a mighty corsair fleet. Storming the ruined halls, Yriel draws the cursed Spear of Twilight from the Shrine of Ulthanash, embracing a lingering death so that his kinsfolk might survive. At last, the hive fleet's swarms are expended, and a battered and desolate Iyanden continues its voyage through the stars.

997.M41 Leviathan Wakes

The twin tendrils of Hive Fleet Leviathan strike at the underbelly of the Imperium, cutting a swathe of destruction through Segmentums Tempestus, Ultima and Solar, beginning the Third Tyrannic War. From Macragge to Ultima Macharia, the forces of the Imperium hurry to confront this new threat, leaving many sectors open to attack by other enemies.

997.M41 The Pandemonium of Sondheim V

The world of Sondheim V is invaded by Tyranids of Hive Fleet Leviathan just as the Daemon Prince M'kar the Reborn transforms it into a private Pandaemonium. Whilst the Sky Sentinels Chapter establish an orbital quarantine, Grand Master Vardan Kai of the Grey Knights descends to the surface to capture the Book of Pandegaras – the cursed tome key to M'kar's plans. After a brutal three-way battle, Kai seizes his prize and orders the Sky Sentinels to begin Exterminatus. The Grey Knights make their escape as the first wave of barrage bombs slam into the twisted jungles, their Stormravens regaining the safety of the battle barge before a volley of cyclonic torpedoes rip the world apart. In the wake of the Exterminatus, the Sky Sentinels surrender themselves for mindwipe.

997.M41 The Storm of Vengeance

Piscina IV is invaded by Orks under the joint leadership of Ghazghkull Thraka and Bad Moons Warboss, Nazdreg. Only the stout defence commanded by Master Belial, of the Dark Angels, ends the Ork threat. Although the victory is great, several Imperial Commanders, including Master Belial, feel that this is only the beginning.

997.M41 Audacious Expansion

The small but growing Tau Empire begins a third phase of expansion. They seize half a dozen more Imperial worlds on the Eastern Fringe and several more bow willingly before the Greater Good.

997.M41 The Quest for the Cure

Brother Corbulo continues his search for a cure to the Red Thirst – the bloodlust that mars the Blood Angels and all their successor Chapters. This takes him to the edge of the Imperium, to the world of Sollorn, and an ancient bio-vault dating back to the Dark Age of Technology. Before Corbulo can recover the tissue samples, the system is overtaken by Hive Fleet Leviathan, and the Tyranids absorb the samples within the vault. Corbulo leads a boarding action into the heart of the largest hive ship, determined that his quest will not fail.

998.M41 Da Great Waaagh!

Ghazghkull Thraka returns to Armageddon, plunging the world into another colossal conflict. Imperial commanders know that if the hive world falls, a thousand other systems will follow, and thus commit massive amounts of troops. Imperial and Ork reinforcements arrive almost daily, and soon the Third War for Armageddon degenerates into a gruelling war of attrition in which neither side can gain a clear advantage.

998.M41 The Devouring of Shadrac

A Tyranid splinter fleet falls upon the isolated, bitterly cold world of Shadrac. The frostbitten Imperial Guard stationed there need a miracle to survive, but when a pack of Space Wolves appears out of nowhere, it appears that a miracle has indeed arrived. Led by Skold Greypelt, the Space Wolves join the Guardsmen in a last-ditch defence that destroys an entire swarm. Though Shadrac is ultimately claimed by the innumerable Tyranids, a handful of warriors escape, and the Hive Mind learns to be wary of the Sons of Russ.

998.M41 Shon'tu's Revenge

Warsmith Shon'tu of the Iron Warriors boards the Imperial Fists star fort *Endeavour of Will* with his warband. Helbrutes hammer the Imperial Fists, but Chaplain Gannus Roth rallies the defenders, and though casualties are high, they hold on until Terminator Assault Squads teleport into the fray. With hammer and shield, the veterans drive the Daemon Engines back into the *Endeavour's* docking bay and into the waiting guns of the Centurion Devastators squads. Shon'tu retreats, swearing vengeance against Chaplain Roth.

998.M41 The Doom of Straxos

With many of its Titan Legions assigned to the Armageddon war zone, forge world Straxos barely survives Asdrubael Vect's grand trophy raid. Over the course of the three-month Straxian night, six full Kabals battle Skitarii and the Knights of House Raven. When dawn at last comes, the invaders vanish, leaving only ruin in their wake.

998.M41 A Prophet of the Waaagh!

After months campaigning on Armageddon, Ghazghkull realises that no other greenskin has his ambition. For the rest of the Ork race, a good fight is a victory in itself, but Ghazghkull yearns for something greater. Possessed by a sudden, manic energy, Ghazghkull departs Armageddon, leaving behind him a world still locked in the grip of a war that neither side can win.

998.M41 The Red Waaagh!

Warlord Gruk of the Red Waaagh! ploughs into the densely populated Sanctus Reach. The Imperium prepares to make a stand upon Alaric Prime, a feudal world of linked archipelagos and crumbling gaols. When a flotilla of Ork rust-ships makes planetfall, the knightly houses of Alaric lead their Cadian allies in a worldwide counter-attack. Warlord Gruk's bullish tactics take a heavy toll on the human defenders before the legendary Freeblade known as Gerantius joins the conflict, tipping the war into a new desperate phase.

999.M41 Chaos Rising

Tech-Priests of the Adeptus Mechanicus discover growing failures in the mechanisms of the Golden Throne. They are deemed beyond any current ability to repair. The light of the Astronomican grows dimmer, and a ripple of psychic activity passes through the Imperium, awakening the dormant powers of countless latent psykers. The resulting backlash creates innumerable Warp rifts and a thousand worlds are lost to daemonic incursions. Meanwhile, in the twisted space known as the Eye of Terror, one of the Imperium's oldest foes prepares to launch a war to end all wars.

999.M41 Baal's Darkest Hour

The Blood Angels are tested as never before. A tendrill of Hive Fleet Leviathan is judged to be on a direct course for Baal. Worse, the dread Bloodthirster Ka'Bandha returns from the darkness of the Warp with a Daemon army at his command, his first blow striking against Ammonai, outermost planet of the Baal system. Faced with a terrible war on at least two fronts, Dante makes swift preparation, uniting many Imperial and non-human worlds under the banner of survival. Even some former foes can be counted in Dante's alliance, though whether or not they can be entirely trusted is another matter.

Knowing even these forces are not enough to repel both Daemons and Tyranids, Dante recalls the 3rd Company from Armageddon and requests aid from the Blood Angels' successors. Gabriel Seth of the Flesh Tearers is the first to respond, dispatching the Chapter's full strength without hesitation, and ultimately all but the Lamenters answer the call. Even the Knights of Blood, declared renegade many centuries earlier, pay heed, though they are careful never to take the field alongside the other Chapters. So is the stage set for the defence of Baal itself – perhaps the final battle of the Scions of Sanguinius...

999.M41 The Bio-Purge

The Eldar of Biel-Tan and Iyanden unite on the Tyranid-infested planet of Valedor, unleashing a psychic doomsday device in order to destroy the planet and prevent fragments of Hive Fleet Kraken – and the genetic information they carry – from being absorbed into Hive Fleet Leviathan. The Eldar repeat their success on dozens of Imperial and Ork-held worlds. The Imperium rages at what its commanders see as impulsive slaughter, blindly venting its wrath upon any xenos spaceship within a dozen parsecs.

999.M41 Return to Damnos

Realising that the threat of Damnos can no longer be ignored, Marneus Calgar musters the entire Ultramarines Chapter to eliminate the Necron menace once and for all.

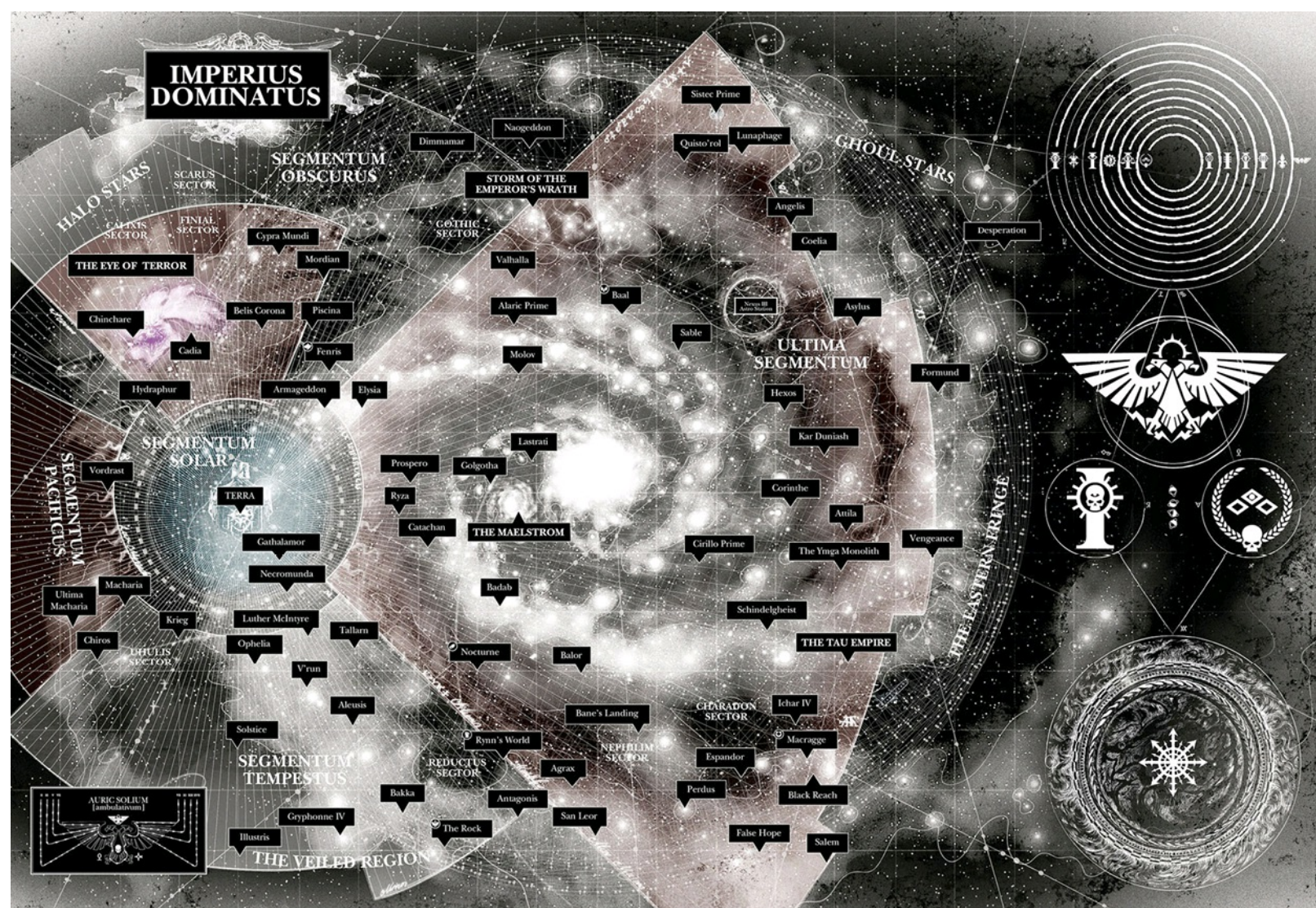
999.M41 Dark Vengeance

The Dark Angels 5th Company battles elements of the Crimson Slaughter for control of the Hellfire Stone. The renegades believe that by anointing the ancient altar to the Dark Gods with the sacrificial blood of a loyalist Space Marine they can halt the voices that haunt them. The traitors have been deceived, for the Hellfire Stone will instead summon forth Daemons of the Warp, ushering in a new age of darkness. The Dark Angels are victorious, but this battle marks only the first in a long series of clashes they will fight against the renegade Space Marines.

999.M41 The 13th Black Crusade

Warmaster Abaddon launches his 13th Black Crusade. The armies of Chaos invade Cadia and many surrounding worlds. The attacking forces consist of those traitors from the darkest of times. Always in the vanguard are the Black Legion, followed by the Death Guard, World Eaters, Alpha Legion, Thousand Sons, Night Lords and others from the annals of blackest days. Before them run infected, plague-ridden cultists, and traitorous scum in numbers too great to count. Behind them march hosts of Daemons led by towering Daemon Princes, and other Warp creatures eager for mortal flesh. Astropaths everywhere cringe to open their minds to receive messages, for the Warp rings with mind-splitting sound of the myriad tears ripping open the barrier between the physical world and the Immaterium.

As the Black Crusade begins, the battered forces of the Imperium prepare for the greatest war since the days of the Horus Heresy.



THE PANDORAX INCURSION

The Pandorax Incursion took place between 959.M41 and 961.M41, when a Black Legion warfleet invaded the Pandorax System and captured the Imperial planet of Pythos. Hidden beneath the planet's surface was a portal to the Warp known as the Damnation Cache, which Abaddon used to unleash a daemoniac legion upon the world. A ferocious campaign was fought by Imperial forces to recapture Pythos and close down the Damnation Cache, first in the depths of space, and then on the Daemon-infested surface of Pythos itself.

THE INVASION OF PYTHOS

In 959.M41, a Black Legion incursion fleet invaded the Imperial planet of Pythos, in the Pandorax System. The fleet was commanded by Abaddon the Despoiler himself, and consisted of half a dozen massive battleships, each one with enough firepower to lay waste to an entire planet, supported by numerous escort craft.

The incursion fleet contemptuously swept aside Pandorax's system defence craft, and moved into orbit above the planet of Pythos within hours of entering the system. What Abaddon could possibly want from Pythos was by no means clear at this time. The planet was an inhospitable death world, home to a colony of hardy Imperial citizens. Most of Pythos is covered in dense jungle, which is home to massive saurian creatures happy to eat anything that moves. The oceans are inhabited by equally large predators.

Because of the dangers of moving through the lowlands and across the oceans, the human settlers of Pythos settled in mountaintop mining colonies known locally as delver-strongholds. From these, they derived a precarious and meagre existence mining the precious minerals found in the planet's mountain chains. Hundreds of these strongholds were scattered over the planet, each home to populations of only a few thousand Imperial citizens.



PYTHOS



Imperial Death World

Pythos is a death world, covered mainly in dense jungles, with occasional areas of scorched grassland. Its jungles and oceans are inhabited by massive saurian predators.

ABADDON THE DESPOILER



Abaddon took command of the Black Legion following the Horus Heresy and

has led it in innumerable bloody campaigns since then. He secured the favour of all four of the Ruinous Powers, who have rewarded him with the arcane blade Drach'nyen, to use alongside the Talon of Horus, the legendary weapon of the Warmaster himself. With the Dark Gods behind him, Abaddon is determined to avenge Horus and destroy the Imperium. Should his armies triumph, a tide of Chaos will pour from the Eye of Terror to engulf the galaxy.

Pythos' only major city was the Hive-port of Atika, which was located on the coast of the planet's largest ocean, and surrounded on its landward side by the aptly named deathglades. Atika was a small spire city with its main habitation zones located in the dome-like upper levels of the city, high above the surrounding swamplands. Travel between Atika and the delver-strongholds was carried out in dilapidated lighter-than-air dirigibles known as sky barges, lumbering through the skies high above the ferocious creatures that inhabited the lowlands in relative safety.

This, then, was the bleak environment which Abaddon found at Pythos. Within moments of entering orbit, his warfleet unleashed a pinpoint barrage, quickly disabling Atika's defences and blasting the bastions and barracks occupied by the city's defence forces. Blood red rain started pouring from the skies, and the massive capital ships of the Chaos fleet launched scores of Dreadclaw drop pods, which disgorged hundreds of Chaos Space Marines. Dozens of squads of Khorne Berzerkers supported by hunting packs of Forgefiends led the assault, slaughtering the defenders in a maelstrom of gore.

Surprised, demoralised, and having already suffered heavy casualties, Atika's defenders broke almost at first contact. The only formation able to organize any kind of effective resistance was the 183rd Catachan Jungle Fighter regiment, stranded on the planet while en route to the Maelstrom, and even they were only able to hold on for a few hours before being forced to conduct a fighting retreat and escape into the surrounding swamplands. Within thirty-six hours of Abaddon's arrival, Atika was claimed in the name of the Dark Gods.

THE BLOOD MARCH

The Catachan Jungle Fighters that had escaped the city were forced to battle their way through Pythos' predator-infested jungles, harried all the way by Black Legion murder squads. It is unlikely that any other Imperial Guard troops could have survived such a march, and even the Catachans suffered dreadfully through the ordeal. Battling their way past ambushes, fighting off attacks by massive reptilian monsters and voracious man-eating plants, the Catachans finally reached the relative safety of the Olympax mountain range, just 150 miles to the east of Atika.

Here, they braced themselves for an all-out attack by the Black Legion. Mysteriously,

however, they were allowed time to regroup. Although the Black Legion continued to harry the Catachans, no serious attack on them was undertaken, and this gave the Imperial forces time to link up with each other.

Although the largest concentration of Imperial troops had been located at Atika, all of the delver-strongholds had their own garrisons and, in aggregate, these troops numbered in the tens of thousands. Colonel 'Death' Strike, commander of the 183rd regiment, and now de-facto Imperial Governor of Pythos, quickly began to organize these widely scattered forces, using commandeered sky barges to gather a sizable army at his base camp in the Olympax mountains. Within a fortnight, he began planning offensive operations against the Chaos invaders of what he now considered to be his planet.



Hidden beneath the surface of Pythos, the Damnation Cache was a portal to the Realm of Chaos itself.

THE DAMNATION CACHE

What Colonel Strike could not possibly know was that Abaddon had been far from idle. Unbeknownst to any of the Imperial citizens on the planet, Atika was built atop a hellish gateway known as the Damnation Cache. This gateway was a small but terrifyingly stable portal into the Warp, through which daemoniac legions could travel into the material realm. Once it was captured, Abaddon would be able to summon forth a tide of wrathful Daemons to overwhelm the remaining defenders of Pythos and threaten the hundreds of Imperial planets nearby.

In the dark days of the Horus Heresy, vast numbers of Daemons had emerged from the Damnation Cache to fight against those who had remained loyal to the Emperor. Following Horus' defeat, the Damnation Cache was sealed, and in the centuries that followed, it disappeared from history. Only the Daemon-hunting Grey Knights retained any knowledge of the portal.

So it was that when Pythos was reclaimed as an Imperial colony in M33, none but the Grey Knights, the Chaos Gods, and the few surviving Chaos Space Marines that had fought there in the Heresy knew of the horrors hidden beneath the planet's surface.

However, Abaddon was one of those Traitor Legion veterans, and immediately upon his arrival on Pythos, he began the task of breaking through the wards that had been set on that infernal gateway thousands of years before.

Disabling the wards was no easy task; dozens of Abaddon's most powerful sorcerers struggled to weaken the seals, sacrificing hundreds of Atika's citizens in bloody rituals of unbinding as they did so. One by one, the ancient bindings broke, until finally, just over a month after Abaddon's warfleet had first appeared in the system, the last ward was broken and the Damnation Cache was unsealed.

Immediately, the portal into the Warp reopened and a tide of Daemons gushed through, rampaging out of Atika, across the planet, and surging towards Colonel Strike's composite army. This time, the Catachans and their PDF allies were at least at combat readiness, but nothing could have prepared them for the tidal wave of destruction that the opening of the Damnation Cache had released.

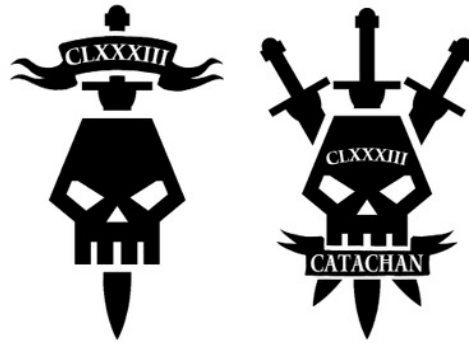
A desperate struggle erupted on the lower slopes of Mount Olympax, as wave after wave of daemoniac creatures crashed against the bastions and defence lines of Colonel Strike's camp. Only great heroics and terrible sacrifice prevented the base from being overrun in the first assault. Even so, it was clear to Colonel Strike that defending the newly established base camp could only result in the destruction of his entire command. Huddled together in a single location, they were an easy a target for the overwhelming hordes of Daemons pouring forth from the Damnation Cache.

Bitterly, Colonel Strike ordered the troops under his command to split up and retreat to the hundreds of delver-strongholds that were located all across Pythos. He knew that while no single settlement could resist attack, the sheer number of strongholds and their scattered locations offered the best chance of some Imperial forces surviving until reinforcements arrived. If, that was, reinforcements arrived at all...

COLONEL 'DEATH' STRIKE



Colonel Strike was the commander of the 183rd regiment of Catachan Jungle Fighters at the start of the Pandorax Incursion. He earned his nickname when still only a squad Sergeant, fighting against insurgents in the dense forests of Burlion VIII. His opponents said that fighting against Strike and his men meant only one thing – certain death. The 183rd regiment was en route to the Maelstrom war zone when catastrophic engine failure on their transport craft resulted in them being stranded on Pythos just before Abaddon's invasion began. Commander Azrael later said that were it not for Colonel Strike, Pythos would have been completely overrun.



183rd Catachan Jungle Fighters tattoos



183rd Catachan Jungle Fighters Regimental Banner

BATTLEFLEET DEMETER

Although Abaddon's initial attack had been terrifyingly swift, he could not stop all messages calling for aid from being transmitted. High atop Atika, the desperate defenders had been able to hold out long enough for an astropathic distress signal to be sent streaking through the Immaterium. Despite the efforts of covens of Chaos Sorcerers aboard Abaddon's flagship, the Black Legion were unable to block all of these signals, which continued to be broadcast until bloodthirsty assault squads of Khorne Berserkers were finally able to smash their way into the astropathic chamber in Atika's central spire.

The Pandorax System lies a short distance to the galactic south of the Maelstrom, in the Demeter Sector. Lying so close to Huron Blackheart's realm meant that the Demeter

Sector was in a high state of battle-readiness and could react to the attack quickly. Immediately upon receiving the distress call, the closest reserve fleet in the sector was ordered to the Pandorax System. Meanwhile, transport was arranged for the 19th and 27th Imperial Guard armies, as the massive resources of the Imperium swung into operation to repel Abaddon's invasion.

Battlefleet Demeter's reserve fleet was under the command of Lord Admiral Orson Kranswar, aboard his flagship, the *Revenge*. He was highly experienced, having fought numerous actions against Red Corsairs raiding fleets, though his background would offer little benefit against the overwhelming force of battle-scarred opposition he would encounter in the Pandorax System. Over the coming weeks and months, his fleet would fight in some of the largest space battles since the Gothic campaign.

The first omen of what Battlefleet Demeter would have to endure in the coming months occurred as soon as the fleet entered the Pandorax System. The 129th Imperial Destroyer Squadron was ranging ahead of the main fleet, and had just begun to pick its way through the asteroid belt that fringed the outer reaches of the star system. As they did so, they were subjected to a lightning-fast attack by Iconoclast destroyers hidden in the belt. Two Imperial ships were lost, and the Chaos squadron escaped unharmed, disappearing amidst the dense asteroid belt just minutes after launching their attack.

Kranswar first established a base on the tiny planet of Gaea, located on the edge of the Pandorax System. With his lines of communication secure, he then began to mount a series of raids and attacks into the asteroid field, intent on clearing a path to Pythos. In the following weeks, a series of increasingly brutal conflicts were fought in and around the asteroid belt, earning it the nickname of the 'Adamantium Fields' due to the myriad hulls of wrecked ships that floated there. At first, the ships of Abaddon's fleet held the upper hand, inflicting heavy losses on the Imperial flotillas as they repeatedly attempted to pick a way through the asteroid belt. However, in the long run, this was a campaign Abaddon could not hope to win, as the material superiority of his adversary – and the willingness of the Imperium to accept stunning losses to break through to Pythos – slowly but surely eroded the strength of the Chaos fleet.

Slowly the tide began to turn, and Abaddon was forced to commit ever more ships to holding Kranswar in check. It was at this point that Abaddon received vital assistance in the form of a raiding fleet of Red Corsairs.

None can say if this came about because Abaddon and Huron Blackheart had agreed to aid each other, or simply because the Red Corsairs were drawn to the Pandorax System by the lure of conflict, just as the giant megaloshark of the Phythosian oceans is drawn to injured prey by the scent of blood in the water.

In any case, the outcome was the same: combining their strength, the Chaos fleets swiftly drove the Imperial ships out of the Adamantium Fields, and back towards their base at Gaea. As they did so, the dispersed squadrons of ships belonging to the two sides gathered for a final space battle of such scale that it would be remembered for a hundred

generations.

ADMIRAL KRANSWAR



Lord Admiral Orson Kranswar came from a renowned line of naval officers that had served the Emperor for millennia. He distinguished himself as a young midshipman, and was quickly promoted. Although personally brave, his tactics were predictable and lacked imagination – a trait exploited by his opponents during the space battles for the Adamantium Fields. He died leading a counter-attack when his flagship, the Revenge, was boarded by Abaddon's Chaos Space Marines.



THE BATTLE FOR PANDORAX 960.M41

Lord-Admiral Kranswar knew that he was in a dangerous position. Although the number

of escort vessels under his command roughly matched those in the combined Chaos fleets, he was heavily outgunned and outnumbered in terms of capital ships. The only real advantage he held lay in the number of fast attack craft he had; the launch bays on the *Revenge* and *Stalwart* gave him a two-to-one advantage over those carried by the Chaos ships.

In order to maximize this strength, Kranswar decided to hold the *Revenge* and *Stalwart* back, while the rest of his ships advanced to engage the Chaos fleet. While the bulk of his ships tried to keep the Chaos fleet at arm's length, his two carriers would launch successive waves of attack craft, tasked with overwhelming the squadrons defending the Chaos ships, and inflicting as much damage as possible. Hopefully, by the time the two fleets came to grips properly, the attack craft would have wreaked enough destruction to even the odds in the ensuing gun battle.

Unfortunately for Kranswar, while his plan was strategically sound, it lacked guile. Although Abaddon was still on Pythos commanding the ground campaign, his chosen lieutenant, Chaos Warlord Malgar Irongrasp, was a veteran of hundreds of space battles and had guessed what Kranswar's strategy was likely to be even before his sensors picked up the positions of the ships in the Imperial battlefleet.

Irongrasp's ships tore forth from the Adamantium Fields like a battering ram, striking straight towards the heart of Kranswar's leading flotillas. Smashing through the screen of Imperial attack craft, they gave Kranswar's ships no time to carry out the dainty manoeuvres that he had transmitted to his command.



'Our actions upon this day will determine if our names will live in glory or be despised. Launch all attack squadrons and prepare to engage the enemy! Let us win glory!!'

- Admiral Kranswar, Battle for Pandorax



IMPERIAL BATTLE FLEET

Revenge, *Emperor class battleship*

Stalwart, *Dictator class cruiser*

Steel Anvil, *Dominator class cruiser*

Leviathan, *Lunar class cruiser*

Lord Solar, *Lunar class cruiser*

Courageous, *Dauntless class light cruiser*

Banshee, *Dauntless class light cruiser*

Myrmidon, *Endeavour class light cruiser*

Gamma Squadron, three Sword class frigates

Jaguar Squadron, two Firestorm class frigates

129th Destroyer Squadron, six Cobra class destroyers

89th Escort Squadron, five Falchion class escorts

PANDORAX SYSTEM

Demeter Sector

Ultima Segmentum

Pandorax

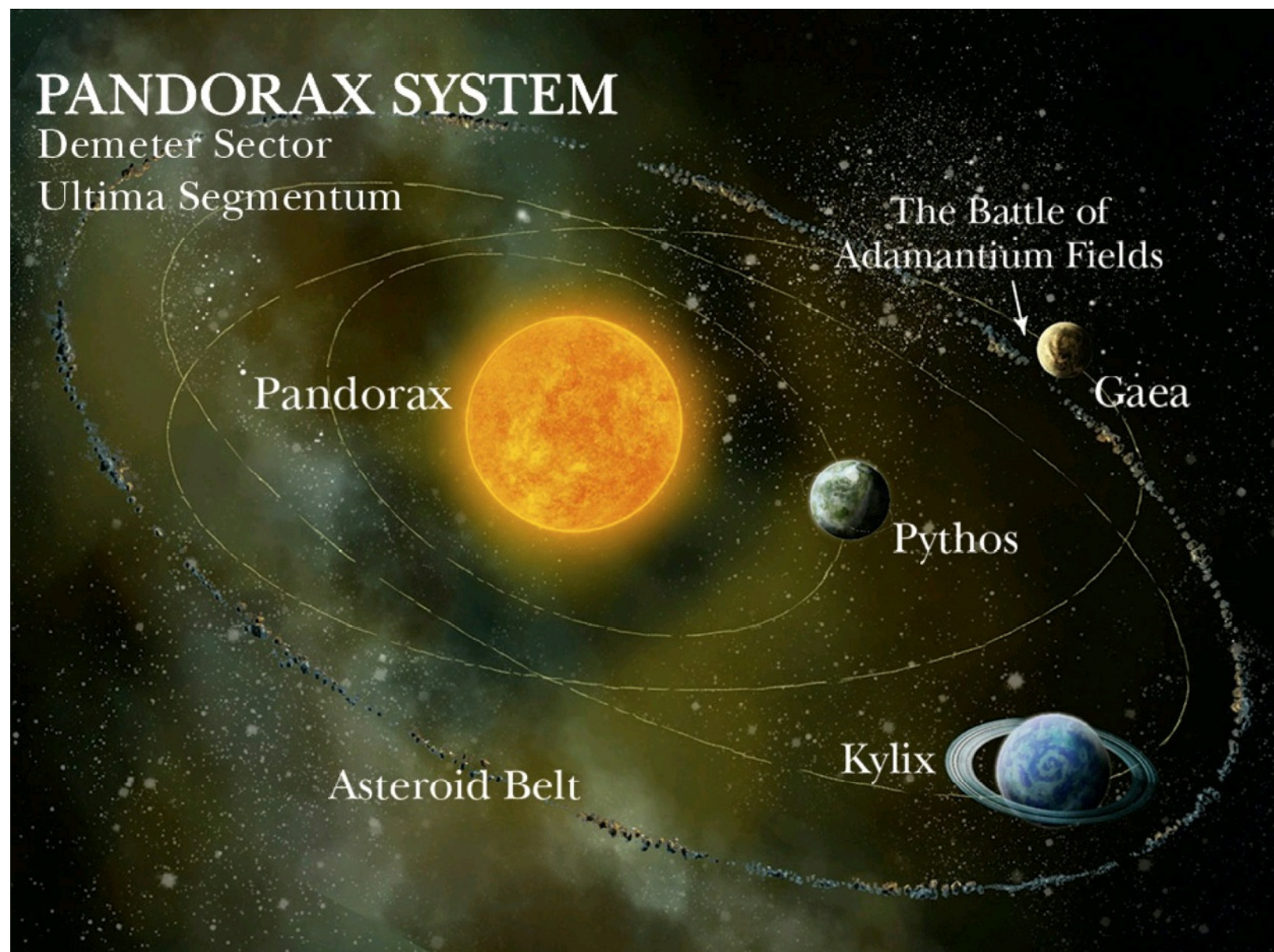
The Battle of
Adamantium Fields

Gaea

Pythos

Asteroid Belt

Kylix



A furious close range battle erupted, as the Chaos fleet ploughed in amongst the ships of the Imperial advance guard, their immense, rippling broadsides illuminating their flanks.

Hundreds of attack craft swirled and battled around the miles-long capital ships, while squadrons of escort vessels engaged in deadly close range gunnery battles.

Kranswar desperately ordered his ships to disengage. Although they had suffered heavy damage, they had given as good as they'd gotten, and if he could just buy enough time to rearm and refuel his now depleted attack craft, the battle could still be won. The Imperial ships executed Kranswar's orders with a stoicism bought through many long hours of careful training. The Imperial capital ships, screened by their escorts, broke away from the Chaos fleet, while the surviving attack craft headed back to the *Revenge* and *Stalwart* to re-arm.

However, Irongrasp had foreseen this reaction too. Unnoticed at the back of the Chaos warfleet, the *Might of Huron*, a Slaughter class cruiser, fired up the huge thruster arrays which define ships of that infamous class, and powered full speed ahead towards the Imperial carrier ships to the rear of the Imperial formation. Mysteriously, its tractors dragged a huge asteroid along behind it.

The purpose of the asteroid was revealed as the *Might of Huron* closed with the *Revenge* and *Stalwart*: the interior of the massive rock was hollow, and inside were hidden scores of Black Legion and Red Corsairs boarding parties, supported by Dreadclaw assault pods and short-ranged orbital flyers. As it neared the *Revenge*, the *Might of Huron* released the asteroid, which drifted directly towards the Imperial craft.

As soon as it was close enough, tractor beams inside the asteroid grappled the Imperial battleship, and chanting covens of Chaos Sorcerers loosed a barrage of psychic attacks that tore down the Imperial ship's defensive shields and blinded its short-range batteries.

As soon as the *Revenge's* energy shields went down, hundreds of assault pods were launched at the now defenceless craft, and a massive boarding action erupted amidst the launch bays and corridors of the ship. The Chaos Space Marines in the boarding parties were quickly reinforced by hosts of horrifying Daemons, which poured from Warp portals that began appearing all across the ship. Within moments, the *Revenge* was engulfed in a furious battle.

Leaving the boarding parties to deal with the *Revenge*, the *Might of Huron* went after the *Stalwart*, which was ill-suited to a close-range gun battle with the heavily armed Chaos craft. At a stroke, Warlord Irongrasp had turned the tables on the Imperial fleet, negating any advantage the Imperial attack craft might have given them, and leaving them fatally split.

Meanwhile, the rest of the Chaos fleet was able to concentrate on crushing the ships of Kranswar's advance guard. Once these ships were destroyed, Irongrasp could finish off the *Revenge* and *Stalwart*, if anything remained after the brutal pummelling each was sustaining.

As Admiral Kranswar took personal command of one of the security battalions, he knew that his command was almost certainly doomed to destruction. He offered his soul to the

immortal Emperor, for it would take a miracle to save his fleet.

CHAOS FLEET

Relentless Ire, *Desolator class battleship*

Divine Corruption, *Repulsive class grand cruiser*

Heartless Destroyer, *Styx class heavy cruiser*

Helspite, *Carnage class cruiser*

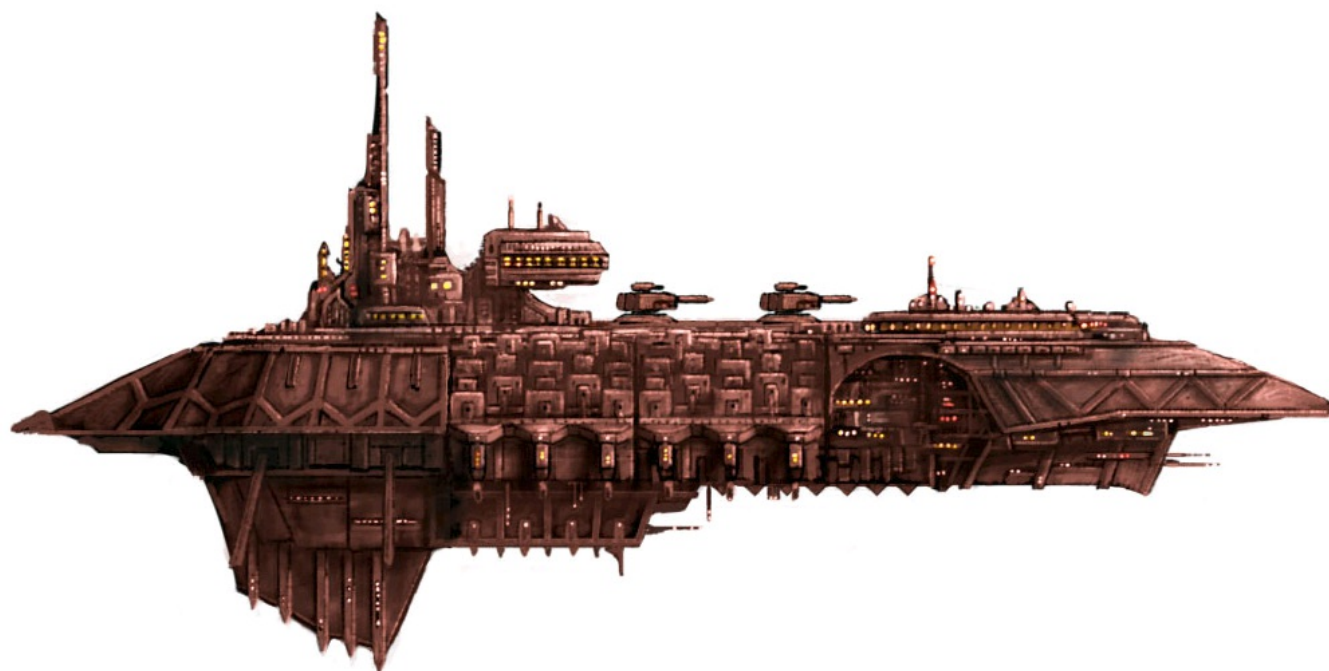
Purgator Squadron, three Idolator class raiders

Savage Squadron, four Iconoclast class destroyers

Black Death Squadron, three Iconoclast class destroyers

MIGHT OF HURON

Slaughter class cruiser Battle for Pandorax



RED CORSAIRS

Might of Huron, *Slaughter class cruiser*

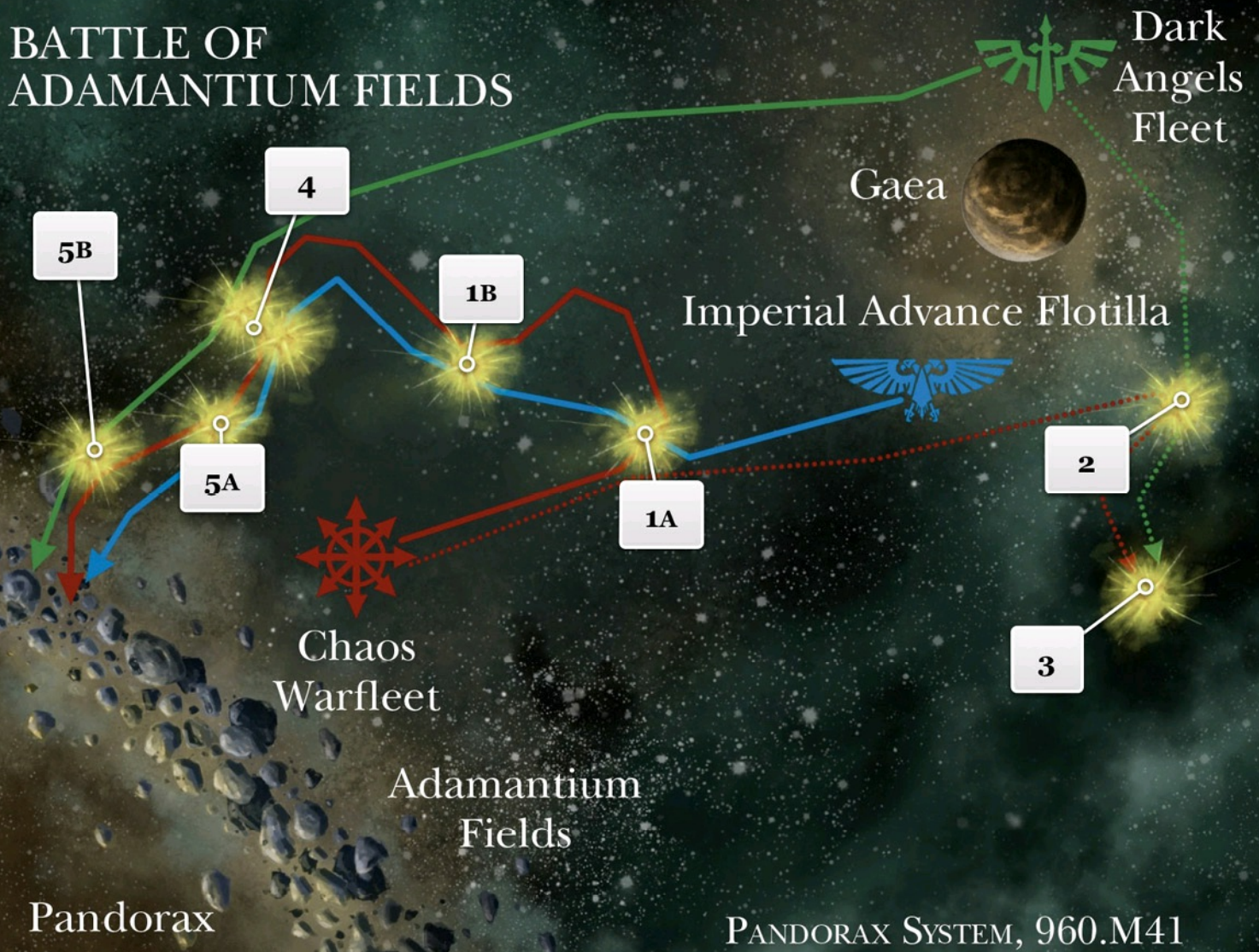
Deathblade, *Murder class cruiser*

No Redemption, *Murder class cruiser*

Red Fury Squadron, three Infidel class raiders

Sanguine Slaughter Squadron, two Iconoclast class destroyers

BATTLE OF ADAMANTIUM FIELDS



1a & 1b. The Imperial advance flotilla engages Chaos fleet.

2. Chaos Space Marines and Daemons board the *Revenge*.

3. The *Might of Huron* is destroyed by the *Stalwart* and the Dark Angels Battle Barge *Unrelenting Fury*.

4. The Dark Angels fleet joins forces with the Imperial advance flotilla. The Chaos fleet is forced to retreat.

5a & 5b. The Chaos fleet is caught between the two Imperial forces, who inflict terrible damage to the Chaos ships before they can finally reach the safety of the Adamantium Fields. The Imperial victory is complete.

A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE 960.M41

It was at this vital juncture that the navigators in both fleets began picking up signs of an opening in the Warp, indications that one or more ships were just about to jump into the system. The navigators could hardly believe their senses – appearing this close to a planetary body was almost suicidal. Nonetheless, the sensors didn't lie: where one moment there was nothing, in the next moment four capital ships and half a dozen escort craft blinked into existence.

Seconds later, an eleventh, impossibly vast, craft appeared; one that dwarfed even the asteroid Irongrasp had used to attack the *Revenge*. This mighty vessel was the Rock. At the moment of darkest despair, the Dark Angels had arrived.

As the Rock and its escorting craft moved to engage the main strength of the Chaos fleet, the Dark Angels Battle Barge *Unrelenting Fury* and three Hunter class escorts swept towards the stricken *Revenge*. Closing quickly, *Unrelenting Fury* launched a volley of boarding torpedoes towards the Chaos asteroid. Just as they struck, a phalanx of Terminators teleported onto the rocky surface of the planetoid, their pale armour a beacon against the dark bulk – this was one of those rare times when the Deathwing deployed at their full strength, an event unlikely to occur more than once in a century.

COMMANDER AZRAEL



Commander Azrael is the present Supreme Grand Master of the Dark Angels Chapter. Azrael is a dynamic leader who knows and speaks his mind and is utterly convinced of the rightness of his cause. He fearlessly leads the Chapter in battle, commanding one of the mightiest, and most enigmatic, fighting forces in the galaxy. Azrael is also the guardian of the secrets the Dark Angels have locked away within the dark chambers hidden miles below the surface of The Rock, where only the Watchers in the Dark dare to tread.

They tore into the covens of Chaos Sorcerers on the asteroid with righteous fury, inflicting dozens of casualties even before the Chaos forces knew what had hit them. Moments later, the Dark Angels' boarding torpedoes struck, and with incredible swiftness, the asteroid was engulfed in a battle.

Help was also at hand for the *Revenge*. A silvered Strike Cruiser arrived alongside the Dark Angels fleet, and a full brotherhood of Grey Knights materialized within the *Revenge's* hull to cut a swathe through the Daemon legions swarming through it. They were soon joined by contingents of Dark Angels, aiding the defenders and stemming the tide of the Chaos boarding parties' attacks.

As the covens on the asteroid died, the portals through which the Daemons were appearing closed one by one. Hunting parties led by squads of Grey Knights wiped out the last of the Daemons lurking within the ship. Within hours, no taint of the incursion remained. Although she had been dreadfully damaged, the *Revenge* was saved, and would continue her vital role in the Pandorax campaign.

All around Gaea, the story was the same. The arrival of the Dark Angels swiftly turned the tide against Chaos. The first to feel the Dark Angels' avenging fury was the *Might of Huron*, which was blasted into oblivion by the combined firepower of the *Unrelenting Fury* and the attack squadrons launched from the *Stalwart*.

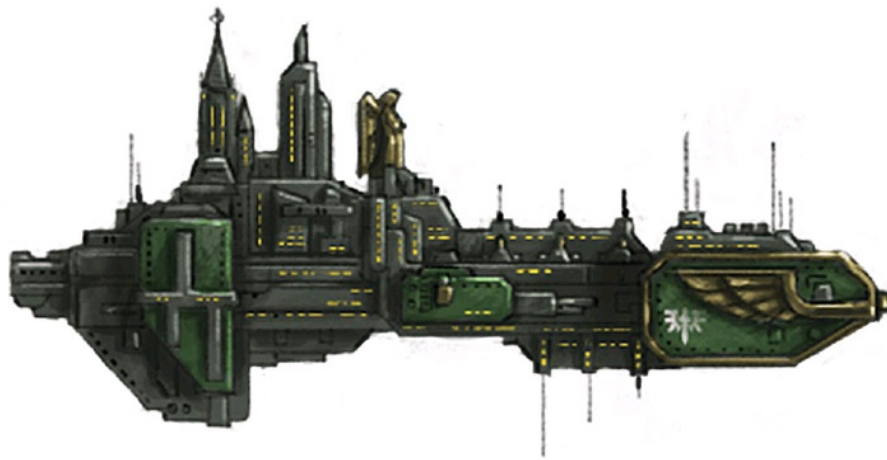
NOTABLE DARK ANGEL VESSELS

- The Rock
 - Unrelenting Fury, *Battle Barge*
 - Sword of Caliban, *Strike Cruiser*
 - *Fortitude Squadron*, three Hunter class destroyers
 - *Terminatus Squadron*, three Hunter class destroyers
-

Meanwhile, Warlord Irongrasp found his ships trapped between the battered but still combat-worthy ships of Battlefleet Demeter, and the newly arrived Space Marine Strike Cruisers and escort squadrons. Surrounded on all sides, Irongrasp attempted to break through to the relative safety of the Adamantium Fields, but his fleet, already damaged in the earlier battles around Gaea, could not succeed. Only half of the ships in the Chaos fleet survived the battle, and those that did were so badly damaged that it would take years to repair them all.

Tragically, Admiral Kranswar was slain when he led a defence detail against the renegades that had invaded his flagship, and he did not live to see the fruits of his victory. The triumph of the Imperial forces in space was almost total, leaving Abaddon and his Black Legion trapped and cut off on the surface of Pythos.

LION'S CLAW SQUADRON



These Hunter class destroyers were the first Dark Angels ships to enter battle at the Adamantium Fields, and provided vital orbital support to Imperial ground forces throughout the reconquest of Pythos.



THE RECONQUEST OF PYTHOS, 960.M41

If Abaddon was worried by this turn of events, he showed no sign. In the months since Pythos had been invaded, the planet had become a Daemon-infested hell. Greater Daemons revelled in battle against the saurian monsters that inhabited the planet, and hordes of lesser Daemons marched on the delver-strongholds.

Whenever this gibbering army reached one of the mountain fortresses, it launched a furious attack, aided by contingents of Black Legion warriors and Red Corsairs sent by Huron Blackheart to aid Abaddon's forces. Although the defenders of the strongholds put up a valiant resistance, they could not hope to hold out for very long. One by one, the strongholds were overrun, and any survivors were marched back to Atika as slaves.

What the slaves returned to was not the city they once knew. Located so close to the corrupting force of the Damnation Cache, Atika had changed beyond all recognition. Strange, hideously mutated structures had sprouted from the once elegant spire walls. Most of the city had been abandoned, and the population now lived in the network of twisted underground tunnels and caverns that surrounded the Damnation Cache. Vile

smoke and putrid vapours filled the air in the tunnels and belched out through cracks and crevices into the surrounding atmosphere. Most terrible of all, the enslaved population of the city had been struck down by a terrible plague that reduced them to shambling creatures, more dead than alive.

It was this grim scene of devastation and despair that greeted the victors of the space battles in the Adamantium Fields. Finally arriving in orbit above the planet, the Imperial fleet immediately began orbital bombardments on the daemoniac armies that were assaulting the delver-strongholds. Squadrons of Marauder Bombers intensified the bombardment, aided by Xerxes Airborne Support Wings, and Dark Angels Thunderhead and Talon of Vengeance squadrons.

Abaddon's forces were driven back by the overwhelming aerial barrages, allowing companies of Space Marines and regiments of Imperial Guard to relieve the defenders, many of whom had been fighting continuously for over a year. In a brief ceremony, Colonel Strike officially handed over command of the planetary defence force to Commander Azrael. Colonel Strike refused all offers to join the other high commanders in the orbiting battlefleet, preferring to return to the fray in his specially modified Baneblade Traitor's Bane, so that he could fight against the invaders who had cost him so many men.

KREATOR REX



Kreator Rex became one of the first members of the mysterious Chaos machine cult known as the Obliterators. He took part in all of the bloodiest battles of the Horus Heresy, building machines that combined the arts he had learnt with the twisting power of the Chaos. He now fights at Abaddon's side, building massive Chaos war engines to carry out the Despoiler's bidding. The Brass Scorpions, Towers of Skulls, Plaguereapers and Lords of Skulls he constructed proved vital in the attacks on Pythos' delver-strongholds during the Pandorax campaign, quickly breaching their walls and spearheading every assault.

However, although the tide was turning, the Chaos armies continued their relentless assaults on the delver-strongholds. No sooner was one strike driven off, than a new one would begin. Abaddon's tactics changed; instead of making overwhelming and methodical attacks against the strongholds closest to Atika, his legions, supplemented by Hounds of Huron raiding parties, attacked wherever the defenders were weakest.

No matter how well Azrael organised his forces to react to these attacks, he could not always arrive in time. Many smaller strongholds were overrun and their populations enslaved. It quickly became clear to Azrael that fire-fighting in this way was leading nowhere. He had to strike at the source of the problem: the Damnation Cache itself would need to be recaptured and resealed.

In truth, the Grey Knights accompanying the Dark Angels had been arguing for just such a strike ever since the fleet had arrived over the beleaguered world. Although the Dark Angels harbour a bitter hatred for Abaddon and his allies, Azrael argued that the first priority of the Emperor's armies on Pythos was to shield and protect the planet's citizens; therefore, the delver-strongholds should be saved before Atika was attacked. It was only when it became clear that Abaddon's forces would continue to launch sporadic attacks against the strongholds, no matter how well protected they were, that Azrael was forced to change his tactics.

ORDER OF BATTLE:

THE PYTHOS INCURSION, 785960.M41

Pythos Planetary Defence Force

- 183rd Catachan Jungle Fighters regiment
- 100 Delver-stronghold Militia battalions

Pythos Reconquest Force

- The Dark Angels Chapter
- One Brotherhood of Grey Knights
- 4th, 15th, 22nd, and 99th Cadian regiments
- 5th Mordian regiment
- One regiment Cadian Whiteshields
- 116th Death Korps of Krieg regiment

- 3rd, 8th Cadian Recon regiment
- 10th Cadian Armoured regiment
- 116th Vostroyan Armoured regiment
- 1st, 5th Cadian Artillery regiments
- ‘Thunderers’ Super-heavy Company
- Demeter 1st – 3rd Imperial Navy Fighter wings
- Demeter 1st – 2nd Imperial Navy Bomber wings

Chaos Incursion Force

- Abaddon’s Black Legion: 26 warbands
- Kreator’s Chaos War Engines: 7 Great Engines, 12 Lesser Engines
- Corpulax’s Plague Zombie Horde: 100,000 Plague Zombies
- Vassal Warbands: Chaos Space Marine warbands owing service to Abaddon the Despoiler

Hosts of the Damnation Cache

- Graknor’s Legion: 18 Cohorts of Khornate Daemons
 - Plaguetoad’s Host: 21 Cohorts of Nurgle’s Daemons
 - The Nefarious Brethren: 8 Cohorts of Tzeentchian Daemons
 - Vangorian’s Host: 9 Cohorts of Tzeentch Daemons
 - Exstatix’s Legion: 13 Cohorts of Slaaneshi Daemons
-

ASSAULT ON ATIKA, 961.M41

Once the decision was made, the Imperial forces acted quickly to bring the Emperor’s wrath to their daemoniac foes. The assault on Atika was announced by a massive orbital bombardment. The once-gleaming spire-city toppled to the ground, and the surrounding area was pounded into wasteland by the combined firepower of the Imperial fleet. In the wake of the bombardment, Thunderhawk Gunships and Drop Pods crashed onto the ravaged battlefield, disgorging the full strength of the Dark Angels Chapter, supported by the Grey Knights who had saved the Revenge. Even the Black Legion and the hordes of Daemons at Abaddon’s command could not resist such a hammer blow, and they were quickly driven underground by the fury of the Imperial attack.

The second wave of the assault swiftly followed. Scores of orbital transporters landed around the bridgehead the Space Marines had established, disgorging regiment after regiment of Imperial Guard onto the steaming mire left by the orbital attack. Colonel Strike was one of the first to land amidst the ruins of the city; the hoary survivor had been given command of the Imperial Guard assault army by Azrael himself, and was determined to see the campaign to its brutal conclusion.

The Imperial Guard regiments arrived not a moment too soon, as wave after wave of vile Daemons poured forth from the ravaged underground tunnels, having scented blood. Many Imperial Guard platoons and their accompanying armoured support had only just mustered in their positions at the perimeter of the bridgehead when the daemonic horde struck. Lasguns and battle-cannon tore gaping holes in the charging ranks of Daemons, but as one infernal creature fell, ten more stood ready to take its place.

Soon the whole Imperial frontline was engulfed in a terrible melee, as Guardsmen and Space Marines battled furiously against creatures spawned by the Warp. Bayonets were fixed and chainswords activated in a desperate defence against the talons and blades of the daemonic host. Then, the guns of the orbiting Imperial fleet fired into the Warp-spawned horde, the massive macro cannon shells and strikes of their lance batteries smashing into the ground dangerously close to the hand-to-hand combats being fought all around the bridgehead. Each titanic blast lifted scores of bodies into the air to fall amongst the swirling combatants.

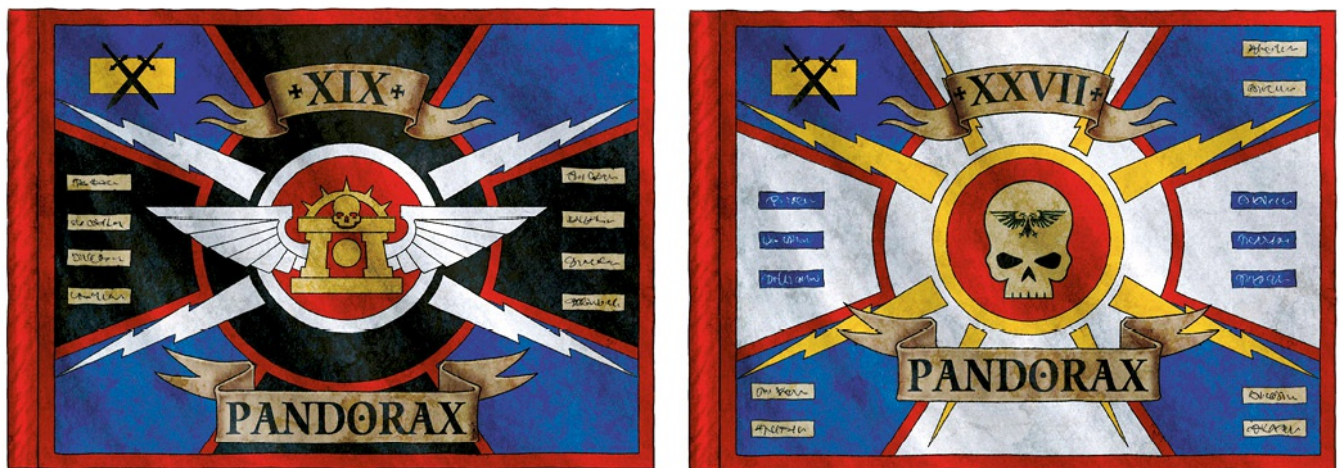
Even the warp-spawned Daemon horde could not withstand such hammer blows, and against the massed firepower of the fleet, the attack faltered and finally stopped. Around the implacable Space Marines, the weary, wounded guardsmen drew breath, relieved to see tunnel mouths empty and quiet. All around the bridgehead, the ground was covered in the slowly dematerialising remains of more than 100,000 Daemons. Within an hour, the bodies were gone, returned to the Realm of Chaos that had spawned them. They left the battlefield eerily barren, strewn only with Imperial corpses and the blackened shells of wrecked tanks.

Pythos Reconquest Force Battle Standards



Army Standard, Pythos Reconquest Supreme Command

Pythos Planetary Defence Forces were subordinate to the Reconquest Supreme Command.



Army Standard, 19th Imperial Guard Army



Army Badge, Pythos Reconquest Force

A number of ad-hoc variations of this badge were used by military units during the campaign, and it was not universally used by all formations taking part in the campaign.

THE UNDERGROUND WAR

With the bridgehead established, Azrael began the grim task of clearing a path to the Damnation Cache itself. The underground tunnels and caverns were defended bitterly by newly summoned Daemons and Chaos Space Marines under Abaddon's command, but the Imperial attackers were implacable.

The cave system was vast, and incredibly complex. Tunnels branched and intertwined, some of them narrowing so that even infantry could only advance in single file, while others were so massive that they formed vast underground caverns large enough to allow Deathstrike Vortex Missile batteries and hunting packs of Warhound Titans to bring their long-range weapons to bear. Unnumbered battles and firefights were fought within the Stygian darkness below Atika, but slowly, yard by yard, the Imperial forces battled their way through the darkened tunnels.





2nd Company Vehicle Pennant, 1st Cadian Artillery Regiment

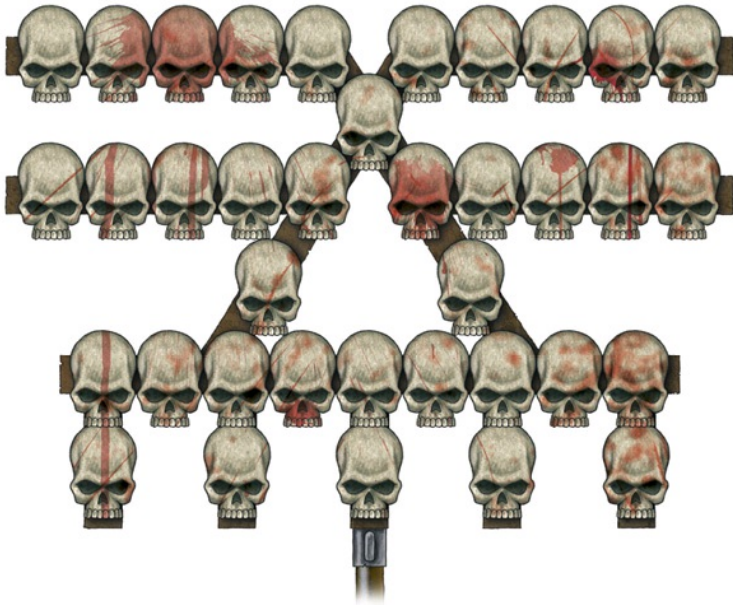


The Mk19c Jungle Pattern camouflage scheme was adopted by the 1st Cadian Artillery Regiment at Pandorax.



Kreator Rex marks all of the war engines he creates with his personal rune of

forging.



Battle Standard borne by Graknor's Legion.

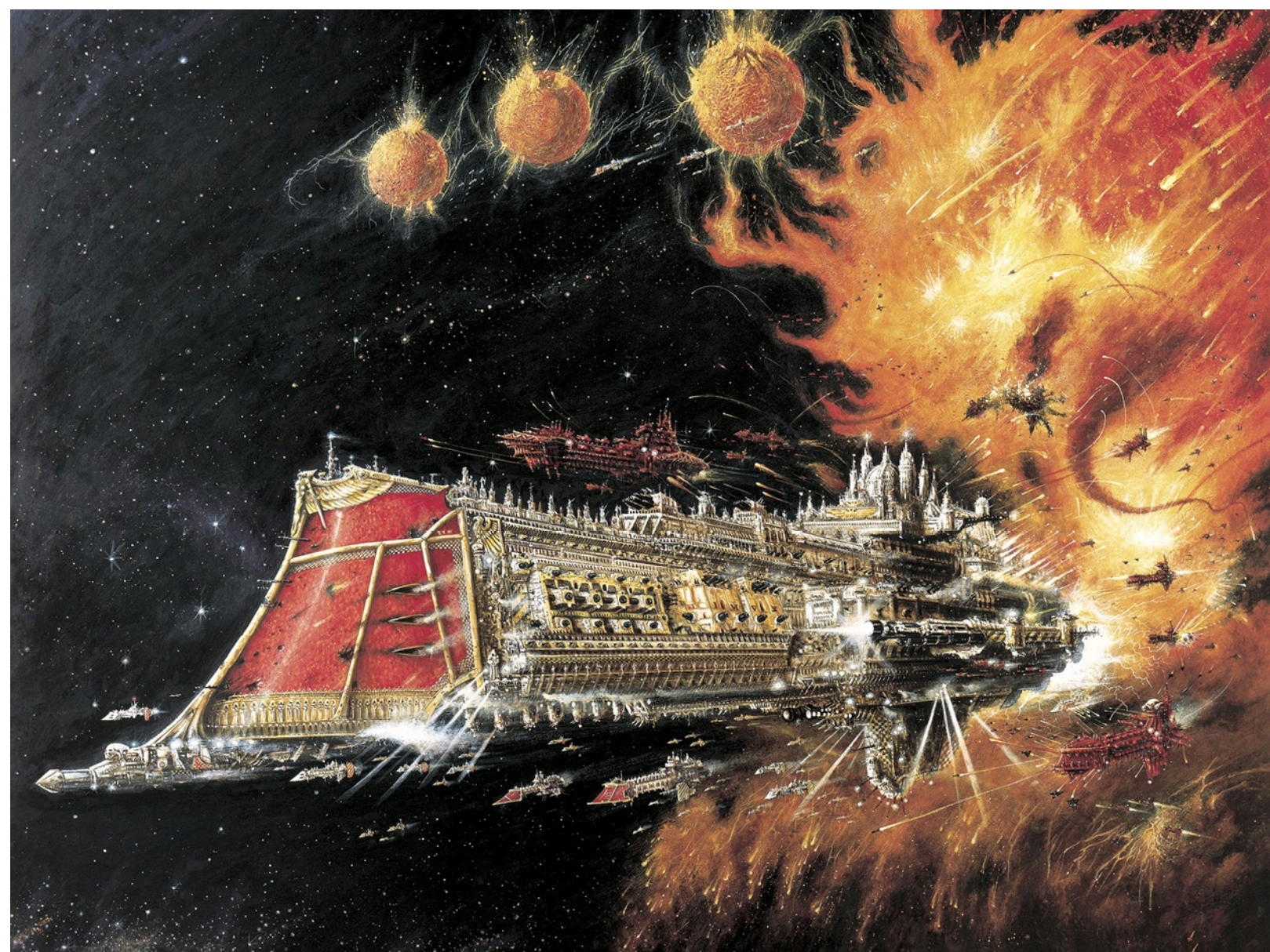
As they closed in upon the Damnation Cache, the Daemons and Chaos Space Marines were joined by shambling hordes of mutant zombies. These were the surviving remnants of the once-proud citizens of Atika, enslaved ever since Abaddon had captured the planet, and now horrifically transformed by the warping effects of the Chaos portal. Gritting their teeth, the Imperial attackers forged on through their foes, every step taking them closer to the Damnation Cache itself.

Even though the situation around the cache was becoming increasingly desperate, Abaddon continued to launch raids on the delver-strongholds, even leading several of the attacks personally. Azrael, however, no longer allow this to distract him from his purpose. Spearheaded by the Dark Angels and Grey Knights, the forces of Chaos were driven ever further back until the Damnation Cache was almost in Imperial hands.

However, just as Abaddon seemed defeated, a fresh flotilla of Red Corsairs raiders suddenly appeared in the system. Breaking through the Imperial cordon, they rendezvoused with Abaddon in the jungle, and their orbital transport craft quickly evacuated the surviving Chaos Space Marines from locations scattered all over Pythos. Although the Imperial fleet was able to destroy some of the Red Corsairs' transporters, the majority made it to the ships hidden in orbit, and escaped. Hours later, an Imperial assault seized the Damnation Cache, and the Grey Knights began the arduous process of re-establishing the wards that would seal it once again. The Pandorax Incursion had finally been defeated, but at huge cost.



Corpulax is a Plague Marine and Chaos Warlord. He was originally a member of the Consecrators Chapter, but was infected with the Zombie Plague when battling against the foetid forces of Typhus. Left for dead on a devastated planet, Corpulax awoke as a reanimated corpse. However, unlike so many of the plague's victims, Corpulax retained his intelligence and cognitive powers. Over the last three hundred years, he has orchestrated an inexorable rise to power, finally becoming one of Abaddon's most trusted warlords. He has fought in dozens of battles, either at Abaddon's side or carrying out his bidding. Wherever he appears, he spreads the terrible plague with which he is afflicted, and is single-handedly responsible for disseminating the disease that wiped out every inhabitant of the city of Atika.



AFTERMATH, 961.M41 - present

In the wake of Abaddon's escape and the resealing of the Damnation Cache, the Dark Angels and Grey Knights left Pythos. Colonel Strike was left in command of the two Imperial Guard armies that had taken part in the reconquest, and has been fighting a decades-long campaign to cleanse the planet of any lingering daemonic infestation ever since. Although the Damnation Cache was resealed, the damage it inflicted was severe, and many minor Warp rifts still need to be closed. The war carries on to this day.



Valkyrie, 1st Squadron, 3rd Cadian Recon regiment



Valkyrie, 5th Squadron, 3rd Cadian Recon regiment

Why Abaddon attacked the Pandorax System remains a mystery. However, there are recurring rumours that his aim was not one of conquest, but of discovery. It is said that the Ruinous Powers sent Abaddon a vision which revealed that, hidden among the population of Pythos, he would find a powerful psyker whose latent abilities would ensure victory in his coming crusade against the Imperium.

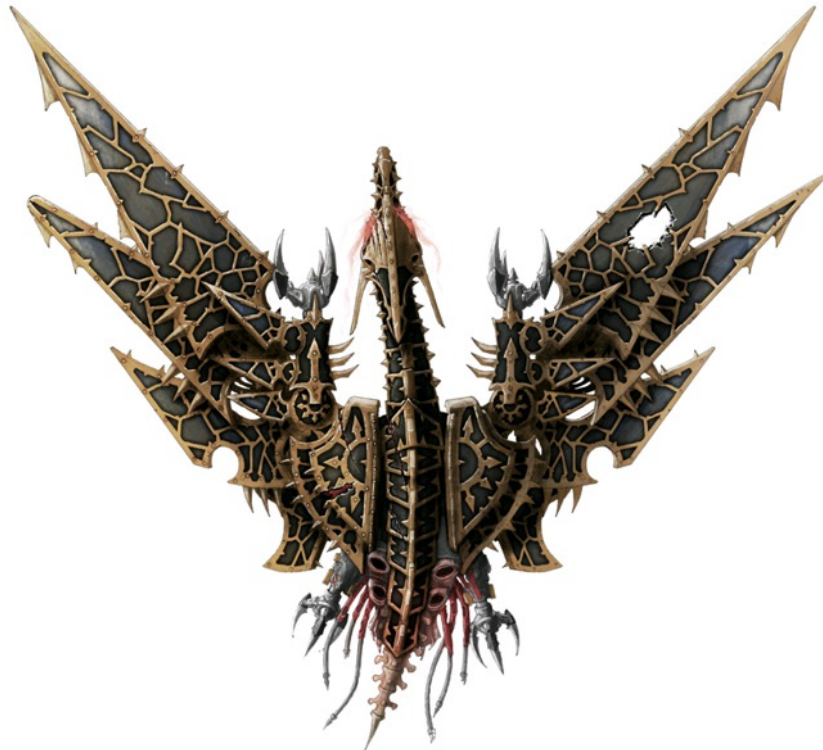
Decades later, the Dark Angels heard whispers that a mysterious psyker of prodigious power had ordered the capture of an artefact known only as the Hellfire Stone. These rumours were confirmed when a Dark Angels force clashed with Chaos renegades searching for the artefact on the Imperial planet known as Bane's Landing. In his sanctum, Azrael remembered the campaign he had fought against Abaddon all those years before. Perhaps, he thought as he made the connection, Abaddon was not defeated on Pythos at all. Perhaps he had left because he had acquired exactly what he had been looking for...

Pythosian Crystal



Pythos' main exports are high-quality ruby crystals, found in abundance in the cave systems that honeycomb the planet's mountains. The crystals are a vital component in many types of Imperial laser weaponry. Gathering the crystals is fraught with peril, as the caves are also home to a frightening array of deadly creatures, many of which are semi-intelligent and perfectly willing to hunt down the delvers that enter their territories. Barges transport the crystals from the strongholds to Atika, where they are transported off-planet.

Dark Pinion



Deathlord Blackfire's Heldrake, Dark Pinion, destroyed more Imperial aircraft than any other flyer in the campaign. Left behind when Abaddon retreated, he

harries Imperial forces to this day from a secret lair in the Hollowfal mountains.

THE PANDORAX INCURSION TIMELINE

The Pandorax Incursion took place between 959.M41 and 960.M41, when a Chaos Space Marine warfleet under the command of the infamous Abaddon the Despoiler invaded the Pandorax system, in Imperial space.

M31: The Damnation Cache opens on the planet of Pythos during the Horus Heresy. It is a huge underground chamber within which Daemons can freely enter the mortal plane. Following Horus' defeat, the portal is sealed. It is forgotten by the Imperium in the millennia that follow.

M34: Imperial colonists settle Pythos and begin the difficult operation of mining precious minerals from the planet's mountain ranges.

959.M41: A Black Legion incursion fleet appears in orbit over Pythos and launches a planetary assault.

830959.M41: The Chaos Space Marines make an overwhelming attack, capturing Pythos' single major city, Atika.

833959.M41: Colonel Strike leads the remnants of his regiment of Catachan Jungle Fighters out of Atika on the Blood March. A week later the survivors reach the nearest delver-stronghold.

887959.M41: Imperial forces consolidate and start fighting back, led by Strike's rugged survivors.

899959.M41: The Battle For Khan's Stronghold. Delver militia hold out desperately against a Chaos Space Marine attack. Catachan Jungle Fighters commanded by Strike arrive just in time to save the stronghold, and inflict the first important defeat on Abaddon's forces since the incursion began.

913959.M41: The Black Legion unseal the Damnation Cache. Bitter conflict ensues, as the resultant horde of Daemons scatters the gathered Imperial defenders, and the Chaos Space Marines start to capture the planet's delver-strongholds one by one.

933959.M41: A swarm of Daemons appear suddenly and overrun Khan's Stronghold.

The entire delver population is massacred and the stronghold is razed to the ground.

960.M41: Battlefleet Demeter sets out to relieve Pythos, bearing Imperial Guard infantry and armoured support.

519960.M41: Battlefleet Demeter arrives in Pandorax. A base is established on Gaea – an isolated planet on the edge of the system. The Imperial fleet is harried by constant attacks from Black Legion craft, but gradually begins to get the upper hand.

555960.M41: 1st Battle of Sunward Gap. As Imperial forces try to force a passage through the Admantium Fields, major engagements are fought to control the relatively clear path through the asteroid field known as Sunward Gap.

601960.M41: 2nd Battle of Sunward Gap.

649960.M41: The Imperial 120th Destroyer Squadron and Chaos Razorsnarl Squadron engage in a furious battle. The last surviving craft in the Chaos squadron self-destructs rather than be defeated, and the resulting explosion destroys the last ships in the Imperial Squadron, leaving no survivors from either side.

666960.M41: 3rd Battle of Sunward Gap.

755960.M41: A contingent of Red Corsairs ships arrive in the system, turning the tables on Battlefleet Demeter.

759960.M41: 4th Battle of Sunward Gap. The Imperial battlefleet is driven back by the reinforced Chaos fleet.

766960.M41: A major battle takes place around the Imperial base at Gaea. At the height of the battle, an Adeptus Astartes fleet led by the Rock dramatically arrives in-system. The Chaos fleet is crushed, and surviving ships are scattered and driven off. The way to Pythos lies open.

785960.M41: Imperial forces arrive over Pythos. The planet is now infested with Daemons, and many of the delver-strongholds have been captured. A terrible plague has broken out in Atika, turning Imperial prisoners into mindless zombie slaves. Several major battles are fought as Imperial forces start to cleanse the planet of Daemons, but the Black Legion's attacks on the remaining strongholds are relentless.

799960.M41: In an unholy alliance, four Greater Daemons belonging to each of the Chaos powers materialize inside the walls of the major delver-stronghold known as High Peak. The four rampage through the lightly-protected stronghold, killing almost nine tenths of the population before vanishing back to the Realm of Chaos.

847960.M41: Contact is mysteriously lost with the three delver-strongholds located on Glazer's Plateau. Dark Angels Scouts find that the populations of all three strongholds

have been turned into plague zombies overnight. Azrael is left with no choice but to cleanse the zombie-infested plateau with a massive bombardment delivered by the Imperial fleet.

968960.M41: The Grey Knights finally convince Commander Azrael that the Damnation Cache must be captured and resealed.

085961.M41: A major orbital invasion is undertaken to re-capture Atika and the Damnation Cache. The initial landings are successful, but then the zombie hordes are unleashed and almost overrun the Imperial bridgehead. The zombies are only stopped by the massed firepower of the orbiting Imperial fleet.

099961.M41: Imperial forces clear a path from the landing sight to the entrances of the tunnels that lead to the Damnation Cache. Despite suffering heavy casualties, the combined Imperial army drives back Abaddon's forces, and secures the tunnel entrances.

102961.M41: Imperial attack teams start clearing the tunnels which access the Damnation Cache. The Daemons and Black Legion defend the tunnels furiously but the Imperials, led by the Dark Angels and Grey Knights, are implacable.

129961.M41: Mount Blizzard, the second largest delver-stronghold on Pythos, is almost completely overrun by a surprise attack from Chaos Space Marine forces led by both Abaddon and Khârn the Betrayer.

153961.M41: The Battle of Emerald Cave. Imperial forces fight the largest battle of the underground war in a huge cavern known as Emerald Cave. The cavern is so vast that both sides are able to employ aircraft and super-heavy war machines in a massive engagement lasting several days. It is only the direct intervention of Commander Azrael that secures an Imperial triumph.

188961.M41: Victory is within the Imperium's grasp when the Black Legion suddenly retreats, breaking through the line with support from a surprise attack by the Red Corsairs' naval forces.

190961.M41: The remaining daemoniac forces in the cave network are swept aside by a final Imperial assault, and the Damnation Cache is finally recaptured and resealed.

961.M41 to present: After the Dark Angels and Grey Knights leave Pythos to deal with more pressing matters, Imperial Guard forces are left to cleanse the planet of Daemons. Although the Damnation Cache has been neutralised, the damage inflicted is severe, and there are many minor Warp rifts that still need to be closed. The war carries on to this day.

999.M41: The circumstances of the war fought to defeat the Traitor Marines in the Pandorax system were recorded in the Dark Angels' archives on their return to the Rock. These reports are unearthed and brought before the masters of the Chapter's Inner Circle

again, decades later, during the Dark Vengeance campaign...



THE ALIEN MENACE

Mankind is not the only race to walk among the stars. Since they first travelled beyond their own star system, in the early days of the Age of Technology, Mankind has encountered alien races, most of which have proven hostile. While some xenos exist only on a single planet, other civilisations might occupy a star system and there are a few that are widely spread across the great void of the galaxy. It has never been in Man's nature to share his worlds with aliens, and bloodshed has ever formed the foundation of empire. Sometimes, humans and aliens are forced to fight over inhabitable planets or vital resources; at other times, humans must do battle with the most dangerous types of xenos, whose only aim is to eradicate Humanity wherever their paths cross. Down the ages, there have been innumerable wars, planet-wide battles of annihilation and long campaigns of genocide that have stretched over vast distances and eras. Despite this eternal pressure and with a staggering cost of lives and material, Mankind has expanded their realm one planet at a time. Even now, however, the Imperium is beset on all sides by aliens determined to enslave, subvert or destroy Humanity.

Many xenos species have been destroyed. The Lacrymoles are gone – the last of their kind wiped out, relentlessly ground away before the end of the Great Crusade. The same can be said of the Vrakk, the Uluméathic League, the Losh, the worm-like Drugh, and others beyond count. Many planets were usurped from xenos races long ago, some during the initial colonisations of the Age of Technology, and now the aliens' very existence on such worlds has been forgotten, their ancient histories lost to the relentless march of time. This explains why great monuments of inhuman design are occasionally unearthed, strange technologies found buried beneath levels of stone and metal, crushed down beneath long ages of human expanse.

Yet worlds and systems that the Imperium has cleared of xenos find that it is merely a respite. New alien species are discovered in unexplored sectors or found thriving upon nearby planets once deemed lifeless. Other xenos drift into human territory, perhaps expanding their own empires, or seeking to escape an impending threat. Infestations of the foul Hrud, the mind-eating Khrave, and the chitin-covered Thraxians were all discovered in this manner, a fraction of the species haunting the galaxy, but enough to leave their mark on the worlds of the Imperium. The Zygo-warriors of Camgia have kept the Imperium's forces off their planet for over five hundred years and whatever stalks the night world of Kradoss has not yet been identified. Known xenos species often return to planets where they once ruled, attempting to reclaim their lost domains. Some of these alien races are ancient beyond Mankind's reckoning, having built spacefaring ships and plied outer space long before Humanity crawled out of the oceans of Terra and evolved. Others are nascent powers, newcomers that have just learned to leave their home planet, extending their grasp into the greater galaxy for the first time. All must be fought tooth

and nail, for the Imperium learned long ago that only the strong survive and that no mercy can be found amongst the stars.



PERILS UNKNOWN

In the darkest depths of the galaxy, alien races slither and dart, climb, swim and drift upon nebulous clouds, burrow deep into the psyches of Humanity. The galaxy is full of countless creatures, the majority of which are capable of great acts of terror and destruction. Many of these are xenos species that care nothing for civilisation or empire, monsters that wish only to prey on the unwary. Countless such abominations have been encountered and tales of the ferocity of creatures like the Clawed Fiend, the crystalline Dracolith, the dread Ambull or the Catachan Devil have spread across the galaxy.

These horrors and more haunt the stars, lurk hidden beneath planets' surfaces, or stalk otherworldly climes, awaiting only an opportunity to feed upon Mankind and to destroy his works. Vigilance and intolerance are Humanity's safeguards against such multitudinous threats.



++ There is no mercy amongst the stars, only an eternity of war. ++

ANCESTRAL FOES

Of the galaxy-spanning foes, the Eldar are perhaps the most enigmatic. Mankind's relationship with the Eldar is troubled; sometimes the ancient race acts as an ally, whilst at other times they launch inexplicable strikes against Humanity and its holdings. Their technological and societal attainment far outstrips that of the Imperium, yet they are capricious beyond belief, as likely to side with Mankind as they are to inflict murder and devastation upon it. For the moment, the Imperium refrains from direct aggressive action against the Eldar on a wide scale. This is partly because the Eldar are numerically a lesser threat when compared to countless others across the galaxy, and partly because the Eldar are allies almost as often as they are enemies, showing up to battles unbidden and aiding the human cause. However, perhaps the most important reason for the Imperium's lack of effort to assault the Eldar is that bringing the elusive race to battle is far easier said than done. Seemingly able to predict and counter the Imperium's every move, the Eldar fade like shadows before a rising sun, disappearing before any battles they do not wish to fight. The only attack that the Imperium managed to push home onto a craftworld ended with the disaster of Blood Nebula and the loss of an entire sector fleet.

Scourge of the galaxy and long-standing enemy of Mankind, the Orks are a green skinned and brutish race. They are an all-pervasive threat that recurrently pops out of nowhere to launch overwhelming assaults upon the Imperium. Planets that suffered devastating Ork invasions in the past can be cleared and considered safe for a span of many generations only to find that, once again, the Ork menace has grown upon their planet, often multiplying quickly in some neglected corner of the world. There is only one thing to do when an strong Ork infestation is discovered, and that is to prepare for war. Orks are an ultra-violent race that cannot be bargained with. They do not wage war for territory, wealth or glory – they fight for the joy of battle itself.

Like the Imperium, Orks also use the Warp for travel, yet having no Navigators or Astronomican to guide them, they have little to no steering. While such slapdash movements often prevent coordinated attacks and the easy mustering of widespread forces, the absolute randomness of their exit points from Warp travel means that armadas of ramshackle Ork fleets can suddenly, and with no warning, appear in any sector of space.

The number of times massive Ork invasions have swept unlooked-for out of what was once considered secure territory is beyond count. The Imperium learned long ago that the best way to confront the Orks is to do so head on and early, for once their armies gain momentum, they can quickly spiral out in waves of destruction.



NEW THREATS

Both Orks and Eldar are ancestral foes that have assaulted Humanity since the Dark Age of Technology. Yet there are many other xenos that besiege Humanity, some of whom have only more recently encountered Mankind amid the star-strewn pathways of the galaxy. Every year, listening stations, outposts and Explorator fleets discover more new life forms. Some of the xenos discovered are peaceful, ensuring they are easily subjugated or, if troops are readily available and the situation dictates, mercilessly exterminated. So it has always been, and of these minor or inconsequential races, little more need be mentioned. There are other aliens throughout the galaxy, however, whose existences have proven much more problematic for the Imperium.

Although known by only a few inside the Imperium, it is increasingly obvious that the Necrons have once again begun to stir. During the long ages of human exploration, the Necrons were unknown, or at best, thought to be extinct – an elder race whose galaxy-spanning empire had long turned to dust before Mankind journeyed away from Holy Terra. Yet the Necrons exist still, lying dormant and undetected within their Tomb

Worlds. But now, their mechanical bodies once more awaken from stasis slumber, and looking out upon a galaxy they once dominated, they do not like what they see.

In the last few hundred years, several major new races have been discovered in the far east of the galaxy. The Tau are emblematic of these ambitious races that do not tremble before the Imperium, for they are a vital people whose fledgling empire is growing at an alarming rate. With advanced technology and a drive for expansion, the Tau have colonised several star systems on the Eastern Fringe, audaciously absorbing a small number of Imperial worlds. Further to the east, and more dangerous still, lurks a more horrific threat. The monstrosities known as the Tyranids arrive in hive fleets that descend upon worlds, unleashing scythe-limbed beasts that think and kill as one. The Tyranids devour everything in their path, leaving behind barren orbs picked clean of anything that lives. Even worse, the Tyranids seem to grow stronger with each battle.

Throughout the galaxy, the enemies of Humanity gather their strength, preparing themselves for the apocalypse they know is coming. Individually, few of these threats could ever hope to challenge Humanity's dominance of the galaxy, but all together, they are a formidable menace – here picking on the fringes like jackals, elsewhere massing for a mighty invasion. The effort to contain the xenos and take back worlds lost to their predations drains the Imperium, diverting military strength, disrupting tithes and shaking Mankind's faith. Each human planet, often far removed from help, is left alone, waiting for the blow to fall, looking out from the ramparts of their world into a galaxy full of dread.

++ We can trust absolutely only the Emperor and Death. ++

THE VIRTUE OF INTOLERANCE

Much of the Imperium, led by the religious fervour of the Adeptus Ministorum, believe in the extermination of all aliens, even those that are entirely peaceful species. When the masses are stirred to such fear and fanaticism, they demand destruction over any kind of cooperation or coexistence. This might seem like a harsh measure, but it is an age where ignorance is a virtue and brute force is used to solve a multitude of problems. The dangers of failing to act are too unthinkable to elicit any other response. It has not become this way without reason; most aliens are hostile and devious, and some have proven as ruthless and ambitious as Humanity itself. To them, there is no room in the galaxy for the Imperium.

Despite the many xenos dangers across the Imperium, there are those who, in their ignorance or desperation, are willing to make pacts with aliens. Sometimes this is seemingly innocuous: trading to gain advanced technology, hiring brute labour or buying mercenary help. So, concealed within teeming hive worlds, xeno-tech draws high prices in illicit markets, while the carnivorous Kroot have been paid in flesh to fight alongside planetary defence forces. In the Tollovian Cluster, fickle Caradochians are not only tolerated, but allowed to sell their military services to the highest bidder. In this way,

many argue, Humanity is tainted. After all, accepting a Donarathi amongst our own kind is only a small step away from making open covenant with the Hrud, the Ork, or any of the other foul species that plague the galaxy.



THE RISE AND FALL OF ALPHA SHALISH

On the predations of xenos and the death of a planet of the Imperium

Though the Imperium contains a thousand times a thousand worlds, there is no register that lists the planets lost over the years, no hallowed memorial for the untold devastation wrought by xenos. The planet known as Alpha Shalish is gone, and there are few now living who remember that it ever even existed. Its tale is one of violence, human endurance and savagery, one that is even now

being repeated again and again on many worlds across the galaxy.

Discovered in the early years of the Age of Technology, Alpha Shalish was originally known as the crimson planet, for it glowed a deep red hue when glimpsed from orbit. Warmed by the energies of two suns, the planet was verdant, rich in both flora and fauna. The pioneers who named Alpha Shalish and marked it for prime conquest did not need to employ any of the atmosphere-fixing wonders invented at that time – neither the oxy-converter, self-sustaining hab-domes, nor ion discharging reactors. There was strong resistance to human colonisation, however, by a xenos species whose very type has been lost over the years. Early resistance was rectified by planet scorching – a slash and burn bombardment that, a decade later when the colonists arrived, left an unpopulated world, ripe for cultivation. The new settlers found ancient xenos ruins predating their arrival by many thousands of years, but these were dozed over and buried beneath their new endeavours. Progress was swift in those days, and expansion was spurred by the discovery of rich mineral mines in the neighbouring systems. As the largest and most inhabitable planet on the clearest Warp route, Alpha Shalish was soon a thriving port world.

Although occasionally plagued by xenos raids, the world of Alpha Shalish, protected by its robotic defences, continued to flourish for thousands of years. STC constructions provided magnificently spired hive cities that rose high above the fully automated agri-fields. The proliferating psykers were welcomed amongst the growing population, and perhaps this was what brought devastation to the planet. Communication with outsiders collapsed without warning and apocalyptic destruction across the galaxy heralded the arrival of what is now known as the Age of Strife. Some planets were struck worse than others and Alpha Shalish was nearly destroyed by the evils that erupted there. The next record of the planet comes from many millennia later, as written by a cloistered brotherhood of compilers, monks who chronicle a period reckoned by corroborators to be between M28 and M29. It paints a bleak picture.

According to their records, the hive cities had long been toppled into massive ruins, haunted places where those that remained of the human population feared to go. These humans survived instead in the wide plains, hunting and gathering and bypassing all machinery. They had become a superstitious people, afraid to venture out at night, unwilling to use anything beyond the most basic technology. Only a small conclave of monks remained literate. When, around M30, the Lacrymole arrived in force, the highly regressed human population was easily subdued and herded into camps to serve as livestock as the hateful xenos settled on the planet.

When next Alpha Shalish is encountered, it is listed by remembrancers, artist-scribes sent out with the 203rd Expedition Fleet to record the auspicious events of the Great Crusade. The Imperial forces, spearheaded by World Eaters

Space Marines, burst into the mounded Lacrymole cities with righteous fury, cleansing the planet of their foul, man-eating kind with extreme prejudice. So was the shackle of alien rule thrown off and the Emperor's Truth brought to Alpha Shalish. Repopulation was quick, aided by a restarting of the agri-machines, STC devices, many of which were found to still be in working order. Within four generations, hive cities were raised over the old ruins. During the Horus Heresy, many recruits shipped out from the growing world to swell the loyalist side. The re-built ports of Alpha Shalish aided in the recovery wars and the world became a hub of what was now declared the Segmentum Solar.

Although nearby planets saw extensive fighting, the next major conflict on Alpha Shalish was in mid M32. As part of the largest Waaagh! the galaxy has ever known, the hive world was captured during that great invasion. Alpha Shalish was dismantled – its hives plundered for scrap, slave labour and target practice. It remained an Ork stronghold for over five hundred years, a cesspit of feuding tribes fighting for dominance amidst the shambles. It was the Blood Angels who led the counter-attack that destroyed the Orks and brought the world back into the Imperial fold, although the planet itself was afterwards embroiled in a series of millennia-long civil wars and the internal power struggles left them victim to xenos raids. By M35 the planet was considered alien territory once again, often changing hands under a succession of foul xenos, its history lost in strife.

An Adeptus Ministorum crusade freed Alpha Shalish in early M38 and the Ecclesiarchy established a strong presence on the world, capitalising on anti-xenos feelings to launch further crusades. Over two hundred named crusades emanated from Alpha Shalish in the following millennia, eliminating aliens from neighbouring systems, liberating the Iron Rim cluster, and sending the Paleopods into extinction. Given the planet's heightened intolerance, it is no surprise that, in mid M39, when Eldar fleets materialized in nearby space, its ambassadors were refused in their request for an audience. That was the last anyone heard from Alpha Shalish.

Strange energy signals were picked up by sensor stations, distant Astropath choirs received garbled visions, and the Warp echoed with the slaughter of untold billions. It took the Imperial Fists six standard days to arrive in orbit of Alpha Shalish. What they found was a barren orb, its blasted landmass in its death throes – the planet literally cracking apart from the awesome energies unleashed upon it. No survivors were found and the surface was too unstable for further exploration. Few recordings of Alpha Shalish's history remain, and they are buried unseen within the vaults of the Adeptus Administratum. Investigations were ordered, Inquisitors were dispatched and many theories returned, but soon, crisis after crisis swept the Imperium, and Alpha Shalish was forgotten.



ORKS

The Green Tide, the Savages of the Stars.



Orks are a barbaric alien race that infest the galaxy from end to end. No matter how far Mankind has travelled, from the galactic core to the blackest depths of deep space, they have found that Orks are either already there waiting for them or will be arriving there soon to launch their characteristic attacks.

Orks are brutal, green-skinned creatures that have more in common with a great savage ape than a man. They delight in carnage and so great is their need for conflict that, without a more obvious opponent, the Orks will indulge in fighting bloody wars with themselves, just to ensure they get a good scrap. Over the long millennia, the Orks have proven to be the most prolific threat to the Imperium. They can be found in countless warbands, clans and tribes spread across many planets, even forming their own volatile empires. They are so numerous that, if the disparate groups were ever to cease hostilities with their own kind, the Orks would be able to sweep over the galaxy, smashing everything as they passed.

Size dominates Ork society and the largest of their kind invariably rise to lead them to battle. On occasion, an especially hulking Ork Warboss, a violent visionary who can inspire his thick-skulled comrades like no other, will conquer several rival groups, forming the survivors into a massive single army. What follows is known by that crude race as a Waaagh! – part invasion and part holy war. During such times, the greenskins will put aside their differences and rival clans work together.

It is not just rare inter-species cooperation that happens during a Waaagh!, but other behavioural oddities occur as well. Large conglomerations of Orks generate mental energies, their bloodlust echoing through the Warp to act as a beacon – summoning more greenskins to join the cause. Orks many star systems distant become further agitated, multiplying in numbers and attacking anything they can reach at a redoubled rate. Ork Mekboyz, as they call their engineer-builders, begin the construction of larger works of battle – towering Stompas or, if there is a large enough stockpile of parts, even a mighty Gargant. Such creations are great mechanical effigies of the Ork gods, laden with enough guns and missiles to flatten a city. Mekboyz also cobble together crude spacecraft, so that the hordes of warriors and massive war machines can rush off to join the growing movement, taking part in the ensuing battles.

Ork Waaaghs! grow in size so long as they have something to conquer. Success breeds further success, and every Ork victory calls yet more greenskins to join the cause. They can mass in such overwhelming numbers that nothing can stop them. Even fortress worlds or Space Marine home worlds are overrun, the Orks blasting them apart to fuel the Waaagh! further. Of course, it takes a dominant Ork to hold a Waaagh! together, as the many different factions are always prone to break apart at any time.

A large and powerful Ork can lead a Waaagh! for a while, but to string together many victories and to find ways to get the massed infantry and machines of war into contact with worthy targets to smash takes an Ork with cunning as well. Luckily, the combination of brawn and brains is rare amongst Orks, although when such a leader rises, the whole galaxy trembles. Some of the darkest moments in the history of the Imperium have been

the result of massive Ork Waaaghs! The Warboss known only as the Beast nearly took over the galaxy, and it can only be a matter of time before another apocalyptic greenskin rising takes place.



ORK TEKNOLOGY



To the forces of the Imperium, the Orks' weapons, armour and vehicles are poorly designed and crudely built, seemingly assembled out of bits of scrap metal almost randomly bolted together. Field repairs, Mekboy experiments or odd bits of scrap ensures all Ork teknoology is anarchic and such devices clank,

spout oily clouds of smoke and leave trails of bits that fall off behind it. Yet any who have fought the green hordes understand that Ork gear is crude, but it is nonetheless effective. From light attack craft like buggies or bikes, to tank-like battlewagons, heavily armoured suits worn by Meganobs, or blazingly fast fighter aircraft, Ork teknołgy is made to pulverise the foe and it gets the job done.

++ Be wary of clever discourse. ++

WAAAGH! GRUKK

Waaagh! Grukk was a teeming fleet of Ork invaders that smashed its way straight through Sanctus Reach. At its head was Grukk himself, an Ork warlord with such a bloody reputation that Orks flocked from all around to fight at his side.

The Ork warlord Grukk is a ten-foot brute of muscle and rage. His physical presence alone makes him an intimidating sight, and underneath his scarred and pockmarked skin lies a body as hard as iron. Even when unarmed he is a terrifying sight. When he dons his monstrous power klaw, Grukk becomes practically unstoppable.

It's a well-known fact that Grukk will fly into a berserk fury whenever his temper reaches its limit, and it doesn't take much to set him off. He once trashed an entire settlement purely because a grot attendant spilt engine oil on his breakfast.

As a younger Ork, Grukk killed Krugg the Tyrant, Warboss of his tribe, to seize power for himself. While such leadership challenges are par for the course in Ork society, the utter brutality of the battle and the spectacular fashion in which Grukk finished his old rival gave rise to the nickname 'face-rippa'.

Though the Orks of Grukk's tribe would never admit it, they are all a bit scared of Grukk, and rightly so. No one wants to lose face in front of his mates, after all.

Grukk's power klaw is a howling, whining beast of a thing. It features a kustom buzz-saw that Grukk uses to live up his nickname as often as he can. It also magnifies his strength from merely impressive to utterly terrifying.

At the Slaughter of Black Gulch, Grukk famously tore open a malfunctioning Drop Pod to get at the Space Marines inside. He then cut all ten of the Adeptus Astartes into pieces, one by one, in a series of increasingly violent kills. It was such an ignoble fate that the commanders of the battle company authorised a revenge strike upon Grukk himself. Despite inflicting severe damage, the Space Marines were unable to complete their

mission. Gruk is still alive today, albeit covered in a grotesque patchwork of thick, knotted scars. The same cannot be said of the Obsidian Glaives Chapter.

Though his strength is legendary, it is Gruk's utter certainty that he cannot lose that makes him so dangerous. He makes a habit of leading every charge, no matter the odds, and publicly butchers any Ork stupid enough to question his rule.

Gruk is always encrusted with the clotted blood of those he has killed. He never wipes it off, either, considering such acts as cleaning or washing to be 'runt's work'. His supporters claim that he has never lost a fight, not even once. It is this bloody reputation – and Gruk's habit of painting his ships with gore – that has led to his crusade of violence being known to his followers as the Red Waaagh!

This kind of renown spreads like wildfire in Orky society. Though he has never spared a thought towards the arts of leadership, Gruk has unintentionally started a Waaagh! that has blazed from one side of Sanctus Reach to the other.

Ork fleets from every part of the Sanctus Reach System converge upon the front line each week, hoping to get a glimpse of the Face-rippa in action. Many of the Orks inbound on the system believe that Warlord Gruk is blessed by Gork himself.

With every battle the Ork warlord wins, Waaagh! Gruk grows more powerful. There is very little chance of stopping it before it reaches critical mass and wipes out a swathe of Imperial space altogether.



GORK



The Ork psyche is so strong and robust that their reflection in the mirror-universe of the Warp is a potent force indeed. There are two mighty, belligerent and boisterous Ork gods that the greenskins believe in above all others – Gork, who the Orks say is brutal but kunnin', and Mork, who is kunnin' but brutal. Though both are warrior gods, Gork is the primary deity of clobbering, smashing, breaking, killing and pummelling the rest of the galaxy into submission. This is a notion that resonates strongly with the more single-minded warbosses of the Ork race, of whom Gruk is a perfect example.



'Cross me, curse me or even look me in the eye and I'll kill ya stone dead, just ta teach ya a lesson.'

- Grukk the Face-rippa

ELDAR

The Proud Remnants, Sailors on the Sea of Stars.



The Eldar are a spacefaring race that plies the void in vast jewel-like craftworlds. Long before Mankind's ancestors crawled from the Terran seas, the shining constellations of the Eldar empire spanned the galaxy. Their whims decided the fate of worlds, but now they are all but extinct – the last fragments of a shattered civilisation. The Eldar are reduced to a drifting nomadic race, the children of those ancients with enough foresight to have left their home worlds, to have sailed far away from the impending disaster, and escaped the cataclysmic Fall.

Although only a shadow of their former glory, the Eldar are still a formidable power. Confident in the superiority of their technology and martial prowess, the Eldar justifiably look down on the barbaric usurpers that have overrun the galaxy. Who could compare the crude, smoke-belching engines of Man or Ork to the sleek grav-tanks or streaking jetbikes of the Eldar? In combat, observe how lumbering and slow the movements of a human soldier are against the precise, graceful attack of an Eldar. Only in sheer numbers do the Eldar come up short in comparison to the other forces in the galaxy, though the quick-striking Eldar way of war can offset this lone disadvantage.

At their most devastating, a small, methodically planned Eldar attack is like a choreographed dance – in a whirl of interlocking steps, the squads, war machines and vehicles sweep in, perform their role, and fade away. These orchestrations of destruction allow even small Eldar armies to halt larger forces, quickly whittling them down with a series of rapid strikes, before delivering a swift killing blow. Each unit of Eldar has skills sharpened to an inhuman pitch, allowing them to complement the functions of the others. Yet the Eldar can lose but one of their warriors for every ten enemies slain and still rue the exchange.

No one knows exactly how many craftworlds there are, not even the Eldar themselves, for the evacuation of their worlds was hurried and many ships disappeared into the void. Miraculous feats, the craftworlds are really artificial worlds that float through space. They are self-sufficient and able to grow organically, adding space, repairing damage or adding new outer shells over time. The largest and most important of the craftworlds identified by the Imperium are Alaitoc, Iyanden, Biel-Tan, Saim-Hann, and Ulthwé. There are smaller craftworlds too, including the mysterious Black Library, the doomed craftworld of Mero and the legendary lost craftworld of Chto. Undoubtedly there are others that have yet to make contact with other Eldar or the Imperium. This is not surprising, as the Eldar are isolationists, avoiding contact with outsiders, and often each other as well. In times of need, several craftworlds can be seen in close cooperation, although the Craftworld Drohai refuses contact with all others, believing themselves to be the only uncorrupted survivors of the Fall.

To Mankind, the Eldar are an enigma, at once vexatious and helpful, turning from aloof and uncaring to meddlesome with alarming swiftness. They are a perplexing race, and the Adepts of Terra find them hard to ally with and impossible to predict. Discounting the bloodthirsty raiders and space-faring pirates, the more learned amongst the Imperium realise that the bulk of the Eldar are more often allies to Humanity than enemies.

However, the two races share no love for one another and conflicting interests have driven them to war and with each other many times in the past, where both sides have committed merciless deeds against the other.

THE WEBWAY

Eldar do not, indeed cannot, use Warp travel in the same way as the Imperium. Being more psychically attuned than humans, the Warp is altogether anathema to them. Instead, the Eldar travel through the webway, a labyrinth that exists between the Warp and the material dimension, partially in both and yet – in a way – in neither. This ancient lore was learned from a long extinct race called the Old Ones and galactic wars have been fought between the Eldar and the Necrons over control of these strategic pathways. The webway leads to many spots throughout the galaxy and can be used for almost instantaneous travel. This is how the craftworlds now stay connected, and it also allows for contact with Exodite worlds, those rare planets where pre-Fall Eldar settled and survived. Some webway portals are vast, large enough for entire craftworlds to enter, while others might be man-sized. Travel within the webway can be perilous, for opening the wrong gateway can lead to exits high above a planet's orbit or the depths of space. Little else is known about the webway, although there are many wild speculations. Few humans have ever managed to penetrate it and they report dead ends, secret paths, loop traps and sealed-off passageways to prevent the infiltration of the Warp. The fabled Black Library, the sinister lairs of the Dark Eldar, and an increasing number of Necron fleets are rumoured to be hidden within its many winding corridors as well.



THE FALL OF THE ELDAR

The Eldar themselves never speak of the Fall, as they call it, to other races, and so it is hard to get an accurate picture of exactly what happened. Rumours tell of planets swallowed by the Warp and that the darkest Daemons from within the minds of the Eldar overcame them for their arrogant sins. Some say that the captive souls of long dead Eldar are still tormented to this day by their sadistic conquerors. Others say the Eldar got their just punishment and it is only a matter of time before the rest succumb to whatever dreadful fate destroyed their reign. What is indisputable is the area of the galaxy which was once the central region of the ancient Eldar worlds is instead dominated by the Eye of Terror and that the Eldar are still haunted by their past.



++ *Wisdom is the beginning of fear.* ++

DARK ELДАР

The Bitter Remnants, the Star Reavers.

Nestled far from prying eyes, the vile and sadistic city of Commorragh was once a nodal point – a grand nexus within the labyrinthine dimensions of the webway. Before the Fall of the Eldar, the hidden destination was renowned for its depravity, especially in the right circles of the cults of excess, for it served well those who wished for privacy. Shielded from the raw power of Chaos and the psychic backlash unleashed upon the galaxy during the Fall, those in Commorragh were not slain like so many of their kin. From their safe haven, the depravity of these Eldar grew, until Commorragh was a monstrous nest of scum and villainy. In many ways, the Dark City was the birthplace of the race known as Dark Eldar, the forsaken and corrupt kin of the Eldar.

Where the Eldar aboard the craftworlds looked inwards to overcome the anguish of their past, steeling themselves with inhuman discipline and rigid self control, their dark kin have gone the opposite way. They have become a race of murderous killers, a people whose very existence now depends upon the pain and suffering that they unleash upon others.

Hidden within the webway, the Dark Eldar were largely immune to the passage of time, with the exception that their souls began to age and wither. The only counter for this gradual loss was to refill that void by steeping themselves in extreme sensation and outrageous evils. Quite literally, the agony and suffering of others replenishes them, granting them an unholy vitality and vigour. Those with witch-sight can look past their elegant and graceful exteriors to see the twisted and hideous beings that the Dark Eldar have become. Those who have chosen this grim path can continue on, or die. There is no turning back.

In order to exist, the Dark Eldar must have a constant supply of living beings on which to practise their foul craft. To fulfil such needs, the Dark Eldar have become masters of the lightning raid – hit and run attacks that eliminate all resistance, allowing the victors ample time to gather up the spoils. While not above taking technology and material goods, it is live captives that the Dark Eldar seek. All the mortal creatures taken into captivity will surely suffer a terrible and often prolonged fate in order to satiate their loathsome captors.

To launch their assaults, the Dark Eldar travel using the webway, moving unseen across the galaxy, journeying where no space fleet, no patrol, no Imperial listening stations can detect them. Their warships suddenly appear in low orbit around their target planet, and without any warning, the wolves are amongst the sheep. On many levels, the Dark Eldar use a similar fast-hitting, hard-striking approach to their kin, relying on fast-moving grav-vehicles and Reaver Jetbikes to launch lightning assaults. They display the same uncanny

agility, weaving into combat with an inhuman grace. Yet to those knowledgeable enough to tell the difference, the wanton slaughter and excess cruelty gives away the horrible inner nature of the Dark Eldar. No others take such unnatural satisfaction in their own foul deeds.

Unlike their craftworld brethren, the Dark Eldar are not psychic. They do not have Farseers in their midst and actively avoid using psykers themselves – for they do not wish to draw the attentions of the Warp powers that are constantly seeking to devour them. Bereft of any type of precognitive warnings, the Dark Eldar rely on the speed and surprise of their attack to lead them to victory and a rich supply of new slaves. However, the Dark Eldar are rapacious and arrogant to an extreme. When, on occasion, their plans go awry and their surprise assault is welcomed by ready and determined resistance, the Dark Eldar rarely fade from a fight. This is very much unlike their more fickle kin, but the thrill of combat and the draw of bloodlust is powerful in the Dark Eldar. To them, the call to slaughter on the battlefield is no different than the siren call of the bloody and cruel gladiatorial games that are so popular in Commorragh.

To the majority of Mankind, the Eldar are just a rumour – terrible stories of piratical raiders. For those in the Imperium, there is little to distinguish between the ships of the Eldar craftworlds, the corsair fleets or the bloodthirsty Dark Eldar. All are seen as the same thing – an elusive menace that can bring sudden and cruel death to the unwary – just another reason for Mankind to hate and distrust all xenos. For their part, the Kabals of the Dark Eldar understand how their rapacious actions continue to drive a wedge between human/Eldar relations. This only serves to delight their sadistic hearts – for to them, Humanity is barbarous and beneath respect, no different from the way Mankind treats their livestock – brute beasts useful for sustenance and little else.

++ Happiness is a delusion of the weak. ++



KABALITE WARRIOR
OF THE BLACK HEART



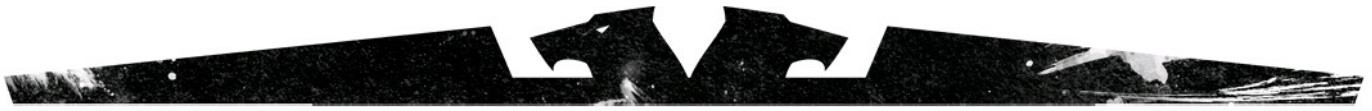
HAEMONCULUS OF THE
ALTERED



WYCH OF THE
CULT OF STRIFE



HELLION OF THE
BLACKENED FANG



THE BLACK LIBRARY

Humanity's few experts on the forbidden arts whisper of a hidden Eldar craftworld, a secret repository of all that ancient race's hard-gathered knowledge on the Ruinous Powers. Such a thing does exist, although it is buried somewhere beyond the most secret passages of the webway. Known as the Black Library, it is guarded by all manner of psychic protections and patrolled by fell-handed sentinels who are described as perilous beyond measure.

Few Eldar know the whereabouts of the Black Library and only a handful have ever dared to enter within, for the secrets it harbours are too powerful even for the strong-willed. There sit black tomes of sorcerous lore, including a copy of the dreaded Book of Magnus and a copy of the Daemonicus Totalus. Countless scrolls bearing the true names of Daemons are kept, as are the pacts for binding Warp entities into service. It is even said that the collected wisdom of the Old Ones resides within. There, piled amongst grimoires and bound prophecies, are the dark secrets of the galaxy. Many seek the Black Library, but very few ever find it, and fewer still are allowed to pass inside.





NECRONS

The Ancients, the Hollow Ones. They are Legion.



The Necrons are ancient beyond imagining. Long have they slept in stasis, hidden beneath the surface of silent Tomb Worlds, their consciousnesses preserved against the ravages of time within immortal mechanical bodies. So long did the Necrons slumber that the galaxy all but forgot their existence. Even in the minds of the Eldar, who once strove against the Necrons for mastery of stars, did their memory grow dim. Mankind, who knew the Necrons only from the scattered fragments of their once star-spanning civilisation, deemed them merely another faded race brought to nothingness by the crushing weight of aeons.

Now, sixty million years after the last Tomb World was sealed, a terrible purpose has begun. In dark caverns where no mortal creature has set foot, ancient machineries are stirring. Revivification chambers hum with power as they return life to the Necrons sleeping within. Service robots scurry through dust-laden passageways, repairing the damage caused by aeons of dormancy; living metal walls flow like quicksilver as the great mausoleums reconfigure themselves as palaces, armouries and fortresses. The cold-hearted Necron Lords and their implacable legions are rising to find their once-great empire in decay and primitive life-forms squatting in their ancient domains. They are not impressed; a reckoning shall come.

Yet the younger races have time, perhaps, before annihilation. Not all the Necron tombs have survived their Great Sleep intact – some were damaged by tectonic shifts, plundered by younger races or suffered losses due to malfunctioning stasis systems. Others have not yet begun to stir due to machinery faults or the strange disruptions of Warp storms. A Tomb World is at its most vulnerable during the revivification process – in these early stages, it is unlikely that the army of a Tomb World will have awoken to full function. This leaves the defence in the hands of Canoptek servants – automatons whose responses, although remorseless and lethal, are not nearly so powerful as a Tomb World with its legions fully functioning. Worse, the power signatures given off during awakening are detectable across great spans of space, luring tech-scavengers, explorators and treasure-hunters of all kinds.

The Necrons themselves are no longer creatures of flesh and blood, but android embodiments of death itself that can survive crippling damage. Incredulous observers report rent metal flowing back together and severed limbs scrabbling to reattach themselves. Should irreparable damage occur, the Necron ‘phases out’; body and consciousness are teleported back to the nearest tomb-complex to remain in storage until a new form can be forged. The technologies by which this is accomplished are a mystery, and the Necrons have put in place many contingencies, including self-destruct mechanisms, which prevent their knowledge from falling into the covetous hands of lesser races.

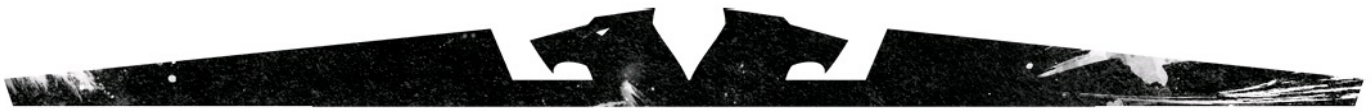
Much about the Necrons is unknown to Mankind. Their technology is beyond the grasp of human understanding; the number of Tomb Worlds and their relationships to each other is unguessed. However, the Necron purpose seems brutally clear: they seek to cleanse the galaxy of upstart primitives and re-establish their rightful role as rulers. Few Necrons feel

any empathy with lesser creatures, for they view them as little more than vermin infesting the ruins of their former glory.

NECRONS AT WAR

Necrons often strike without warning, issuing forth silently from tombs far beneath a planet's surface or teleporting directly into battle with their target. They are implacable foes, remorseless in advance and virtually impervious to enemy fire. Marching in silent phalanxes, they unleash precision volleys of crackling green gauss energy that reduce flesh, armour and bone down to its constituent atoms. Amidst the phalanxes stalk eldritch machines and vehicles of strange, macabre design. Looming over all are the Monoliths, Obelisks and Tesseract Vaults, great floating ziggurats of destruction.

Victory against this unforgiving and unstoppable force will require the lesser races to stand united, and time for them to do so is swiftly running out. With every world the Necrons reconquer, the ancient empire comes ever closer to rebirth...



IMPERIAL REPORTS

Given the size and bureaucracy of the Imperium, it is hard to ascertain the level of threat the Necrons pose. There are those, typically Inquisitors or Space Marine Commanders, who can link together the many incoming reports and see, if not a pattern, then at least an emerging threat of prime import. Yet reports are vague and it is difficult to verify which xenos attacks are from the mysterious robotic warriors, for in victory or defeat, the Necrons leave few clues.

The range of information coming in is so varied in nature it hardly seems possible that it can emanate from the same xenos, making it hard to establish any kind of pattern. Some worlds report aggressive, genocidal attacks, others cautious probes. Some worlds have been visited by emissaries under truce, requesting the surrender of entire planets teeming with industry and billions of Imperial inhabitants, while others claim the Necrons have begun covert operations upon their systems, using deception, pinpoint raids and assassinations to destabilise vital locations.

At times, the Necrons seem pre-programmed – launching raids upon the promethium refinery plants of Asylus at exactly the same time each lunar month. At others, the best-laid Imperial defences are bypassed as if they weren't there, or worse still, brushed aside the way a man might carelessly swat an insect.

++ *We are already defeated if our master is fear.* ++



TAU EMPIRE

Proponents of the Greater Good, Bringers of Enlightenment, Children of a Greater Destiny.



On the Eastern Fringe of the galaxy, far from the centralised control of Terra, a new empire is growing. Ambitious and united in purpose, the xenos race known as the Tau seeks to spread its 'enlightenment' across the stars. Although barely registering as a blip against the size of the unthinkably sprawling Imperium of Man, the rapid rise and expansion of the Tau has been startling.

Although the Tau lead their colonisation efforts with a range of parable-speaking diplomats who offer alien populations peaceful opportunities to join the rising empire, the Tau army is always close behind, ready to be called in should dialogue prove fruitless. Tau diplomats have a talent for picking up foreign languages and observing the niceties of local customs. They are master negotiators who can, in their first visit to an alien planet, tactfully address the plentiful benefits of joining the Tau Empire and the ramifications for those who resist. Those who wilfully refuse to join the Tau, subserviently becoming part of their growing empire, are quickly shown the error of their ignorance. There are some races, whether conquered or coerced, which have come to accept and fully adopt the message of the Greater Good, the philosophy that the Tau live by. Many, such as the Ranghons, Nicassar and Morralians, have already bowed before the Tau Empire, with aliens like the carnivorous Kroot and the insectoid Vespids even sending their own troops to act as auxiliaries for further Tau expansions.

Unlike many xenos, violence is not the option Tau turn to first. However, once peaceful overtures have been rejected, they readily shift to a military footing to find the solution. Unfettered by Mankind's superstitions and fears of machines, the Tau embrace their technology, putting great effort into perfecting their gear of war. They believe their victories are not achieved by willpower or bludgeoning might, but rather by sophisticated weapons systems, well coordinated attack plans and a flexible discipline that will fluidly pull back as needed until they can operate once more at peak efficiency. The Tau believe in a military doctrine of bringing overwhelming firepower where it is needed most, while suffering the least damage to themselves in return. Unlike the grinding Astra Militarum armies, which willingly trade body counts for territory, the Tau do not believe in the wisdom of battles of attrition or even in the value of holding ground. Instead, a Tau commander will take advantage of superior ranged weapons, pinning down a foe and picking him apart, quickly departing should they advance too closely.

No matter the opposition, the Tau are sure their technology can overcome the challenge. The pinnacle of Tau weapon technologies are the various types of battlesuits. Piloted as much as worn, battlesuits form the elite units in a Tau army and perform a range of roles – offensive and defensive. They are equipped with versatile weapon systems, often using advanced scientific breakthroughs such as stealth field generators, guided missiles, or artificially intelligent and independently acting drones. For the Tau, new designs and prototype weapons are constantly in the works, promising an even brighter future.

THE GREATER GOOD

The Tau civilisation is made up of a rigid caste system, with each of the five castes (Fire, Earth, Air, Water and Ethereal) forming a sub-species within the race. Such segregation provides the clarity of purpose that allows each member to fulfil his role within society – be it warrior, worker, pilot, or bureaucrat. The members of the ruling caste, known as Ethereals, bind and harmonise the other castes together into a common goal. It is they who steer the course of the Tau expansions, deciding which planets will be colonised, which aliens will be absorbed and which will be eliminated. The entire Tau race is underpinned by the philosophical concept, driven by the Ethereals, that the individual must set aside personal desires and work for the Greater Good. The Imperium would give much to learn the secrets of the Tau, particularly the Ethereals. There is much speculation about how they maintain such a high level of control over the other castes. Psychic abilities have been ruled out – the Tau being a race that don't seem to register in the Warp. Chemical manipulation has been suggested, perhaps explaining the power behind the smooth, dulcet words spoke by the Tau spiritual leaders, but nothing has been confirmed.

The Tau wholeheartedly subscribe to the Ethereals' conviction that theirs is a race predestined for greatness, a race meant to inherit the rule of the stars. The Tau are methodically working their way outwards from their birth world, launching great expansion drives that have yet to be halted. Before long, many more will join the growing wave of Tau expansionism...



FIRST CONTACT

The Imperium's Explorators first encountered the Tau just prior to the Age of Apostasy, finding a resource-rich planet surrounded by a promising band of star systems. The inhabiting race, the ancestors of the Tau, were little more than savannah-roaming primitives. Marked for extermination, the Imperium sent out a seeding colony, but Warp storms arose and the Imperium's armada was never heard from again.

When the tumultuous energies calmed enough for recontact, nearly six thousand years later, the Tau had changed almost beyond recognition. The Imperium found a newborn empire busily expanding, even daring to absorb a handful of planets previously under rule of the Imperium. The Departmento Munitorum has increased manpower tithes and begun the preparations to supply another massive war zone.



++ *To lack conviction is to invite defeat.* ++

TYRANIDS

The Shadow in the Warp, the Star Swarms.



Beyond the range of the Imperium's spacecraft and the most strident astrotelepathy lies the unspeakable cold of the intergalactic void. It is the great barrier that divides galaxy from galaxy, a place where grand vistas of space and time conspire to hold their secrets apart with inconceivable distances. Yet the void is not empty. An immeasurably ancient and exceedingly alien intelligence has moved out of that darkness, its many eyes fixed on a galaxy rich with life.

The Tyranids are the most alien of the races to infest Imperial space, for they come from beyond. Their hive fleets stretch out like tendrils, great chitinous bio-ships drifting in brooding silence. Once the remorseless shoals of the bio-ships detect the presence of a prey world, they close upon their target, grasping it like some many-tentacled beast seizing its food. In the ensuing invasion, the world will be consumed, for the Tyranids hunger for all living matter. There is no escape from this final embrace and when the Tyranids finally depart, they leave behind a barren world, a scoured ball of rock now devoid of anything that lives.

THE HIVE MIND

The Hive comprises many different creatures functioning as one, coordinated by the gestalt consciousness of the Hive Mind. Individual Tyranid creatures are held in a common psychic bond that enables them to act as a single organism, each individual serving only to fulfil the functions assigned by the greater consciousness – the Hive Mind itself. While some Tyranid creatures are capable of rational thought, most do not have distinct minds as humans would understand. Indeed, most Tyranids are unthinking, having been created to fulfil a single specialised role. It tends to be the larger beasts that act as generals on the ground, making decisions and redirecting the lesser beings, all of course, according to the greater strategy and goals of the Hive Mind.

A Tyranid hive fleet consists of millions of living starcraft, each home to untold numbers of monstrosities evolved from the geno-organs of the ship's reproductive chambers. All the creatures serve the entity that is the ship, and the ship exists only as part of the horrific super-organism that is the fleet. Even when dead, organic matter is reconstituted back into the ship, along with captured biomass from the invaded planet. It is then all dissolved into a rich biological gruel used to make new Tyranid creatures, each ready to serve the Hive Mind and begin the feeding process anew.

The Tyranid race is psychic, each creature linked by the sentience of the Hive Mind. On the battlefield, leader creatures serve as hubs to channel these connections to the lesser swarms. It is this central intelligence that guides the Tyranid fleets towards prey planets, but it does more. So powerful are the emanations from the Hive Mind that they bring with them a smothering psychic signature known to Imperial Astropaths as the Shadow in the Warp. It is as if the darkness of the intergalactic void has been made incarnate, causing even the strongest minds to unravel with despair. So mighty is this Shadow that it blots out the sacred guiding light of the Astronomican; thus do the Hive Fleets isolate and

destroy all in their path.

INVASION

A Tyranid assault upon a planet is a terrifying sight that few have witnessed and survived. Gigantic spores plummet through the skies to smash into the surface, ploughing deep furrows into the ground. There, they split open to reveal broods of ferocious beasts. Swarms of chittering, scythe-limbed aliens move across the ground as one. Some carry grotesque living weapons capable of firing parasitic projectiles that chew into their targets' flesh. Strange stalking beasts use perfect camouflage to ambush their prey, often turning up far behind the front lines to sow confusion in the enemy ranks, leaving trails for the ensuing waves of Tyranids to follow. From the skies, winged creatures rain death, and the ground quakes as burrowing beasts tunnel up from below. Towering monstrosities stride upon multiple sets of legs, halting occasionally to unleash firestorm blasts from bio-cannons. Every Tyranid creature is a bioengineered killing machine, perfectly adapted for its role in the slaughter. Thus far, only their vanguard has reached this galaxy, the greater mass is still on its way. And the Hive Mind hungers...



THE HIVE FLEETS

Thus far, the Imperium has been struck by what they gather to be no less than nine distinct hive fleets. Each one of these living armadas is made up of millions of many-tendrilled spacecraft and on board each ship are millions of creatures ready for planetary invasion. The Magos Biologis of the Imperium has thus far categorised the separate forces, noting the defining characteristics that each of the self-sufficient hive fleet exhibits, the creatures it evolves and the tactics it employs during attacks. Differing hive fleets seemingly have their own agenda and have sometimes competed with each other for food, occasionally even clashing with each other over a particularly bio-rich planet.

Unbeknownst to the Imperium, the threat is of an even greater magnitude, for the bulk of the Tyranids have not yet reached the Imperium's galaxy, their masses still strewn out across the void. So immeasurably large is the invasion fleet that its furthest stretched tentacles alone have entered the Imperium's space. Each of the identified hive fleets is but a splinter of that single monstrous host, the Hive Mind. What horrors await, only time will tell.

++ A weapon cannot substitute for zeal. ++

THE GREATEST THREAT

From the shifting seas of the Warp, fearsome entities espy Mankind and his doings. From that realm of madness, great powers conspire to bring about a doom so complete, so absolute, that the entire galaxy would be consumed – swallowed into an endless oblivion of darkness and torture. If such a cataclysm were to happen, there could be no hope of recovery, only Chaos. Despite the incessant xenos invasions that beset the Imperium, it is this apocalyptic fate that looms largest over Mankind's destiny.

There are few in the Imperium who understand the real ramifications of what lurks in the Warp, plotting Man's demise. It was the Emperor, the Master of Mankind, who first fathomed the dangers that the Ruinous Powers posed to Humanity. It was his ill-fated plan that even now protects the Imperium from the predations of the Dark Gods and their daemonic scions. Secretive agents of Mankind work tirelessly to thwart daemonic incursions into realspace, but they are few, and the creatures of the Warp are many. If every citizen of the Imperium was privy to the knowledge safeguarded by the Inquisition, then Humanity would become a race of madmen, for the true scope of the threat of Chaos is impossible for the untrained mind to bear.

The Ruinous Powers attack the galaxy in interwoven ways, using unexpected guises. It is beyond mortal comprehension to follow such machinations or unravel the convoluted patterns behind such assaults. Are the slaughters on Van Horne's world related to a greater plan, or was the bloodbath merely an opportunity to enter realspace? What is the endgame for the corruption of the planetary governor of Drakus Prime? What foul seeds are planted upon worlds that have suffered from the Zombie Plague that has spread across swathes of the galaxy? What hope has Mankind to fathom so random, bloodthirsty and immortal a foe?

What can be recognised is that the forces of the Dark Gods are legion and are not confined solely within the Warp. Humanity itself has been corrupted. Many have opened up their hearts to hubris, greed and envy. Disaffected traitors follow their own goals, unknowingly serving a larger purpose. Outcast mutants harbour their own kind, unwittingly nurturing a festering malignancy. All separate actions spread over time and space, yet working towards the same goal – the break down of the barriers between realspace and the Warp, and the downfall of Man.



SCIONS OF THE WARP – DAEMONS

The most powerful of the Chaos forces are the foul Daemons themselves. When the creatures within the Warp burst into the material world, it is to wreak carnage and bring anarchy. The servants of the Chaos Gods, Daemons are all that is vile and twisted made manifest. They are not fashioned of flesh and blood, but of unadulterated power, supernatural beings who dine on the terror and ambition of man. Although the different factions amongst the Daemons are often rivals, they are united in their quest to make the mortal plane a playground for their hateful needs, to let loose unending punishment, slaughter and anarchy upon the galaxy.

Daemons cannot exist in realspace for long without the unnatural energies of the Warp to sustain them. Unless an incursion happens near a major rift between the realms of reality and the Immaterium, such as the Eye of Terror, the time that Daemons can stay in the land of mortals is limited by the size and strength of the source of Warp energies that brought them there. This is often long enough to accomplish much destruction – for even the briefest daemoniac invasion can consume an entire planet in its fury. Nothing short of overwhelming the entire galaxy will ever sate these fiendish creatures, and each rampage

leaves Mankind a little weaker; every breach into the material realm stretches the barrier a little tauter. Daemonic incursions are phenomena that are occurring with increasing frequency, and their rise can only mean the absolute destruction of Humanity.

SLAVES TO DARKNESS – CHAOS SPACE MARINES

Once proud and majestic warriors armoured with faith and armed with righteousness, the Chaos Space Marines are now bitter, selfish champions of dark, hungry gods, with no cause other than personal ambition and hatred. Devoted to the arcane powers of the Warp, Chaos Space Marines care nothing for loyalty or honour, sacrifice or obligation, for they have bargained away their souls, discarding their oaths of allegiance to the Emperor for material power, sensual freedom and the chance to attain daemonic immortality.

Blessed with the gifts of the Dark Gods, Chaos Space Marines sow havoc across the galaxy as they prosecute the Long War, unrelenting since the days of the Horus Heresy. For ten thousand years, traitor Legions and renegade Chapters have ransacked and razed the worlds of the Emperor, and all knowledge of their slaughter and conquest has been ruthlessly expunged from history by the Inquisition, lest awareness of their existence serve to tempt others to the service of Chaos. Their names cursed for their betrayal, the Chaos Space Marines are notorious for acts of bestial savagery, and they serve as foreboding reminders to those who fight to defend Humanity that even the most powerful and trusted of humankind can fall. No planet is beyond their reach and there is no world that does not fear their coming.



TAINT OF THE TRAITOR

A Chaos Space Marine attack is the most tangible of the Chaos threats, but there are still other perils, less recognisable, but equally deadly. On every human world there are malcontents who lust for power beyond their means, whose avarice is insatiable by honest endeavour and who would take any path to satisfy their ambition. Such minds are easy prey for the Ruinous Powers, falling easily into temptation. Though the worship of Chaos is a primal heresy, punishable by death throughout the Imperium, there are thousands, maybe millions, of Chaos cults – all gathering strength to extend their influence. In deep sewers beneath hive cities, hooded figures meet to debase themselves in forbidden worship; on great stone pyramids, primitive shamans attempt to summon Daemons to do their bidding; under the light of strange moons, foul offerings are lifted to blasphemous gods whose names honest men fear to speak. Organisations of this kind have coiled their way into all levels of the Imperium, counting adjudicators, military commanders and planetary governors amongst their number. Who can say with certainty which fellow citizens are pure and which are tainted?

Most pleas to the Chaos Gods go unanswered, for only the true student of the malevolent arts can hope to understand the nuance and ritual that can allow creatures from the Warp the passage they seek. Yet, with every human who turns from the true path of the Emperor dissension is sown and so does the Imperium turn upon itself. With desperate fervour, Inquisitors seek out Chaos Cults, yet the roots of corruption run deep. Some cultists are lured into furthering the plots of the Chaos Space Marines, while others at last manage to bring forth a malignancy into the galaxy, either summoning entities from the Warp or through their foul actions allowing some gateway – most often a psyker – to open a rift. There can be no greater delusion than that of the fools who seek an easy road to power, yet they can, and do, bring ruin upon entire planets.



FEAR THE MUTANT, HUNT THE MUTANT

Mutations sweep across the Imperium like plagues, twisting bodies and souls into ever more deviant forms. In all but a small handful of cases, mutants are considered a danger to the wider Imperium and they are feared and shunned by all right thinking citizens, if not hunted and purged outright. By far the most dangerous mutants are those with psychic powers, for an untrained 'witch' can unwittingly allow foul denizens of the Warp access into realspace. Worse still are the psykers who actively court the attentions of such fiends. Driven, by ruthless persecution, into a hidden underclass in most societies, mutants often fall prey to the honeyed promises of help made by the secret and devolved cults concealed amidst the strata of Imperial society.



CHAOS DAEMONS

The Doom of Mortals, Servants of the Dark Gods.

In the Warp, there exist countless Daemons of myriad abhorrent shapes, each the spawn of the nightmares and secret vices of mortal creatures. Daemons are but extensions of the Chaos Gods, the undisputed masters of that shifting land of hellish limbo. There are four Chaos Gods, rival brothers in darkness. They are: Khorne, the Blood God, the master of battle and patron of ferocity; Tzeentch, eternal schemer, the Changer of Ways, the Lord of Magic; Nurgle, the Great Lord of Decay and Fecundity, joyous bringer of plague and physical corruption; and Slaanesh, the Lord of Pleasure, the purveyor of secret vices and excess. It is these four Dark Gods who vie for the dominion of man, and whose Daemons seek gateways through the minds of the weak and careless. Daemons are but splinters of the Ruinous Powers made sentient, so the appearance and behaviour of a Daemon always betrays the character and ambition of its progenitor – they can only act in the manner of their patron. So, Bloodletters, the rank and file of Khorne's legions, are ferocious, slaving creatures eager to reap and slay, as befits minions of the God of Battle.

In the Warp, the Dark Gods vie for supremacy, each pitting their legions and wit against the others in a constant bid to dominate them. Daemonic armies clash across the ever-changing Realm of Chaos, riding nightmare dreamscapes into battle, shattering landscapes and reconfiguring conquered territory to fit its new master. Thus, if Nurgle's legions overrun the iridescent shape-changing crystalline structures that mark Tzeentch's kingdom, it will soon flow freely with pus, decay and the corrupting poxes that signify the new ruler of that space. This eternal battle waxes and wanes as the fortunes and powers of each God ebbs and flows. When great plagues sweep the mortal realms, such as the eyerot or the terrifying Zombie Plague, then Nurgle's realm might gain ascendancy for a while.

At any given time, there might be countless different rivalries or alliances between the brother gods. There are plots within plots as each seeks an advantage in the eternal back and forth. Yet there is one thing that unites the opposing powers to put aside their differences for a time and work together. For, above all else, the Daemons of the Warp lust to push through the boundary that separates them from the mortal realms, to unleash their wanton destruction upon the galaxy.

DAEMONIC ASSAULT

There are countless ways in which Daemons can invade reality. Human psykers present the most common means of entry, for their untrained minds are like beacons within the Warp, and draw Daemons to them as the scent of blood draws predatory beasts. Through such open psychic minds, a Daemon can rip a hole into realspace and burrow into the

psyker's mind. Ships entering the Immaterium are also vulnerable, for if any of their numerous safeguards fail or if the insidious powers can worm through even the tiniest crack in a ship's protections, then a horrifying fate awaits all on board. Many Imperial spacecraft have entered the Warp to return far from their planned point of exit and filled with fiends instead of men. Using hosts or sacrifices, Chaos cultists can sometimes create a rift or open up a person to unholy possession. Those who study the way of the Daemon too closely, including some Inquisitors, can likewise put themselves at risk. For all their ferocity, Daemons are also intensely clever, and over time are able to use temptation or subtle manipulation to corrupt even the most strong-willed of individuals.

Permanent gateways to the Warp exist throughout the galaxy – some great in size, others small, but all bristle with inevitable danger. In such places, the mutating powers of Chaos run rampant and planets are twisted into Daemon worlds, where the greatest of evils are free to manifest themselves. The largest permanent rift between the material universe and the Warp is the Eye of Terror, a region of space where the two universes overlap. There are smaller gaps too, such as the Maelstrom, von Grothe's Rapidity, the Green Maw, and the Storm of Judgement.

Warp storms, great stellar trauma or vast psychic emanations can also draw forth the daemonic legions. What might start as a trickle, a single entity wriggling its hideous way into the material world, can become a larger hole in the barrier between realms, eventually resulting in a steady stream or even a full, raging tide of Daemons, a hellish flood that can engulf a world or even a star system in a short period of time. When the Daemon armies emerge, they do so with great purpose – to unmake reality, whether through insidious corruption or outright war.

With so much unnatural energy spilling out, even the most monstrous denizens of the Warp can cross over, letting the Greater Daemons once more stride the stars. The most powerful of the Dark God's minions, Greater Daemons are terrible abominations capable of mighty deeds of destruction. Just to stand before such colossal nightmares is to risk an eternity of torment. At their whim, reality is reformed, and at their command, daemonic hordes slaughter entire populations. Luckily for Mankind, most rifts in the barrier between realms are temporary and, upon closure, the Warp energies dissipate quickly. This means daemonic incursions are typically short lived, and the foul armies are forced back to the Immaterium.

Besides cutting off the unnatural energies around them, there are other methods to drive Daemons back into the Warp. An unremitting blast of psychic will or physically slaying them will do the job, but only for a while. The destruction of a Daemon's physical form will banish it from realspace, but will not end its existence. The malefic presence will gradually reform again in the Warp, nursing its hatred and its grudge for long decades or even centuries. If such an entity gets a chance, it will return, its hatred further stoked with a horrible vengeance in mind.

THE CHAOS GODS

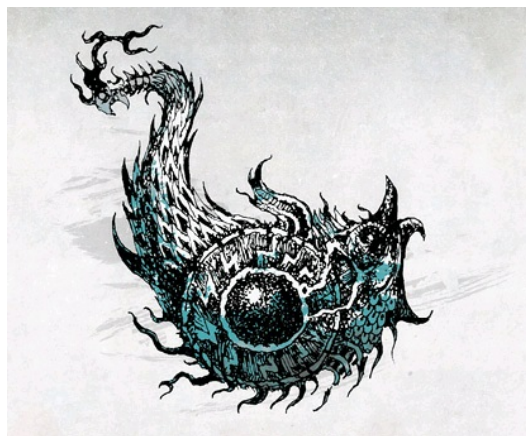
The rules of the Realm of Chaos are the four Great Powers, the Dark Gods.

KHORNE



Khorne is the Blood God, the god of battle whose bellows of insatiable rage echo across time and space. He broods upon a mighty throne of brass atop a vast mountain of skulls. A sea of bones, fed by the remains of those slain by his many champions, extends endlessly from him in all directions.

TZEENTCH



Tzeentch is the Great Sorcerer, the god of magic and Master of the Timestream. He is the Changer of Ways, the one who directs the fate of the universe. Tzeentch weaves plots like spider webs and his labyrinthine plans within plans reach past temporal bounds and carry through untold centuries.

NURGLE



The Great Lord of Decay, Nurgle presides over physical corruption and the cycle of purification, rebirth and morbidity. Plague and entropy attract him like a fly to a rotting corpse, and though he dotes over his foul diseases and Daemons like an indulgent father, his wrath is terrible when roused.

SLAANESH



The Dark Prince, the youngest of the Chaos Gods, is Slaanesh, who alone of the pantheon is divinely beautiful. He epitomises excess in all things, and favours seducing beautiful mortals, tempting them with a life of overindulgence. He is all things decadent and debased.



THE EYE OF TERROR

The Eye of Terror is the largest and most well known Warp rift in the galaxy – a permanent tear that has breached the barrier between reality and the Immaterium. Like a weeping sore on the verge of eruption, this galactic phenomenon has blighted Imperial space for over 10,000 years. At the centre of the swirling Eye is absolute Chaos, a whirlpool of energy where the creatures of the Warp bathe in those purest currents of madness that pour out from the realm of the Dark Gods. From a distance, the Eye of Terror stains the surrounding stars in a disturbing blend of colours. From Cadia, bulwark planet of the Imperium, it can be seen with the naked eye – a pulsing ocean of sickly purple. From Fenris, the icy homeworld of the Space Wolves, the Ocularis Terribus appears as a hideous wound gnawing at the sky. From Terra, if magnification could see past the pall of atmospheric pollution or the many rings of orbiting defence stations and free-floating debris, the Eye of Terror could be seen as a speck, distant, but glowering with a menacing malignancy. Even at a vast range, it is nauseating to gaze upon that throbbing light, and many claim that staring too long into that hateful abyss can lead to nightmares, blindness, or absolute madness.

For many light years around the anarchic hub of the Eye of Terror's centre, there are broad zones where reality and the Immaterium mix, where physical laws clash with the whims of the Dark Gods. Planets within the Eye of Terror are imbued with arcane energies and known as Daemon worlds, hellish regions that defy reason, places where creatures from the Warp walk freely. Often, such worlds are gifted to particularly powerful Greater Daemons or even Daemon Princes, rewards from their dark masters for spectacular service. In the middle spirals of the Eye of Terror, some of the laws of nature still apply, although the area is regularly swept by the unadulterated powers of the Warp. Since the days following the Horus Heresy, this region has become a refuge for the Traitor Legions, a base for those Space Marines who joined the rebellion and have been fighting the hated Imperium ever since. Here they remain, largely untouched by the weight of the aeons, for time passes unpredictably, if at all, in the Eye of Terror. Some Legions have had their once noble Primarchs elevated into immortal Daemon Princes, diabolical leaders made even more mighty. From this sanctuary of dread, they strike out on countless raids, wars, and mass for the invasions known as Black Crusades.

All planets and space sectors near the Eye of Terror are dangerous in the extreme. Those who escape the predations of Daemons or Chaos Space Marines are still subject to foul mutation. As the spiralling tendrils of the Eye swirl haphazardly, the range of such chaotic effects can vary wildly, sometimes affecting space a great distance away. Navigators are loathe to direct their third eye anywhere in the direction of the Eye of Terror, for to do so will mean

certain doom. Ships that stray too near the vortex can be thrown far off course or, worse still, sucked into the roiling space to be consumed or tortured at the leisure of Daemons. The area to the galactic southeast of the Eye of Terror is, however, typically calm. Named the Cadian Gate, it is the only predictable and stable way to exit the region, and therefore the passageway has become the site of non-stop fighting. These battles range from skirmishes and raids to the full expression of might, rage and vengeance unleashed by a Black Crusade. There, along the many fortified planets of the Cadian system, the Imperium strives to contain the horrific powers, blocking them from rampaging out into the more vulnerable sectors beyond.

CHAOS SPACE MARINES

Cruel Marauders, Slaves to Darkness, The Tainted.



Not all the creatures of the Warp are its direct offspring. Once proud and majestic warriors armoured with faith, the Chaos Space Marines are now bitter champions, covered in corruption. They are hateful reavers who war to serve their own dark needs and, in so doing, also serve their new masters.

Betrayal has ever been a threat to the Imperium and some of its blackest hours have come from the traitorous deeds done by what were once some of its most noble warriors. Throughout a war-torn history, many Space Marines have strayed from the service of the Emperor and turned to the Chaos Gods. There are any number of paths to damnation – some of the Imperium's finest warriors have consciously chosen their paths and others have been tempted across that line, twisting their allegiances by small increments at a time. There are even some few who have been tricked into darksome deeds, unaware of the implications of their actions until it was too late.

Between their discipline, long histories of service, STC-designed wargear and the Codex Astartes, there are more similarities than differences between Space Marine Chapters. This is not the case with the Chaos Space Marines. A dark mirror to their Imperial counterparts, Chaos Space Marines share the same genetically enhanced superhuman abilities, but beyond that, the ranks of the traitors are far more greatly varied. Some of the Chaos Space Marines are from the original betrayal, part of the Space Marine Legions that joined Horus in his rebellion. After Horus' defeat, many traitors fled to the Eye of Terror, seeking refuge from the loyalists that hunted them. There, washed over by the intense energies of the Warp, they took worlds of their own, becoming masters of Daemon realms and indulging their unworthy ambitions. Although 10,000 years have passed since they fled during the aftermath of the Horus Heresy, they live there still, for time flows strangely near the Warp. This means the same Space Marine warriors who fought against the Emperor still wage war on the Imperium today. For them, the strands of time have become interwoven, the past, present and future merging into eternal war. Yet the Traitor Legions are not alone.

Over the span of thousands of years, other Space Marines have turned from the light of the Emperor, sometimes individually, or in squads or companies, and on very rare occasions, in entire Chapters. Freed from the dogma of service to their Chapter and the Imperium, these individuals fully indulge their superhuman bodies and prodigious fighting skills. Modified to be the ultimate human warriors, these defectors most often gather wealth or power, becoming tyrannical leaders of pirate fleets, despot warrior kings on frontier planets, or the leaders of mercenary warbands out to claim their own fortunes. As doomed as any traitor from the Heresy, these Space Marines also turn to the Chaos Gods, sometimes willingly, seeking more power, sometimes at desperate need, when their heresy is at last revealed.

The Chaos Space Marines are a fearsome foe. They have a Space Marine's abilities, along with his gear of war and, since turning to the darker powers, many also now bear powerful mutations or gifts from their patron Chaos Gods, which aid them in battle. They still carry the same weapons they bore in their service to the Emperor, sometimes dating

back 10,000 years and now washed over by the corrupting powers of the Warp. Some Chaos Space Marines appear uniform and stern, their allegiance only distinguishable by their actions, while others are loathsome, their forms befouled so greatly that they are monstrous to look upon – plague-bloated and beslimed or perhaps forever melded into their armour.

The superhuman frame of the Space Marine can accept and survive through more mutations than any other mortal could bear. Marked by tentacles, spikes and bestial visages, it is easy to identify Space Marines who have been long subjected to distorting powers from beyond, often mutated by their patron into forms more pleasing to their inhuman eyes. For instance, those who follow Khorne might find their limbs grown into killing blades, their armour emblazoned with deathly skulls and eternally dripping with the blood of those they have slain. Those in thrall to mighty Tzeentch might be led by a Sorcerer, with each warrior marked by a magical aura that glows around them, chains of lightning crackling over their heads.

Even the vehicles and war machines of the Chaos Space Marines become corrupted over time, twisting into mockeries of their previous forms, bearing icons and battle scars from their ceaseless wars. Towering above them all are Daemon engines, horrible lurching creatures that are man and machine merged together in hellish fusion. They are the ultimate horrors, each a sign that shows just how inhuman some Chaos Space Marines have become. Most fell of all, the Daemon Princes stride to the fore or glide upon enormous bat-like wings. These terrifying creatures are imbued with Warp powers and immortality, rewards for the foulest of deeds and millennia of dark service.

Chaos Space Marines do not only dwell in the Eye of Terror, but are also scattered across the galaxy. They live in hidden moon bases and drifting space hulks that flit in and out of the Warp. They have conquered frontier worlds to call their own and established furtive bases upon Imperial worlds, hiding beneath their enemies' noses. The Alpha Legion is notorious for having strongholds established under hive-cities and taking over research stations to deceive the Imperium for decades with false reports. From these sites the Chaos Space Marines launch raids – some taking what they want for their own needs, others continuing a war of hate against the Imperial whelps and their cursed Emperor, their dreams unfulfilled until Holy Terra has been reduced to ruin and the desiccated husk upon the Golden Throne has been chopped down, to wither away as dust.

THE BLACK LEGION

The Warmaster's Own, the Black XVI.



The history of the Black Legion resounds with the din of both victories and the most bitter of defeats. The sixteenth of the First Founding Space Marine Legions, they were once called the Luna Wolves, before the Emperor renamed them the Sons of Horus to honour them and their Primarch after many triumphs. It was with that title that the Legion rebelled alongside their new master.

The Sons of Horus served as the Warmaster's bodyguard and fought with ferocity during the Horus Heresy. After Horus' defeat, they recovered his body from the loyalists and fled into the Eye of Terror. There, they feuded with other Traitor Legions, eventually losing the Warmaster's body, and were nearly destroyed. Only the matchless leadership of Abaddon kept the remnants of the old Legion together. It was this new Warmaster's edict to repaint their armour black, an eternal memory of the shame of their losses. Abaddon directed the newly named Black Legion and reclaimed the Legion's vaunted fighting prowess, once again restoring the respect and finally the support of the remaining Chaos Space Marines. Champions of many Legions and other followers of the Dark Gods now vie to fight alongside Abaddon and his infamous Black Legion.

EMPEROR'S CHILDREN

The Pleasure Slaves, the Debauched.



One of the first Legions to turn from the Emperor's light and embrace Horus' rebellion, the Emperor's Children were seduced by the dark side and the pleasures it promised. Now corrupt beyond human comprehension, the Emperor's Children are a savage fighting force unlike any other. Seeking out perverse enjoyments that only the thrilling din of combat can provide, the Emperor's Children often wield outlandish weapons that produce deafeningly loud and pyrotechnically explosive attacks.

DEATH GUARD

The Plagued Ones, the Bloated Sons of Mortarion.



Few sights are more loathsome than the corrupted forms of the plague-infested Death Guard. Their oozing power armour has rotted away in places, exposing festering wounds and pestilence-filled innards – yet their bloated bodies do not feel the agony of their mutations. Abominations against nature, the Death Guard advance within a cloud of flies, their weapons spitting death, their miasma spreading unnatural disease. One of the original Legions, the Death Guard fell under the sway of Nurgle, the Lord of Corruption, and became the first of all the Plague Marines.

WORD BEARERS

The Ultimate Zealots, Bringers of the True Faith.



Worshippers of all the Chaos Gods, the Word Bearers are methodical followers of rites. They exist to consecrate new worlds, to practise foul blasphemies and to erect monuments to the Dark Gods. The Word Bearers are cult-starters, furtive missionaries seeking to spread the truth of the Warp. Those unable to see their one true path are instead offered up as sacrifices in blood-soaked rituals. At first, the Word Bearers found purpose in the propagation of the Imperial Cult, but following the Emperor's chastisements and self-proclamations of mortality, they drifted into rebellion, turning their fanatical devotion instead to Chaos. More active than ever, the Word Bearers are still stirring new worlds to sedition, ever eager to spread their words of hate.

THE WORLD EATERS

Blood Soaked Berzerkers, Slayers of Skalathrax.



Long before the Horus Heresy, the World Eaters were noted for their savagery, having been censured by the Emperor for their brutality and use of psycho-surgery to turn new recruits into frothing madmen. Still, the World Eaters were invaluable terror troops in the Great Crusade and fought at the forefront of many great campaigns. It was simple for Horus to pervert their bloody rituals to the worship of Chaos. Since then, they have become devoted to Khorne, the Blood God, and they have become a byword for carnage.

In its bloodlust, the Legion tore itself apart, forming many smaller warbands, which to this day still seek battle, often joining other Chaos armies in their quest for skulls.

THE THOUSAND SONS

Chaos Sorcerers, the Followers of Magnus.



The path of damnation for the Thousand Sons was longer than most. They studied arcane lore despite the Emperor's warnings. They remained loyal to the Imperium, however, using their occult powers to warn the Emperor of Horus' impending betrayal. The Emperor declared the Thousand Sons' manipulations of Chaos to be heresy and unleashed the Space Wolves upon them. Forced into a war they did not want, the Thousand Sons turned to the Chaos power known as Tzeentch in order to save themselves. Escaping to the Eye of Terror, the Legion continued their magical studies, although they were soon wracked by mutations. Disturbed by their decline, a cabal, led by the great sorcerer Ahriman, risked the wrath of their, now daemonic, Primarch to cast a spell known as the Rubric. The spell instead brought greater changes to the Legion and the cabal was banished by the enraged Primarch, forced to scatter and fight for different Traitor Legions.

++ *Tolerance is Weakness.* ++



worst of which are the Red Corsairs led by Huron Blackheart. In the Thirteenth Black Crusade, Huron is making his own simultaneous assault upon the Imperium.

THE ENEMY WITHIN

Despite the constant alien assaults and the incessant wars wracking the Imperium, some of the wisest maintain that the greatest threat to the survival of the human race comes not from without, but from within.

A BETRAYAL OF FAITH

All over the Imperium there are hidden cults, clandestine organisations dedicated to the worship of the Dark Gods of Chaos. Thriving in troubled and uncertain times, these cults are as varied and diverse in practice as are the planets on which they can be found. A strong warrior cult on a feral world might lead to worship of the Blood God, while a pursuit of knowledge on the most civilised of worlds can eventually be twisted into the study of dark magics best left untouched. Often veiled under a more comely guise, such as a militia group or religious following, the cults seek to gain power or influence. According to Imperial law, joining in on such debased activities is the most heinous of heresies and is considered a betrayal of Mankind, a crime against one's own species. Being caught in any association with even the fringe elements of a Chaos cult is a death sentence.

Once it has begun, the corruption of a cult can spread like an infectious disease, the victims of doubt becoming the new evangelists of heresy, tempting the ignorant with promises of easy power. Chaos cults incite revolt among the masses, or work their way into governmental organisations to snatch control from within. Whole worlds are plunged into unrest or anarchy. Such actions have great ramifications and not just for the planet itself, but for all the Imperium.

When freed from the righteous restraints imposed by the Imperium, populations will develop psykers more frequently, releasing a growing vortex of psychic energy that tears at the fabric of the multiverse. If allowed to go unchecked, the emanations of such an agitated population can produce a Warp rift that will engulf a planet in a tide of Daemons, or perhaps even create another substantial gateway from which the perils of Chaos can further invade the galaxy. Small wonder that when the Inquisition finds evidence of a deep-rooted cult, they would rather subject an entire world to Exterminatus than let the situation escalate.

A BETRAYAL OF BODY

Accompanying the cultist down the path to ruination is the mutant. In all but a handful of cases, mutants are a danger to the Imperium. Some mutants, such as the genetically engineered Navigators, are both stable and accepted; however, most are neither. Once, mutations were associated with known causes – leaking reactors, or extreme environmental zones, such as high gravity mining worlds or planets seared by strange

stars. Some continue to attempt rational explanation for the rise in mutants, but it is not a rational age. Mutants are associated with the disfiguring effects of the Warp, and their unnatural features are generally considered physical proof of either open worship of the Dark Gods or membership in a secret cult. Feared and shunned for their deformities, mutants are an underclass, deviants that must hide from ordinary folk. A dark secret kept hidden from prying eyes, mutation is a scourge upon Mankind, a woeful reflection of the evolutionary process.

A BETRAYAL OF MIND

As widespread and calamitous as mutation of the body may be, it is in the mind of Man where the greatest peril lies. With mutated minds able to wield the unnatural power of the Warp, psykers are only tolerated when safely harnessed within Imperial organisations, and even then they are always watched and rarely trusted. After all, the source of psychic power is the Realm of Chaos, and therefore, perilous above all else. All psykers offer Daemons the chance to enter the material world, their mere presence destabilising the structure of all actuality. The Imperium must be ever vigilant, lest the hellish denizens of the Warp overrun realspace at Mankind's unconscious beckoning. Such is the true threat of the enemy within.

SUFFER NOT THE WITCH

The Imperium has become increasingly severe. Sanctioned persecutions are given free rein and witch-hunts have become more frequent. On many planets, suspicion is everywhere, and a life steeped in doubt and mistrust is the norm. Citizens make an elaborate show of their loyalty to the point where it has become a meaningless ritual, the act of looking devoted far outstripping any accomplishment. All live in fear of indictment, a fear made palpable by merest rumours. Which fellow toiler, which prefect or shuffling menial, is hiding some monstrous growth? Which one is a disguised Inquisitorial henchman? Which one is scrutinising you?

Even the slightest lapse in the harsh regime of vigilance imposed by the iron hand of the Adepts of the Imperium can result in the spread of cultists, mutation and psyker activity, all of which, ultimately – inevitably even – can only end in daemonic manifestation. It is doubtless true that some innocents must perish with the guilty, some who might aid the cause are instead slain by it, but any means justifies an end so vital and so endangered.

++ There are no Answers. Only Death. ++

THE GATHERING DARK

Everywhere, the foes of Humanity gather, preparing themselves for the coming apocalypse. Aliens, whether barbaric plunderers, ancient powers, upstart usurpers, or voracious monsters, all clamour for a morsel of flesh, a lick of blood from the great carcass that is the Imperium. More insidious than xenos invasion is Mankind's own corruption, those who would betray their own species for promises of power or material gain. Some are only beginning to walk the path of the traitor, whilst others knowingly sold their souls long ago to the horrors that lurk beyond the veil of the material universe.

From the shifting seas of the Warp come Daemons, the ultimate doom bringers. They are entities whose bodies are not fashioned of flesh and blood and their cravings are not those of mortals. They draw hatred and greed for breath and their food and drink is the terror and ambition of Man. They are never sated. The abominations from the Warp will not rest until they have consumed not just Mankind, but the universe as well. All will be ruin; all will be Chaos.

Although this may be Mankind's darkest hour – all is not lost. While the will of the Emperor is still bound within the Golden Throne, there yet shines a light in the darkness. Though it is but a lone beacon surrounded by the blackness of the eternal void, it is Humanity's call to arms, and it echoes across the galaxy. Where hope has been abandoned, single-minded faith and blind devotion must serve instead. And it cannot be denied that the Imperium of Man still endures.

Though already bathed in the blood of unremembered heroes beyond count, more is needed. New heroes must arise, new blood must be spilt. For 10,000 years the Imperium has held together, surviving an age of endless war that has escalated, intensifying in an ever-rising crescendo of madness and mayhem. Upon a million planets and across the trackless depths of space, the sound of battle rages, and behind it can be heard the sound of Dark Gods laughing...



GUARDIAN OF HUMANITY

Sensing the rising birth rates of human psykers, it was the Emperor who first anticipated that Man was developing into a psychically aware creature. The Emperor was, himself, the most psychically gifted human ever born, and long before he was placed upon the Golden Throne, he knew that without his guidance, those with the newly emerging trait would fall victim to what lurked in the Warp. He had learned what clawed and hungered for the life-essence of

sentient creatures and he knew that the Warp fiends would prey upon their untrained minds, or worse still, use them as gateways to enter the material world. He foresaw, as only his mind could, the many mutations that the forces of Chaos would create to pollute Humanity's evolution. The only answer the Emperor could foresee was the creation of a harsh new regime: the birth of the Imperium. Vast armadas of Black Ships ply the void, voyaging continuously back and forth between over a million worlds and Terra. Like clockwork, the inhuman gears of Imperial bureaucracy unquestioningly click, without insight, without will. A small price to pay for the survival of the human race...



++ A destiny unfolding, marred by weakness and mutation. ++

THE LONG WAR

Brother-Captain Karlsen surveyed the carnage wearily. His wounds pained him. His armour hurt as if it were bruised skin and he almost envied those who had died. He ran his metal-clad tentacles over the fused remains of the Daemon Engine, the ragged remains of the Lord of Battle. It was still warm from the reactor meltdown that had, at long last, sent its enraged spirit back to the Warp. On the far side of the tremendous crater was the head of a slain Warhound Titan, it lay smoking, half buried in a pile of ash and slag.

Karlsen watched the triumphant rebels swill foul drink and listened to their babbled jokes and chatter. The few remaining cultists who danced and sang amongst the rubble did not realise it yet, but they were dead men. Their patron Daemons had been cast back, or had disappeared when the Warp rift closed. His own Chaos Space Marines would soon be gone. Without that backbone, Imperial forces would easily break the strength of the rebellion on this world. And they would be coming now, coming in full strength. To Karlsen it did not matter. There would be other worlds.

His wandering had led him to a ruined temple of the Emperor's Ascension. All was charred black and innumerable skeletons and melted armour were scattered about, obviously a hard fought site of the battle. From under the rubble he heard a groan. A figure pulled itself out from the fused innards of the building, the sound of scraping ceramite was unmistakable. Karlsen watched clinically, surprised that a Blood Angel yet lived. The Space Marine was mangled, the red of his armour mostly peeled away from the heat of a blast. He lifted his half-destroyed helmet, a single hate-filled eye locking onto Karlsen. Frantically, the Blood Angel staggered to his feet, struggling to bring his bolt pistol to bear.

'Traitor. Heretic. Abomination,' the Space Marine chanted. Karlsen found himself staring down a wavering barrel. Part of him wanted the Blood Angel to pull the trigger.

Bitter laughter bubbled from Karlsen's horribly mutated throat. Speech was difficult now. He tried to find the word to articulate his loathing. He searched his corroded soul for a single word that could embody ten thousand years of hate.

'Brother,' he said eventually.

A hint of fear could be read playing over the Blood Angel's blistered features. He made to pull the trigger. Like a blur, Karlsen swiftly brought his own

weapon up. A single shot tore through the Blood Angel, who fell without a sound. Karlsen kept firing, unloading a full magazine, hoping to hear a scream. He was disappointed.

At that moment, he wished he had every single Space Marine in his sights. So boundless was his hatred, so great was his rage, that he would have killed them all without mercy. At that moment, he knew he would fight forever. He would fight until all was ruination and the entire galaxy burned. For him, there could be neither rest nor peace.

The Long War would go on.



DARK MILLENNIUM

The 41st Millennium is a vast, dark and deadly place, full of untold mysteries both scientific, esoteric and utterly alien. To produce a study on all of the technologies and sorceries of the Age of the Imperium would take all the scribes of Terra a hundred years or more; what follows is but a glimpse into this terrifying age. A candle-flame in the darkness...

THE CULT MECHANICUS

A brief overview and history of the religious beliefs and practices of the Adeptus Mechanicus.

The Cult Mechanicus, or Cult of the Machine, refers to the religious beliefs of the Adeptus Mechanicus. This worship predates the Imperium itself and was shrouded in mystery long before the Emperor created the Treaty of Mars to reunite the empires of Terra with that of the Mechanicum of the red planet. Although now fully interwoven within the fabric of the Imperium, there is much about the Adeptus Mechanicus that remains unknown. As with their secrets of science and the workings of their forge worlds, the Adeptus Mechanicus do not willingly share information with anyone outside their own organisation. If anything, they are even more closed-mouthed about their religion; although there is much speculation, little is known of the rites and practices of their worship. Following is a collection of the known facts.

Mars long ago evolved a strong culture devoted to the study and construction of engines and machinery of all types. During the anarchic centuries of the Age of Strife, they were ruled by the Mechanicum of Mars, a parliament of technocrats known to worship a machine god. Even then, there were visible signs that those on Mars were deep in the practices of what is now known as the Cult Mechanicus.

When the Emperor first rose to power on Terra, the Tech-Priests recognized in him a kindred spirit. He was a man of science in an era when most still held to the crude superstitions brought about by the disasters of the Dark Age of Technology. Instead, the Emperor valued the machine and technological advancement, and so, upon this initial foundation of mutual respect, the alliance between Terra and Mars was built. In return for supplying matchless arms and armour for his troops, and a war fleet for them to sail the stars upon, the Emperor gave to Mars six Houses of Navigators, also promising to protect the Tech-Priests and to respect the sovereignty of their forge worlds.

More of the unusual ways of the Adeptus Mechanicus were observed as Tech-Priests began to journey alongside the Space Marine Legions and the Imperial army as they crossed the galaxy with the successes of the Great Crusade. It became clear that the Tech-Priests did not fear machines, but coveted them – treating them with a reverence hitherto unseen by the men of Terra. As the Emperor's forces reconnected long lost colonised

planets, driving out hostile xenos, they quickly found growing signs of what was to become the Imperial Cult, as the newly conquered worlds were convinced that the Emperor was a god. It was also at this time that some of the Tech-Priests first began to equate the Emperor to a living embodiment of their own machine god and a fulfilment of what they claimed were ancient prophecies. However, not all of the Adeptus Mechanicus believed in this, a source of contention that divides their ranks even to this day.

The dispersion of Tech-Priests away from their cloistered forge worlds allowed more to be discerned about their machine god. In its broadest terms, the Adeptus Mechanicus is divided into two parts. The greater mass of those on Mars, or any forge world, are worker-slaves called servitors. They are not fully human, but half-man, half machine creatures whose minds have been partially programmed to perform specific duties. The servitors are slaves to the ruling priesthood of Tech-Priests who form a hierarchy of technicians, scientists and religious leaders (to those within the Cult Mechanicus, these aspects are all one in the same). The leader of the Adeptus Mechanicus is the Fabricator General, a High Lord of Terra and the head of the Cult Mechanicus.

According to the Adeptus Mechanicus, knowledge is the supreme manifestation of divinity, and all creatures and artefacts that embody knowledge are holy because of it. The supreme holder of all knowledge is the machine god himself, the Great Omnissiah – an omnipotent being. To those within the Cult Mechanicus, machines are not mundane objects or tools, but rather they are holy items, and those that preserve knowledge from ancient times are considered the most sacred of all. Tech-Priests teach that all mechanical devices are blessed with machine spirits, and the more ancient and important the machine, the mightier its spirit. As such, before any technology can be used or repaired, its spirit must be properly appeased, lest it fails of its function. This is achieved through rituals, some of which include chanting repetitious cants, sprinkling blessed unguents, and often, if the machine is very old and revered, a rhythmic striking with a special metal tool.

The Tech-Priests teach that a man's worth is measured only by the sum of his accumulated knowledge – his body is simply an organic (and therefore more faulty) machine capable of preserving intellect. The replacing of worn body parts with mechanical upgrades is considered by the Tech-Priests to be holy augmentation – bringing the flesh closer to the divine. The most elderly of the order are more machines than men, their presence betrayed by the whirl of cogs, the billowing of mechanical lungs, and the telltale clicking of bionic prosthetics.

Over the years, such radical beliefs have raised tensions, caused schisms, and on occasion, even escalated into minor conflicts with other elements within the Imperium. In M32, when the Ecclesiarchy rose to dominance and was recognized as the one true creed in the Imperium, they put forth much effort to redirect any other beliefs or creeds towards acceptance of the Emperor. Those not quelled by the might and power of the Imperium were led down the true path by more subtle ways. For instance, it is permissible for natives on primitive planets to continue worshipping their sun god, and the missionaries

of the Ecclesiarchy would readily admit that the sun was magnificent and worthy of worship, always adding in that, on their planets, the sun god was known as the Emperor. Within the span of a few generations, aided by the hard-working members of the Missionarius Galaxia, and their teachings and sermons, shrines to the Emperor (in whatever form) are eventually raised and another world is added to the fold. Those who persist in denial, however, often run into considerable hardships.

Because of their importance to the Imperium, the Adeptus Mechanicus was allowed, in quiet discord, to continue following its own mysterious strictures. The Cult Mechanicus does acknowledge the Emperor as the Master of Mankind, although they do not recognise the authority of the Adeptus Ministorum, despite its official sanction. While other religions were named as heretical for such acts, the Adeptus Mechanicus has been granted an unusual autonomy, a freedom of worship unparalleled save for that granted to the Space Marines for their unusual practices. Over the millennia, as the Ecclesiarchy's power and influence has risen, these exceptions to their authority have come into question on many occasions, however, all such infighting is eventually subsumed beneath more pressing needs. And so the Adeptus Mechanicus continues their mysterious and strange worship of he that they call the Omnissiah.

THE HIGH LORDS OF TERRA

A short history of the Senatorum Imperialis.

The High Lords of Terra are the governing body of the Imperium. They are tasked with interpreting the Emperor's will and enacting his rule across the largest empire in the galaxy. On their command, the fleets and armies of the Imperium move, only their edict can approve a Space Marine Founding, and on their orders, the Black Fleet sails and their grim tithes are collected. Yet how, beneath the Benevolent Emperor, has such an organisation come to be?

The Senatorum Imperialis has, at its roots, many echoes from ruling bodies formed before the birth of the Imperium. In the beginning of the age, the Emperor himself ruled, although he formed about him a council of advisors comprised of key individuals. This top circle contained the Fabricator General of Mars, the Paternova of the Navigator Houses and Malcador the Sigillite, perhaps the Emperor's greatest ally during the Unification Wars of Terra. As the Emperor left the homeworld of Mankind to lead the Great Crusade, he left in his stead the legendary Malcador, more or less to act as regent in his stead.

Over the course of that vast military campaign, which reclaimed the galaxy and freed Humanity from enslavement, the Emperor discovered the lost Primarchs and brought them into the fold. As the Great Crusade began to branch off in many new directions, the Emperor grew to rely on his new battle council. After the decisive victory at the Battle of Ullanor, when Mankind's re-ascension was no longer in doubt, the Emperor left military matters in the hands of Horus, his newly appointed Warmaster, and returned to Terra.

Whilst Horus directed the rest of the Primarchs in the expansion and security of this new realm, the Emperor formed the Council of Terra. This formalized the role of the Emperor's previous advisors and the group started off with a half dozen men. This council, under the leadership of the Emperor, was to become the body of government that would administrate the myriad bureaucratic tasks needed by the newly formed empire. Already, under the far-seeing eyes of Malcador, the Adeptus Administratum was born, new branches already forming beneath its auspices. It was a bright start for the new Dawn of Mankind envisioned by the Emperor.

In addition to the Council of Terra, the Primarchs, under the Warmaster, were to head the military branches, now in the latter days of the Great Crusade and spread far across the galaxy. As it turns out, this was a contentious decision. Some of the Primarchs took great exception to being ruled by those deemed less worthy of such honours than themselves. It cannot be proven, but doubtless this turned out to be one of many growing resentments that allowed the Ruinous Powers to infect and corrupt several of the Primarchs.

Following the calamities of the Horus Heresy, the Emperor was interred upon the Golden Throne and could no longer rule his realm directly. Several legends tell of the Emperor's last words, spoken as he was attached into the vast machinery that would allow his mind to live on. Full of foresight beyond mortal men, the Emperor's final instructions were for the rule of Mankind's galaxy-wide kingdom. In that time of great change, Malcador too was now gone, and it had been he who had proven best able to enact the Emperor's vision. Now that role, and the leadership for the coming reformation, fell upon Roboute Guilliman, the great Primarch of the Ultramarines. It was he who set up the new ruling body, the Senatorum Imperialis, or as it is more commonly known now, the High Lords of Terra. It was their duty to interpret the will of the Emperor and, in his stead, to command the Imperium. The number of this ruling council was set at 12, with Roboute Guilliman himself taking a seat under the title of Lord Commander of the Imperium, the old term Warmaster having fallen out of favour for obvious reasons.

Since those days, the number of seats on the High Lords of Terra has largely remained the same, fluctuating during various points of crisis before eventually returning to its original number. Each seat is filled by a leader from one of the most powerful organizations of the Imperium. A complex web of tradition, skulduggery, promises of support, threats of retaliation and considerations of mutual interest binds them together and determines who holds office and who does not. In practice, some of the Imperium's organizations and institutions are so powerful and vital that it would be unthinkable for their leader to not be granted a seat upon the High Lords of Terra. Naturally, over the long millennia, the unthinkable has happened many times over, however, the existing High Lords often put in place an inordinate amount of measures to ensure that their seat is a permanent one – that upon their deaths their position is automatically filled by the new head of their organization. The following offices are almost invariably represented as High Lords because they form the cornerstones of the Imperium, the most important of its ancient institutions.

- The Master of the Administratum

- The Master of the Administratum
- The Fabricator General of the Adeptus Mechanicus
- The Paternoval Envoy of the Navigators
- The Inquisitorial Representative
- The Master of the Adeptus Astra Telepathica
- The Ecclesiarch of the Adeptus Ministorum
- The Grand Master of the Officio Assassinorum
- The Master of the Astronomican
- The Grand Provost Marshal of the Adeptus Arbites

Those nine posts are virtually sacrosanct, and there are very few times in the history of the Imperium when their seats upon the High Lords of Terra became empty and were not filled with a successor from the same organisation. Note that a specific Inquisitor does not typically hold the position of Inquisitorial Representative on his own, but instead, the seat is retained for whichever individual is sent on behalf of the Inquisition. Similarly, the place of the Paternoval Envoy is open to whoever might be the Envoy of the Paternova of the current ruling family of Navigators. The Paternova himself never leaves the Palace of Navigators, for it is forbidden for him to do so.

The remaining three posts are usually filled from amongst the following mighty officials:

- Lord Commander of the Segmentum Solar
- Lord Commander Militant of the Imperial Guard
- Lord High Admiral of the Imperial Navy
- Cardinal(s) of the Holy Synod of Terra
- The Abbess Sanctorum of the Adepta Sororitas
- Captain-General of the Adeptus Custodes
- Chancellor of the Estate Imperium
- The Speaker for the Chartist Captains

It is an oddity that, throughout its history, very few members of the Adeptus Astartes have served as High Lords of Terra – given the importance of Humanity’s most elite fighting force and the fact that the first council was initiated by Roboute Guilliman, the Primarch of the Ultramarines. This seems to have been set up intentionally by Guilliman, who knew that at times of great need, Space Marine leaders would have no choice but to step in, but would otherwise remain outside the ruling structure. Some say the Primarch’s discouragement of Space Marines serving in the Senatorum Imperialis was based upon the Emperor’s original Council of Terra – which was separate from his Military Council,

and a ruling body that did not include any members of the Adeptus Astartes. Guilliman clearly believed, as his great work, the Codex Astartes points out, that it is the Space Marines' duty to serve Mankind, not to rule it.

In its long existence, the High Lords of Terra have gone through many changes. They have been forced to give one of its seats over to a religious leader (the Ecclesiarch, who joined shortly after the Adeptus Ministorum was named the sole religion of the Imperium in early M32), wiped out to a man by assassination (on the orders of a slighted Grand Master of the Officio Assassinorum, an event known as 'the Beheading'), and dissolved altogether by the ruling Ecclesiarch (during the civil war known as the Age of Apostasy). Many members have disappeared under suspicious circumstances and the Inquisition has been asked to investigate a number of times (although many have suggested that at least some missing Lords of Terra have disappeared because of the Inquisition). Yet always, despite the many power struggles and strife, the High Lords of Terra have continued to interpret the Will of the Emperor and thereby rule the greatest empire in the galaxy.

DAEMONS

That there are Daemons abroad in the universe, and the link that these entities have with the Warp, is not a commonly known or understood phenomenon within the broader community of the Imperium. There are various reasons for this. Quite apart from the sheer rarity of encounters with the denizens of the Warp, the hierarchy of the Imperium has always sought to suppress such knowledge. What little awareness exists amongst the peoples of the Imperium is never openly or officially acknowledged. Tales of the Warp, and its unpleasant inhabitants, are dismissed as scaremongering or mere superstition.

The Imperium, or at least its more senior agents, is quite determined to prevent the spread of daemoniac infestation. It is known amongst the cognoscenti that the ways of the Daemon are deceitful and devious and that they have subtle ways to infiltrate human societies and influence the human mind. Many are the strange, twisted cults and secretive covens of Daemon worshippers that have inveigled themselves into the worlds of the Imperium throughout the course of its long history. Invariably, these cults have been unearthed and eradicated, but not without great cost of lives, property and sanity.

There is also the very real threat of possession, which, although a very rare occurrence, is nonetheless feared above all other outcomes. A Daemon with such a foothold in realspace is both difficult to identify, at least in the early stages of possession, and is also a most deadly and dangerous foe. Furthermore, the Daemon is always intent upon spreading its taint through the establishment of cult worship and the encouragement of yet more possessions. Unchecked, such a creature can wreak untold damage in both the physical and metaphysical spheres.

However, the primary motivation for keeping knowledge of Daemons secret is to ensure that the greater population is not catastrophically disturbed by such revelations and driven to madness, despair and mass civil unrest through the knowing of them. There is a

world of difference between understanding that there are vile, antipathetic alien species at large in the universe and knowing that one's immortal soul is at risk from predation by unholy daemonic entities from a hellish dimension a mere thought away from our own. Also, as dangerous as Warp travel may be perceived to be, if the general populace was to realise that it was, in fact, through a realm inhabited by Daemons, it is unlikely that anyone would willingly submit themselves to such a means of transport or trust any of the astropathic messages sent through it. The anarchy that could ensue from such a turn of events would be threat enough to completely destabilise the Imperium.

Thus, only the most stout-hearted and iron-willed are permitted to know and retain knowledge of the Daemons and their masters, the Dark Gods of Chaos. The bearers of this knowledge are few, and they share this information reluctantly. The Inquisition and their erstwhile allies, the Grey Knights, are among the tiny number of humans who are allowed to know of the Daemons and their evil ways. Most others who come into contact with them are culled to prevent both the promulgation of knowledge and the possible spread of daemonic taint. If they are of sufficient value to the Imperium, they are mind-wiped to erase all memories of the encounter.

BLACK SHIPS

The great fleet of Black Ships belongs to the Adeptus Astra Telepathica. Independent of the Imperial Navy, they are the second largest fleet in the galaxy. There are many thousands of Black Ships but only the highest-ranking adepts in the Adeptus Astra Telepathica know the true scale of the fleet and the vast scope of its operations. New vessels are constantly commissioned to replace inevitable losses and to further increase the fleet's size. Thus it is that each year, more and more planets of the Imperium are visited and stripped of their psykers for transportation to Terra.

The captains and other senior officers of the Black Ships are senior adepts of the Adeptus Astra Telepathica. The ships' crews are indentured workers drafted from a number of Imperial worlds situated relatively close to Terra. The Astra Telepathica have ancient contracts with these worlds, ensuring a steady flow of suitable recruits in return for exemption from Imperial Tithes. All crew are rigorously tested and scrutinised for any latent psychic abilities or sensitivities and are regularly mind-scrubbed to purge any taint or infection.

Navigators for the fleet of Black Ships are all members of the Granicus, Ptolemy and MacPherson Navigator Houses who work exclusively for the Astra Telepathica. Inquisitors, alone amongst Imperium officials, have secured Rights of Passage aboard the Black Ships and have leave to travel freely throughout the entire fleet. They are also wont to oversee the identification, capture and incarceration of particularly recalcitrant or rebellious psykers in whom they have a personal interest. Generally, few other Imperium agents are permitted aboard these dread vessels but occasionally Space Marines, Sisters of Battle or higher-ranking members of the Adeptus Terra may be accommodated at the captain's discretion.

A Black Ship is a dreadful environment for psykers. Psychically sensitive crew spend most of their time in the shielded upper decks of the main bridge, as far removed from the containment holds as possible so as to avoid the unpleasant effects of the security measures in place. There are numerous devices and routines directed at the great holds to confuse and confound psychic abilities. Each ship has a troop of specially trained adepts whose sole function is to focus their own psychic energies into an Occluding Sphere – this strange metaphysical device broadcasts an invasive signal into the mind of any nearby psyker severely disrupting their ability to concentrate or reason and therefore largely curtailing their ability to utilise their talents. In addition to this, oppressively loud and discordant noise is pumped into the holds. The holds are dimly illuminated for the most part but frequent bursts of strobing light shatter the twilight. Food and drink for the captives is laced with sedatives. The captive population is regularly moved from one hold to another. All of this serves to keep the psykers in a helpless, confused and compliant state. The most dangerous psykers (as identified by Inquisitorial scrutiny) are kept in separate isolation cells deep within the bowels of the containment holds.

Every day, dozens of Black Ships complete their epic journey and arrive at Terra, whereupon they disgorge their cargoes of human psykers. Each ship can hold many thousands of psykers within their vast holds. So each and every day, tens of thousands of psykers are sent to the processing halls, graded and passed on through the myriad departments and institutions responsible for ensuring that the Tithe is put to its allotted use.

ABHUMANS

Abhumans are creatures evolved from human stock, but changed or mutated to a greater or lesser degree. They differ from true mutants in that they conform to a recognisable physical standard, breed true, and are no more prone than normal humans to further mutation. There are many millions of abhumans living within the Imperium and they are tolerated and exploited by the authorities very much as the rest of the population. It is rare for them to reach positions of authority or power within the Imperial hierarchy and many are subject to popular derision, fear or prejudice. Many abhumans are recruited into service of the Administratum and its various sub-divisions, including the Imperial Guard and the Imperial Fleet. In the Imperial Guard, they are organised and fight in dedicated squads or companies, segregated from their human comrades.

The Adeptus Terra officially recognises seventy-three stable abhuman strains within the Imperium. Of these, forty-six types are now listed as extinct, and no records have been received of a further twelve strains for over a generation, suggesting that they too have died out or been assimilated back into the general population. The status of the remaining fifteen abhuman races is quite varied and there is permanent disagreement about their specific classification amongst the adepts of the overseeing sub-division of the Adeptus Administratum: the Tithes Chamber Notaries, sub. Planetary Census (Abhumans). The most noteworthy and contentious matter concerning the adepts is the Ogryn (Homo

sapiens gigantus) matrix of abhuman strains. This complex group is currently officially listed as seven distinct types (Alpha, Theta, Type IV, Type VIIa, H.S. gigantus gigantus, H.S. gigantus cranopus and the mysterious Grey Ogryns), but many in the Chamber doubt that these are all separate types, and yet another revision of the classification is therefore pending.

Ratlings (*Homo sapiens minimus*), Squats (*Homo sapiens rotundus*), Beastmen (*Homo sapiens variatus*), Troths (*Homo sapiens verdantus*), Longshanks (*Homo sapiens elongatus*), Pelagers (*Homo sapiens oceanus*), Felinids (*Homo sapiens hirsutus*) and Neandors (*Homo sapiens hyannothus*) comprise the remaining classified, and officially recognised, abhuman races.

Of these, Beastmen are subject to severe persecution and have been placed on the Register of Proscribed Citizens (Class A-G worlds) by the Adeptus Arbites. This effectively precludes them from settlement on, or transportation to or from, more than three hundred thousand worlds of the Imperium and forbids their conscription as an Imperial Tithe obligation. All of this is a sure sign that they will soon lose abhuman status completely and be reclassified as true mutants. Troths, Felinids and Neandors are endemic, and restricted to the worlds of Verdant, Carlos McConnell and Hyannoth IV respectively. The remaining abhuman races are variously present across the entire Imperium. In some regions they are plentiful and common, living in large colonies or even populating entire worlds, in others they are scarce and virtually unknown.

STC TEMPLATES

Created at the developmental apex of the Age of Technology, the Standard Template Construct (STC) system was a way to ensure that all the recently far-flung human colonies across the galaxy could build anything they needed. From air-purifiers to military grade weaponry, hab-buildings to plasma reactors. The user simply asked the machine how to build what was needed and it would calculate everything – from locally-available materials to the means of manufacture and assembly – it would present the most efficient way to achieve what the settler asked. The STCs were designed so that the least accomplished user could still fabricate the vehicle, building, or weapon they needed. For all intents and purposes, the STCs were the sum total of man's technical know-how at its zenith of power.

Every human colony had at least one STC system, although most colonists never tapped into anything like the more advanced constructs, finding the more rudimentary machines and weapons far more useful. It is highly probable that few of the theoretical or most highly advanced works were ever attempted. Over the passage of time, a majority of the STC machines were lost, destroyed in battle or by natural disaster, or began to fail, overcome at last by corrupted databanks, too much jury-rigging in place of knowledgeable maintenance, or simply the fatigue of thousands of years of use. Those lucky planets that still maintained even a partially working STC system grew to guard it jealously as the Age of Technology slipped into the anarchic madness that was the Age of Strife. Soon, the

galaxy-wide realm of Man was fractured, each world cut off from all but the closest planets by Warp storms or worse. The madness, warfare and Warp-spawned invasions, along with the great backlash against technology, ensured that few of the great works of the previous era survived.

Today, there are no surviving STC systems. It was common practice, however, beginning in the Age of Technology, for colonies to produce hard copies of many of the more standard designs. Over the years, these have been copied repeatedly, with varying levels of accuracy. Yet, as commonplace as many of these designs once were, now any copy is a rarefied item, even more so for any that carry precious first-generation printout information. During the Great Crusade and later, during the period known as the Forging, thousands upon thousands of previously colonised planets were reclaimed for Humanity. Many STC templates were found amongst these worlds and, it is rumoured, even some partially working systems were unearthed. These long lost troves of forgotten technology were discovered mostly buried amidst the ruins of greatly regressed worlds, but on occasion they were found enshrined within locked vaults, guarded by those to whom the name STC, or even its purpose had longed passed out of understanding. Any such findings are greedily collected by the Adeptus Mechanicus; the Tech-Priests rush such treasures back to their secretive forge worlds, where they can be thoroughly studied, hoarded, worshipped and copied.

One result of the STC system, and its pivotal place in human development, is that many worlds utilise designs and machinery of a similar type. Of course, the millennia have wrought changes in the basic utilitarian devices proscribed by the STC, but many humans adhere religiously to the old designs. STC designs were intended to be able to cope with anything – given the unpredictable nature of colonies in previously unexplored space. Therefore, designs were often big and brutish, hard to damage and easy to repair. Examples of recovered STC template technology still being built and in use today include such military hardware as the Rhino Armoured Personnel Carrier and the Land Raider, as well as the Atmospheric Pumps that still keep the air (almost) breathable in even the largest hive-blocks.

The Adeptus Mechanicus are driven by a quest for knowledge and, in an era when innovation and invention are almost non-existent (being viewed as highly suspicious, if not outright dangerous), then it is no wonder that the Tech-Priests hold STC templates as holy items. A working STC system is the ultimate embodiment of their endless mission – truly the font of all knowledge (which is actually what the original devices were meant to be). The Adeptus Mechanicus will pursue any and all information about STCs, willingly trading lives by the millions for even the chance to get their hands upon the lost devices of the Age of Technology, and especially the blueprints by which they were made. To this day, discoveries are rare, but still being made. Who knows what ancient artefact lies buried beneath forgotten levels of a hive city or sits idle and overgrown upon the trackless lands of recently recolonised worlds? Tech-Priests aboard Explorator fleets dream of finding a planet on the edge of the galaxy or long locked away by Warp storms, a world where full volumes of STC printouts have been collected, or perhaps a fully functioning

STC system still awaits them. Until then, gone are the secrets for the trident-shaped Proteus Cannon of Mars or the force field generators that guard the Palace of Xerxes, and countless other marvels whose workings even the most adept of the Tech-Priests can't begin to fathom.

EXCERPTS ON WARP TRAVEL

Notes of Sharim Calypso, Adjutant advisor to the Imperial Navy.

The Questio Logisticus branch of the Adeptus Administratum has a division devoted to tracking median travel via common Warp routes. Although only two millennia's worth of data has been compiled, it has thus far proven little, save what is already known – to enter Warp space is a deadly and unpredictable risk.

By way of an example, note the logbook of the Proxxian traders that operate in the Nephilim sector. They primarily transport forced labour, from the hive world of Proxx to the isolated mining colonies of Hephastian, approximately three times each Terran year. The distance is dozens of light years and requires a fleet to traverse the Immaterium. The route is anything but predictable, despite being classed as a semi-fluctuating passage (the most stable rating). Typical voyages range between one and six weeks, but the more extreme journeys have taken as much as 1,200 years and as little as two minutes. Some 22% of expeditions have, as of yet, not arrived at their destination – although given the time disparity, one can only estimate what percentage have been lost and which are still en route. In distance, this is a relatively short voyage example; the numbers only grow worse with longer journeys.

It is my observation that little more can be learned from further computations and that the old Navigator maxim, 'Trust in the Emperor's Light', remains the one truism of value concerning Warp travel.

THE MARCH OF TIME

The Imperial timeline is expressed using the dating system of the Administratum, though it should be noted that events themselves may go unrecorded – or be recorded with considerable bias – within the Imperial archives. Indeed, records on different worlds may vary greatly in their representation of the facts.

An Imperial date is a date 'Anno Domini', but expressed in different terms to those we are used to. The most noticeable change is the suffix 'M' followed by a number. This is the millennium number. In Imperial terms, any date between 2001 and 3000 would be suffixed by M3. The current millennium in the Warhammer 40,000 mythos is the forty-first or M41. Incidentally, this suffix is normally emphasised by a full stop for clarity.

A typical dating code, such as you will find in this book, is 0150935.M41. The M41 means we are dealing with a forty-first millennium date. The other numbers tell us the year, the fraction of the year and the accuracy of the date.

Year: The last three digits are the year within the millennium running from 000-999. 0150930/M32 is the year 930 of the thirty-second millennium, described as the year 31930AD. When referring to a year in general terms, and where it is not necessary to include the year fraction or check number, it is acceptable to write 'year 930/M32'.

Year Fraction: For administrative purposes the standard year is divided into 1000 equal segments; 001-000. This is a purely administrative convention and not part of everyday usage.

Check number: The first digit in the sequence is usually the dating reference or check number, though it is not always included. This check number is necessary due to temporal distortions which affect ships in the Warp as well as worlds which are remote, or isolated, from Earth. Its presence qualifies the accuracy of the date given in each case – the following is appended out of completeness and for the satisfaction of curiosity.

Prefixes 1 to 8 indicate widening 'grey areas' of a given item of data's surrounding origins. Prefix 9 is slightly different. It's used when, for instance, a source reporting from a world that doesn't use Imperial dating, needs to make a reference to that world's history. The historical date would carry the prefix 9.

D6 0/1 Earth standard date.

Referring to an event which happened within the Sol system of Segmentum Solar.

2 Direct.

Source in direct psychic contact with Earth when date reference was made.

3 Indirect.

The source is in direct psychic contact with a class 2 source, but not Earth.

4 Corroborated.

The source is in direct psychic contact with a class 3 source, but not a class 0/1 or 2 source.

5 Sub-corroborated.

The source is in direct psychic contact with any corroborated source.

6 Non-referenced 1 year.

No psychic contact with a class 1-5 source when the reference is made. The reference does belong to a sequence beginning or ending with a date with a class 1-5 source. The unsourced time period is less than 1 standard year.

7 Non-referenced 10 years.

This is an unsourced date in the same way as a class 6 date, but with an unsourced period of 1-10 years.

8 Non-referenced more than 10 years.

This is an unsourced date as for 7, but for an unsourced sequence of more than 10 years.

9

An approximated date with no fixed coordinates at either end of a sequence, or a date drawn from non-Imperially dated references.

COMBAT LIFE SAVER

Lesson 243.77fIVs.

HOW TO FIELD DRESS A LAS-WOUND

Laser weapons are easy to produce and maintain, assuring they are amongst the most common weapons in the galaxy. Las-weapons do not fire a projectile or slug, but instead project a brief, high-energy pulse. This beam can range greatly in strength, depending on the size of the las-weapon and the rating of its power source. The largest of the las-weapons – such as the lancestrike batteries employed upon spacecraft of the Imperial Navy – produce beams that can sear away entire hab-blocks, leaving only smoking craters hundreds of feet deep. On average, however, las-weapons are much smaller. Even the humble laspistol, within close range and with no atmospheric diffusion of shot, has the power to blast away a foe's face on contact, with the beam penetrating the skull and burning a hole through the brain, causing immediate death.

A las-pulse will shear through flesh producing a cauterised hole surrounded by blister-burns. When first striking flesh, a las-pulse will cause a flash-burn effect upon impact, as the heat of the discharge causes the immediate surface area of the target to be vaporised. This can, to the untrained eye, take on the same wound aspects as those produced by high density explosives, but there are major differences when it comes to field dressing las-wounds. While the brief exploding flash of initial contact is highly visible, it is rarely the major concern of aid givers. It is typically the continuing projection of the las-beam boring into the body that causes the most extensive damage – the beam will puncture through any internal organs and is capable of severing limbs.

The following steps should be employed when confronted with a las-wound:

I) Approach. Do not treat until you have ensured the victim is removed from

the source. Las-weapons produce a narrow amplified beam of light. Most often this is a short burst, however, should the shaft be ongoing and still present, it is dangerous to approach – entering the beam will cause you to become a casualty as well.

II) Expose. Identify the impact site and determine the extent of the flash burn. Lift away any clothing covering the burnt area, without pulling material over the burns. Leave in place any material that has been seared into the burn area. If the victim is wearing armour, be aware that some materials absorb heat, leaving the area dangerous to touch. In a hazardous environment (such as chem-zones, rad-sites, or other such dangerous areas) do not cut away any protective covering – apply the dressing directly over it.

III) Evaluate. Find the penetration level of the beam. Has the beam passed through the victim causing an exit wound? It is best to check as soon as possible. The extreme heat cauterizes the wound, leaving minimum bleeding, however, rapid swelling will begin around the area almost immediately, making later diagnosis more difficult. If the las-wound is only a glancing hit, in a limb, or shows no signs of striking a vital organ, proceed with Field Dressing Type I. If you suspect the las-wound has penetrated a vital organ, go straight to Type II.

IV) Field Dressing (Type I). Using the cleanest material available, place the cloth lightly over the burn, covering the entirety of the wound. If the victim is able, he may hold the dressing in place. Use strips to bind in place (wrapping around limbs or torso) and tie tightly enough to avoid slipping. Do not break blisters or apply ointments to flash burns.

V) Field Dressing (Type II). Cover the wound as quickly and completely as possible. This is cosmetic, to hide the lethal wound from comrades, and may also allow the victim some false comfort. The swelling that follows is bound to cause catastrophic bodily failures.

ASTROPATH COMMUNICATION

A brief treatise on the basics of Astropathic transmission (Imp. Ref. 0253870007/SA).

There are many methods of communication within a single planetary orbit and even within compact star systems, ranging from the mundane to the esoteric. However, the majority of the Imperium's colonised worlds are so far apart from other star systems that other means are required to stay in contact with the wider Imperium – to pass messages over such great interstellar distances requires the skills and powers of an Astropath.

Astropaths are the most common sanctioned psykers in the Imperium, having escaped the cruel fate that awaits those without the strength of mind to control their powers, or the will and determination to survive the Imperium's strict training regimes. All major organisations of the Adeptus Terra, from the bureaucratic branches of the Administratum to the furtive offices of the Inquisition, use Astropaths to communicate with each other across the vast distances of the galaxy. These psykers can be found working alongside starship captains, rogue traders, Planetary Governors and officers from all branches of the military. The Adeptus Ministorum makes extensive use of Astropaths, and has built vast amphidomes and psi-comm spires that rise high over every shrine world, aiding their spiritual broadcasts and creating an interlocking transmission web that at least partially connects many dioceses and parishes, though the most powerful can even reach some of the far distant missionaries on the edges of the Imperium.

It is said that the Emperor, the greatest of all psychic minds, once held full telepathic conversations with Malcador the Hero, himself a mighty telepath. Though they were at opposite ends of the known galaxy, there was no time delay to speak of, and they may as well have been in the same room. Although human psykers of such extreme potency no longer stride among the stars, the most powerful Astropaths can single-handedly send messages across several star systems with some accuracy.

If all goes well, Telepathic communications travel quickly through the Warp, crossing many thousands of light years, becoming fainter and fainter, before eventually fading out altogether. Still, such communications vary widely based on the mental strength of the sender, the ability of the receiver to absorb such incoming messages and, perhaps most of all, the unpredictable nature of the Warp itself. When the galactic distance required of a transmission is so great that a single Astropath proves insufficient, it is common for them to work in relays, sending messages to various beacons, hubs and Imperial sub-stations to pass along. It is also possible to boost a message by using an Astropath Choir – a group working in synchronicity to broadcast or receive complex messages over unimaginable distances.

It is too complicated and variable to list all of the methods and processes involved in Astropath communications, but the following generalizations should help even a novice understand some of the difficulties of the medium. There are, after all, dozens of types of Trance Broadcasts alone, to mention nothing of Station Reception, Astral Projection or the nearly infinite styles of Divination practised by Astropaths within (and beyond) the purview of Imperial Sanction.

Using mesmeric chants to enter a deep trance, a typical Astropath forms the message within his mind and sends it through the Warp. The progress of the message is rather like a stone dropped into a pool, as it creates a series of ripples that extend outwards through the Immaterium. Some psychics are able to project the message so that it travels only in a desired direction, but even then, some echoes are likely to lap outwards.

Once projected, a message hurtles through the Warp until its energy is lost and it fades away, typically a gradual process, but the Immaterium is anything but predictable. A

communication of this kind has many restrictions; they are brief in length, perhaps comprising only a few images or sentences depending on how the Astropath works, (psychics are as likely to work in abstract pictures and emotions as they are words). As with all things, the very Chaos of the Warp can alter the form of a message, if only rarely its intent. Unless powered by a mighty source, longer or more complex messages risk getting unravelled in the ripples of the Warp, arriving in a jumbled order, and risking further, if not complete, distortion. Warp interference is common, as messages can be delayed, altered or contaminated by any number of fluctuations, such as shifts in Warp tides or the intermingling of multiple telepathic signals. Raging Warp storms can redirect or simply swallow and destroy messages, blocking communiqués for centuries.

Any Astropath can pick up Trance Broadcasts, although in general it can be said that more discipline is needed to receive messages than to send them. With outgoing messages, an Astropath can concentrate on the clarity of thought, on the message itself, pushing such deliberations deep into the Warp. Astropaths in such a trance and actively receiving incoming messages are particularly vulnerable – their minds must open to the eternal noise of that erratic and highly dangerous realm. Not only must an Astropath attempt to sift out the senseless static of passing currents, they must also contend with the residue of ancient messages that sometimes (for no logical reason) drift endlessly, not losing power as is usually the case but continuing to call from some distant past, faint waves of energy lapping gently across the void. The repercussive Warp-waves of major events or cataclysms can also be picked up, sometimes unintentionally, sending more sensitive Astropaths into fits or burning out their minds altogether with the unexpected onslaught.

Ominously, some telepathic impulses attract unwanted attentions – mischievous Warp entities that attempt to alter messages, making them misleading or obscene, redirecting them to the wrong recipient, or perhaps even attaching themselves to the mental transmissions, piggybacking on the message to its final destination. Although rare, it is possible for Daemons themselves to become aware of and attracted to the psychic signals hurtling through their realm. On occasion, they will even trace them back to their source searching for a way to establish a claw-hold into realspace.

An Astropath who wishes to send a singular message to a specific location – whether it is a particular spacecraft, planet, hive or even an individual – must be able to concentrate his mind to a degree that is unimaginable to a normal human. These messages are launched into the Warp not as ripples extending outward in all directions, but as a single bolt of pure thought. The recipient must be prepared to receive such a powerful transmission, though it is still possible for those in Sweeping Trance Reception to pick up snippets of such messages if they happen to pass through their area of their psychic awareness on the way to their destination. Success of this kind is linked more to random chance than any degree of skill or accuracy on the part of the erstwhile recipient.

The need for interstellar communication is enormous, and the Scholastia Psykana is bombarded with requests for Sanctioned Astropaths constantly. They are a common sight in the more civilised sectors of the Imperium, easily distinguished by their green robes

and sightless, sunken eye sockets. Although only released for duty once they have cleared all sanctioning tests and the holy ritual known as the Soul Binding, the nature of their occupation puts them in nearly constant danger and there have been documented cases of Astropaths becoming corrupted (see crossfile, datascroll Ref.0062132005).