

DEATHWATCH

THE ACHILUS ASSAULT



SECRETS OF THE CRUSADE
INTO THE JERICHO REACH

WARHAMMER
40,000
ROLEPLAY

[illegible]

ROLEPLAYING IN THE GRIM DARKNESS OF THE 4TH MILLENNIUM

CREDITS

LEAD DEVELOPER

Ross Watson

LICENSING AND DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR

Deb Beck

WRITTEN AND DEVELOPED BY

Owen Barnes, John Dunn, Andrew Fischer, Andy Hoare, Tim Huckelbery, Kevin Rubitsky, and William Thrasher

EXECUTIVE GAME DESIGNER

Corey Konieczka

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Michael Hurley

PUBLISHER

Christian T. Petersen

EDITING

Graham Davey

PROOFREADING

Matt Eustace

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Kevin Childress and Chris Beck

COVER ART

Michael Phillippi

INTERIOR ART

Even Mehl Amundsen, Jacob Atienza, Ryan Barger, Ted Bargeon, Alberto Bontempi, Matt Bradbury, Dmitry Burmak, Daarken, Zach Graves, Nikolaus Ingeneri, Jason Juta, Karl Kopinski, Adam Lane, Clint Langlely, Damien Mammoliti, Daniel McGowan, David Nash, Ameen Naksewee, Brad Rigney, Adrian Smith, Mark Smith, David Sondered, Frank Walls, and Andrea Uderzo

MANAGING ART DIRECTOR

Andrew Navaro

ART DIRECTION

Kyle Hough

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Eric Knight

GAMES WORKSHOP

LICENSING MANAGER

Owen Rees

HEAD OF LICENSING

Andy Jones

HEAD OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Alan Merrett

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR PLAYTESTERS

"The Bolter and Chainsword Playtest Group" Ryan Powell with Matt Bogart, Jon Cox, Max Hardenbrook, Matt Hunt, Steve Koelzer, Anders Lang, and Richard Sanders, "No Guts, No Glory" Sean Connor with Adam Lloyd, Aaron MacManus-Wood, Stephen Pitson, Mark Smith, and Simon Tierney, "The Librarians" Pim Mauve with Keesjan Kleef, Jan-Cees Voogd, Joris Voogd, and Gerlof Woudstra, "Roll Perils" Matt Eustace with Sean Kelly, Rob Lord, Stuart Lord, and Mike Madani, "Veterans of a Psychic War" Benn Williams with Chris Lancaster, Scott Philips, John Ross, Rebecca Williams, and Eric Young.



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FLIGHT
GAMES

Fantasy Flight Games
1975 West County Road B2
Roseville, MN 55113
USA

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INTRODUCTION

The essence of war, heroism, and duty pervade the setting for **DEATHWATCH**. The task of the Achilus Crusade embraces all of these themes, yet it faces great challenges from both without and within. To try and live up to these ideals is a difficult task, yet it is the fate of the Deathwatch Space Marines in the Jericho Reach to shoulder this duty head-on—they are the first and last line of defence against a myriad of threats to the Crusade of which some commanders are not even aware.

The Achilus Assault is a guide to the fires of war raging in the Jericho Reach, from the numberless tides of the Tyranids in Hive Fleet Dagon to the hellish legions of Chaos pouring forth from the Hadex Anomaly and the expansionist aggression of the Tau Empire. The threats presented in this tome provide Game Masters with a surfeit of antagonists and mysteries to confront a Deathwatch Kill-team.

WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK?

This sourcebook is divided into distinct chapters, each focusing on a variety of organisations, personalities, events, and warzones that are the focus of the Achilus Crusade into the Jericho Reach. Each section provides key insight into particular aspects of the Crusade, the history and character of the individual Salients and commanders, the particular challenges and enigmas that the Crusade must overcome, and ultimately, its purpose. Where relevant, Game Masters are presented with a range of suggestions on the use of these setting elements in his campaign, as well as possible scenario ideas and adventure seeds.

MODIFYING ENEMIES

The enemies presented in this book can, and should, be modified by a Game Master to create the types of enemies he requires for his game. Some options and variations are presented as part of the enemy profiles but the possible variety of enemies far exceeds these, and a Game Master should feel free to make adjustments to them as he sees fit. If, for example, a game requires a group of Renegade Militia armed with missile launchers, they can be created by removing their autoguns, giving them missile launchers and the Heavy Weapon Training (Launcher) Talent.

ENEMY PROFILE PRESENTATION

In all the entries presented in this book, the characteristics, movement values, and weapon damages have been presented with all modifications included. Weapon damages include the effects of the enemy's Strength Bonus and Talents that always apply to damage such as the Crushing Blow Talent. Talents, Traits and Special rules that have a variable effect or will only apply in particular circumstances, such as the Hammer Blow Talent, have not been combined into the profiles presented here. It is also important to note that NPCs are not necessarily bound to follow the same strictures for their profiles as player characters.

CHAPTER I: THE JERICHO GATE

This chapter contains various reports, sealed data, and rumours providing fragmentary glimpses into the nature and dark history of the Warp Gate in the Jericho Reach. A measure of truth may be gleaned from these mad rantings and official (albeit often confused or contradictory) reports—the nature of that truth, however, rests in the hands of the Game Master and the ingenuity of the Player Characters.

CHAPTER II: THE CRUSADE BEGINS

The history of the Crusade itself is written in blood and ambition, chronicled in this chapter. Particular focus is granted to the Crusade's original Warmaster, Lord Militant Achilus, and his successor, Lord Militant Tetrarchus. The involvement of the Deathwatch into the affairs of the Crusade is examined at length.

CHAPTER III: THE ORPHEUS SALIENT

The alien threat of Hive Fleet Dagon has driven the Orpheus Salient into near-collapse, and its battle lines are now riven with confusion and fear. This chapter describes the Orpheus Salient, from its original successes to the fateful encounter with the Tyranid hordes.

CHAPTER IV: THE ACHEROS SALIENT

A central push of the Crusade smashed directly into a force of heretics and demons pouring forth from the hellish Warp intrusion known as the Hadex Anomaly. This chapter focuses on the Acheros Salient's origin and current status, holding the line against the warp-spawned forces of Chaos.

CHAPTER V: THE CANIS SALIENT

An expeditionary force from the Tau Empire began the conflict in the Canis Salient when the Imperium's Crusade interfered with the Tau's plans for expansion. This chapter discusses the Canis Salient in detail, including the mysterious Black Reef.

CHAPTER VI: HEROES OF THE CRUSADE

Champions of the Crusade, enemies of the Warmaster, and famous warriors can be found in this chapter. Many influential and significant individuals are detailed.





THE JERICHO GATE

THE ENIGMA OF
THE GATE
•
A DARK PATTERN
EMERGES

CHAPTER I: THE JERICHO GATE

"The opportunity that we are offered is far too great to ignore. A brief foray, using the assets of the Calixis Sector, could spread the glory of the God-Emperor to millions who crave his light and return untold wealth and glory to Scintilla."

—Tiber Achilus, in his bid for command of the Crusade into the Jericho Reach

This section contains a series of primary source reports on the discovery and analysis of the Warp Gate artefact that connects the Koronus Passage with the Jericho Reach—an artefact later named "the Jericho Gate" by the Crusade forces. Those who discovered the artefact, studied it closely, and felt its true nature compiled these reports directly. Agents of the Administratum and the Ecclesiarchy have studied each of these extensively. They ultimately launched the Achilus Crusade based upon the information provided by these and similar, related reports. When woven together, they offer hints about the artefact's origins, purpose, and portent.

The future of the Achilus Crusade is entirely dependent upon the Jericho Gate, and without it, the Crusade could never have occurred. Millions of Imperial soldiers would have never seen duty outside of the Calixis Sector, the Deathwatch of the Jericho Reach would be operating against Tau, Tyranid, and Chaos forces with little hope for Imperial support, and dozens of planets in the Reach would never know the light of the God-Emperor.

At the same time, in order to pursue the Crusade, the Administratum has chosen to wilfully exploit an artefact that is clearly of xenos origins. More than sixty years of analysis by the most accomplished scholars of the Adeptus Mechanicus and the Inquisition have not even managed to identify the race that created the artefact. The long-term risks of using it remain unknown. In fact, they may not even be identified until they are experienced and can no longer be avoided. Many of those aware of the Jericho Gate have questioned this decision—at least in private. Exploiting the artefact seems inconsistent with the Imperial Creed and exposes humanity to xenos contamination. However, if the Imperium is to prevail with the Achilus Crusade, it will need to press forward with the use of the Jericho Gate for the time being.

The very nature of the Jericho Gate dictates that ignoring it is an unacceptable risk. Its existence presents a huge tactical opportunity for any force, including the growing Tau Empire, to introduce tactical elements into a portion of the Imperium that seemed comparatively safe from external threats. These threats must be prevented from reaching fruition with extreme prejudice, for the safety and security of mankind. The only practical way to eliminate these is to secure both termini of the Warp Gate.

Analyses further suggest that simply destroying the artefact may not be a viable option. The xenos technology involved in its construction is, at best, poorly understood by the Adeptus Mechanicus. Though its use may be dangerous, its obliteration could have even more severe consequences. Better to face known and partly comprehensible risks than to needlessly take risks that are not understood whatsoever.

The Jericho Gate has indirectly caused the deaths of millions and directly caused the deaths of many who attempted to plumb its mysteries. It is a xenos device, representing a threat to the Imperium. While that might place it under the purview of the Deathwatch, other elements of the Imperium have claimed it for themselves. The possibilities this presents for conflict—both internal and external—may be endless.



GUIDANCE FOR THE GAME MASTER

Sidebars are placed throughout this volume that offer suggestions to the Game Master (GM). These include tips on using the xenos threats presented in a campaign and on the various ways that the material might be interpreted. Please keep in mind that these materials are subject to the GM's discretion. Stories and themes that are well suited to one playgroup may not be ideal for others. Choosing what material to embrace, what to ignore, and what to reinterpret allows a GM to uniquely tailor the Jericho Reach. Additional information about the Warp Gate (and a sinister plot involving it) can be found in the adventure sourcebook *THE EMPEROR PROTECTS*.

USING THE JERICHO GATE

The Jericho Gate represents a core element for any Deathwatch campaigns set in the Jericho Reach. It can offer an impending threat, a source of hope, or an unresolved mystery. These articles, and others like them, may offer insights to the Warp Gate, or they may offer false leads.

The artefact may play as small or large a part as the GM feels is appropriate. If the Jericho Gate is unreliable, a campaign might recount the Deathwatch's efforts to recover those lost to the artefact. If it is perfectly safe, then it might instead slide into the background, as yet another miraculous device upon which the galaxy depends. Alternatively, the Warp Gate might appear safe, but hide a xenos threat that could be revealed at a crucial juncture in the campaign. Regardless of what role the Warp Gate presents, the GM should determine how it will impact his campaign.

Classification: Calixis Xenos Code Carnelian

Date: 148755.M41

Author: Rogue Trader Blain Arcadius

Subject: Xenos Artefact Identified

Recipient: Lord Inquisitor Caidin



I have my doubts about this report... are we certain it is accurate?

-A. S.

My Lord,

This missive is sent to fulfil the obligations outlined in my Warrant of Trade regarding an artefact that was recently identified by an Imperial Navy frigate liasing with my fleet, the **Spear of Tarsus**. Please find a selection of holopicts and a draft map accompanying this letter.

The **Spear** was damaged as it made a routine traversal of the Koronus Passage en route to Port Wander. In order to perform emergency repairs, the vessel translated to Realspace immediately at the fifth station of passage. Though I question the wisdom of such a decision, the vessel's captain insists that delaying transit until they had reached a known location was impossible. In this instance, there may have been a benefit in forsaking standard protocols, or perhaps this was merely the consequence of the God-Emperor's guidance.

Upon transitioning from the Warp, the vessel's Astropath immediately began to wail in shock and agony. Within moments, she frothed at the mouth and quickly passed out. The bridge's auto-recorder spit out only one sentence, repeated over and over again: "The unravelling is begun." In spite of the best efforts of the medicae, she has not yet recovered consciousness. If her status changes, we will be happy to make Astropath Moraigne available for questioning.

In response to this extreme reaction, the crew of the **Spear** immediately began a survey of the void surrounding their location. The vessel's Master of Etherics soon reported an anomaly, believed to be an exergenic disturbance nearby. As the damaged systems were related to Warp travel, the vessel made way towards the object for further analysis. The vessel's Navigator voiced several objections prior to and during the investigation of the area. He proclaimed that the Immaterium was unusually stable in this region, and insisted that this stability intensified as they approached the anomaly.

When they reached the epicentre of the calm area, the Captain reported that it was an exceptionally large space station. The design was not consistent with any known architecture of the Imperium present within the crew's Librarium. As such, it was presumed to be of xenos design—but of a type unknown to the crew or the ship's records. What are believed to be runic inscriptions upon the artefact's exterior offered no definitive answer to its origins, but prompted discussion as several of the ship's officers proposed different theories.

As indicated in the holopicts, the upper portion of the object is a shape that approximates a crescent. This crescent has a diameter estimated at greater than fifteen kilometres. Below the crescent, a series of what are thought to be antennae, extend in a myriad of arrays of varying length. A complex structure, which appears to serve as either a central habitat or possibly an energy projector, resides directly above these antennae—the purpose of which can only be guessed at.

Of particular interest, the centre of this crescent structure flickered with a constant swirl of energetic lights. These were thought to have either come from the large emitter at its base, or may have been drawn to the emitter; the vessel's senior Tech-Priest was unclear on the matter. Reports accompanying the recordings indicate that there were visible effects, which the auspex was unable to capture. Those reports, however, are inconsistent, with crew members offering decidedly different descriptions and theories as to their nature.



More precise measurements and analyses of the object were not made. The vessel's representative of the Mechanicus was occupied due to the damages to her Warp systems. A shuttle was launched to examine the discharges within the crescent. When it reached the object, the shuttle abruptly disappeared from all sensors and communications were lost. No explosion was recorded and no wreckage could be identified. Additional efforts to collect data about the artefact were rendered moot as the sensors recordings were inconsistent or incomprehensible. Sensors alternately suggested signs of life or its absence, gravitic fluctuations, tachyon emissions, and the abrupt conversion of energy to matter—something only seen in the rare effects of a teleportarium in operation, but on a much grander scale.

Attempts to hail the device, using standard Imperial vox communication protocols yielded no results. Additionally, no transmissions were detected on any other known frequencies used outside the Imperium. As the vessel's Astropath was compromised, the crew were unable to compile any reports on psychic communications or disturbances beyond the initial event which incapacitated her.

Shortly after the shuttle was lost, the *Spear* completed her system repairs. In accordance with the Navigator's dire predictions and demands, the vessel left the artefact with due haste so that a report could be filed. Agents of the Arcadius Dynasty at Port Wander compiled her report, which I forward on to you with this letter.

I have dispatched two additional ships to examine the artefact more closely. These have been equipped with hardened sensoria, and veteran members of the Adeptus Astra Telepathica and senior Tech-Priests of the esteemed Adeptus Mechanicus that are beholden to the Arcadius Dynasty. Upon request, I would be happy to provide copies of their reports when they are completed. Unless this object is deemed sacrosanct, the Arcadius Dynasty lays claim to it.

Yours in the light of the God-Emperor,

Rogue Trader Arcadius

Classification: Calixis Xenos Code Citrine
Date: 853779.M41
Author: Captain Jacob Dostreus
Subject: Testing Complete, Report Attached
Recipient: Inquisitor Kalistradi



As requested, the *Harmonious Light* has completed its transit through the Koronus Maw Gateway, while leaving a number of crew members on the vessel's surface. Consistent with the protocols received, none of the voidfarers were made aware of the upcoming experiment. Instead, they were led to believe that they were assigned to perform a scheduled resurfacing of the vessel's exterior armour plating.

All of the voidfarers were using standard issue voidsuits. Records indicate that their protective gear was up to date on routine maintenance. All were also tethered to the vessel, as is standard for such assignments. I regret to inform you that of the forty crew members left on the vessel's surface, only a single member was recovered. The tethers of the missing voidfarers' suits were cut, dissolved, or frayed. Some of these appeared to have been cut through possibly by a knife or teeth. Others showed signs of decay, as if they had rapidly aged. Holopicts of the remaining fragments of all tethers are included with this report.

The surviving crew member was found wedged into a gap between two of the vessel's exterior armour plates. When recovered, Rating Whalen was initially catatonic. We transported him to the medicae, where he was examined by our senior surgeon as well as our Astropath. After extensive drug therapy, and the ministrations of members of the Ecclesiarchy, he finally began to respond to questions.

Recordings of his initial responses are attached. I am afraid to report that I cannot discern any meaning from his statements. His vocabulary seems to have been reduced to three words, "The Glowing Eyes." He answered all questions with this phrase, inflecting it differently as appropriate.

At this point, I regret that I must inform you that the crew member successfully committed suicide before further analyses could be completed. In spite of our best efforts, he managed to ingest a mercy ampoule stored in the medicae. Consequently, no other data was compiled.

Please let me know if you wish us to repeat the experiment.



The Elimination of Arcadius's Portal

Magos Metallurgicus Bree Hornath:

Initial analyses of the portal artefact located in the Koronus Passage have hinted that this device may serve a dark purpose. Biological entities that have been sent through the device without the protection of a Gellar field have been subject to inexplicable stresses. These changes are likely due to undue exposure from the Immaterium. These incidents are likely an indication of future risks, which represents an unacceptable danger to Mankind. For the preservation of humanity, this item must be destroyed with all due haste.

In order to achieve this necessary objective, standard sampling and testing protocols were followed, based upon identifiable metallic content and integrity of the artefact's molecular lattice. Calculations were modified based upon the energy flows, unusual size, gravitic attractions, solar winds, and additional factors. These preliminary data suggest that at a minimum the kinetic energy present in twenty-three direct impact blasts from a Jovian Pattern Nova Cannon would be required. As the artefact seems to possess a rudimentary self-repair system, these impacts would need to occur in rapid succession. Achieving this degree of precision and near simultaneous detonations would require a significant portion of the fleet's resources.

Data also suggests that the destruction of the artefact might have unexpected consequence. The artefact causes instability in subatomic motions, likely due to interaction with the Immaterium. There is a possibility, albeit a slight one that its destruction could trigger potent Warp storms for an extended period. There is also the possibility that this might yield a tear in the fabric of reality, enlarging a portal to the Immaterium. Extensive probability modelling suggests that this is an unlikely consequence, but the possibilities are sufficiently high that the risk must be considered.

Navigating the Gate Network

Magos Technicus Huang Mishra:

Based upon preliminary interpretations and extrapolations of the glyphs discovered on the external surfaces of the Warp Gateway in the Koronus Passage (designated artefact KYXX-232TB), it is our conclusion that it may be possible to tune this device to access additional portals aside from the one known terminus. We further speculate that this may require the assistance of members of the Navis Nobilite and are prepared to recruit them as protocols dictate.

The source of the intricate glyph-work remains unknown, but is presumed to be of xenos origins. Analyses performed by adepts who were landed onto the surface of the Gateway have indicated that each large glyph is composed of a series of smaller glyphs. Each of these smaller designs is in turn constructed of yet smaller designs. Manual examination suggests that these patterns extend to the microscopic level. However, the unusual instabilities associated with the artefact have prevented evaluation using more sophisticated sensing devices.

Comparisons of the manually generated reproductions from each terminus of the gate indicate that these glyphs differ between the two known examples. These variations in pattern suggest that if the patterns could be manipulated, they might trigger the gateways to interact with alternative devices. Though no alternative devices have, as of yet, been identified, the device's intricate nature suggests that fail-safes may already be in place to prevent the device from being tuned to an unsafe location. We would like permission to recruit a Navigator who would assist us in attempting to re-tune this artefact other possible Gateway termini, as we believe this might be a key step in identifying the entities which created the artefact.

*Distress Call: Zanatov's Harbour**ATT: All Respondents; ++Priority Alizarin ++015813.M41*

We have encountered a substantial xenos fleet of unknown origin. The encroaching fleet has failed to respond to hails, and continues to approach the human colony. There are at least five vessels of battlecruiser size or larger included in the incursion. The number of escort vessels remains indeterminate, but exceeds fifty.

The fleet's transit mechanism is unknown at this time. Neither the fleet's sensors nor any of the navigators sensed a Warp transition of the magnitude required for these vessels to enter the system. Propulsion methods are also uncertain, as the vessels are not showing any substantial energy signature.

The fleet was first identified when it abruptly changed course to approach the Zanatov System. It had been identified as an asteroid cluster, moving tangentially to the system ecliptic, when the course change occurred. Course projections indicate that, prior to the course change; the fleet was on a direct course towards the Koronus Passage Warp Gate.

Per standard engagement protocols, two destroyers were sent forward to scout this fleet. Both vessels were destroyed, with all hands, within moments of their initial short range scans. Vox channels were open so that command units would receive their first impressions. These descriptions are inconsistent and uninformative. The observers suggested that the vessels are organic in form, with mention of tentacles, tusks, and claws. The precise nature of the threat remains unidentified at this time.

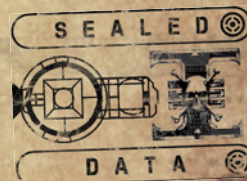
The cause for the destruction of both destroyers is also unknown. These vessels were at a full state of battle-readiness. The vox communications offered no warning of incoming attack. Whatever destroyed these ships was powerful enough to penetrate their void shields and destroy the vessels in a single salvo from long range. It is unknown if this was the action of a single vessel or a strike performed under the combined firepower of the xenos fleet.

All psykers in the fleet are currently reporting extensive disturbances within the Warp. Routine astrotelepathic communications have been disrupted with all known Imperial units. The fleet's navigators are currently extremely reluctant to attempt the transition of any vessels into the Warp while under the influence of this disturbance. Extreme measures are being taken to insure that this message is delivered to Battlefleet Command.

The fleet's remaining two light cruisers and escorts are forming a battle line in defence of Zanatov's Harbour. Assistance from any available units is requested. We are currently severely outnumbered, facing foes of indeterminate strength. Update reports will be sent as the situation permits.

The God-Emperor Protect Us.

*Dispatch Kill-team Sarm immediately.
-Inquisitor Quist*





THE CRUSADE BEGINS

WARMASTER TIBER
ACHILUS

•
COMMANDERS OF
THE CRUSADE

•
SOLDIERS OF THE
CRUSADE

•
DEATHWATCH
INVOLVEMENT

•
CRUSADE
CAMPAIGNS



CHAPTER II: THE CRUSADE BEGINS

"On this day of the most holy God-Emperor's ascension to the Golden Throne, we embark on the mighty Crusade against the alien for which mankind was born. Ours will be the cleansing light and fire of the just as we reclaim the rightful domains of His realm and push back the unholy darkness which assails our great Imperium. I ask only that you do your duty, remember your oaths to the Emperor and your officers; in return I promise you glory and a death well earned in the service of mankind!"

—Achilus Fleet Order of Day XVII, Feast of the Emperor's Ascension, 777.M41

The Achilus Crusade has blazed a bloody trail across the Jericho Reach since its violent beginnings over forty years ago. Driven by the Imperium's endless struggle to maintain its ponderous empire and reclaim systems lost to shadow, the Crusade has consumed millions of lives and measureless amounts of material drawn from hundreds of worlds. It is, however, a Crusade of righteousness and many of the men and women fighting it, as well as the commanders leading them, firmly believe in the sacred nature of their task; to reclaim Imperial territory from the hands of vile alien interlopers or treacherous heretics who would see the God-Emperor cast down and the Imperium falter and fall. There can be no doubt in the minds of those who wage it that the Crusade is vital to the survival of the Imperium. Should it fail, a darkness will descend upon the Eastern Fringe the likes of which may never again be illuminated by the light of the God-Emperor and the will of Mankind.

This section details the nature and history of one of the Imperium's great Crusades against its enemies in the darkest and farthest reaches of its dominion. It provides an overview of the Crusade, its warzones, enemies, and ultimate goals as well as its origins and history from its inception among the High Lords of Terra to its execution in the hands of the men and women on the ground. It explores the life and times of the late Lord Militant Tiber Achilus, the father of the Crusade, his mysterious death and his replacement by the younger, more dynamic, Solomon Tetrarchus. The commanders and leaders of the Crusade are also detailed including notable units and significant formations which fight at its forefront on dozens of worlds. Finally, the chapter delves into some of the secrets of the Crusade, hidden truths and concealed information on such things as the ancient enemy, the patterns of dead worlds and the mysterious and enigmatic Omega Vault.

THE MOST GLORIOUS ACHILUS CRUSADE

At any one moment there are scores, if not hundreds or even thousands of Crusades being waged by the Imperium across the length and breadth of the galaxy. Each one is waged for a variety of reasons, to reclaim some lost portion of the Emperor's domain, cleanse a dangerous or troublesome alien empire or hold back the insidious influence and slow rot of the Ruinous Powers. In the case of the Achilus Crusade it is to reclaim the region known as the Jericho Reach and bring its worlds back into the fold of the Imperium after almost four thousands years of isolation and darkness. For the righteous, it is a chance to bring glory to the God-Emperor and reassert Mankind's mastery over the stars in the face of alien aggression and treacherous seditionists. For the more cynical (or heretical depending on one's perspective and rank) it is yet another attempt by the fading might of a once great empire to mend the fraying edges of its domain before it unravels completely.

WARZONES AND FRONTS

The Crusade's leading edge is determined as much by the placement of Warp routes and strategic worlds as it is by lines on the galactic map. In the early years of the Crusade, Achilus (sometimes known as the 'fortifier' by his sub-officers) laid claim to the worlds just beyond the Warp gate and bordering the Well of Night, a region which would become known as



the Iron Collar. These he heavily fortified and set up as his forward base, striking out in fits and bursts deeper into the Reach. By the time of his death in 786.M41, the Crusade had secured a rough line of worlds from Scansion Beta in the galactic south to Freya in the galactic north. During this initial phase of expansion the Crusade clashed with numerous heretic worlds and indigenous alien empires, but its only real challenge had come in the form of the Tau and their dominion in the worlds around the anomaly known as the Black Reef. After Achilus' death and the ascension of Solomon Tetrarchus, the Crusade underwent a change in tactics and a division into three fronts. From north (rimward) to south (coreward) they became known as the Orpheus Salient, Acheros Salient and Canis Salient, each with its own goals and dedicated battle groups. Of these, the Acheros Salient and Canis Salient have seen the greatest concentrations of fighting, centred around their leading edges in what has become known as the Celebos Warzone and Greyhell front respectively.

ENEMIES AND OPPOSITION

The size and scale of the Jericho Reach means that the Crusade faces many of the Imperium's key foes as well as countless minor rogue worlds and xenos races. In the Orpheus Salient, the Crusade clashes with the Tyranids of Hive Fleet Dagon, the great devourer gnawing away worlds only recently conquered. The Acheros Salient is the centre of the Crusade and the domain of the Stigmartus, a vile collation of heretics and Chaos worshippers spread across a dozen worlds. The Canis Salient is primarily fought against the Tau, an advanced and pervasive foe which has turned as many worlds from the light of the God-Emperor with alien diplomacy as they have with firepower. Each of these enemies pose a serious threat to the Crusade and force the Crusade's commanders to balance their limited resources between the three.

Foul xenos and heretics are not the only foes the Crusade must contend with, however. It is beset from within by the rivalry of its commanders, the machinations of organisations like the Inquisition and the Ecclesiarchy, and its own ponderous communication networks. These factors can be just as deadly to its soldiers and ships as enemy action and it is often only by virtue of the vast numbers of men and materiel involved in the Crusade that losses to error, miscommunication or pure simple stupidity are not taken as seriously as they might be. Aside from forces lost through command blunders, many units within the Crusade have suffered under the hands of their own side. In the hope of uncovering one heretic or traitor, the Inquisition and the Commissariat seek out the slightest hint of treachery. During these purges, countless good men have been sent to the fires screaming their innocence.

GOALS AND GLORY

Ostensibly the driving goal of the Achilus Crusade is and has always been to reclaim the Jericho Reach for the Imperium and drive back her enemies from its worlds. Of course, like all such lofty and broad goals, the devil lies within the details and its exact execution can come in many and varied forms. Lord Militant Achilus himself always hoped for a quick and decisive resolution for the Crusade, a lightning strike by a massive Imperial force and a mass capitulation of worlds before the might of the God-Emperor. The reality was however that in the thousands years the Reach remained beyond Imperium control, both aliens and heretics took root within its worlds and became deeply entrenched and organised. Thus the goal of complete victory became instead a bloody war of titanic proportions, with endless minor conflicts against countless opponents spread across a vast front. Nevertheless, while he lived Achilus never gave up his dream for bringing the light of the God-Emperor to this blighted place, and undeterred by the nature of his enemies he pressed on into the void.

In its current state, while the direct control of the Crusade rests in the hands of Lord Militant Tetrarchus, the true command of its day to day mission falls under the auspice of the Salient commanders and often their own agendas. In fact Tetrarchus' major function seems to have largely become to hold the Crusade together and ensure it has the men and materiel to continue its advance, while the objective of complete domination of the Reach seems to slip further and further away. Many newcomers to the Crusade, as well as more observant members of the Adepta and Inquisition, have noted that Achilus' once great endeavour to rule the Reach seems to have been reduced to a ponderous Imperial conflict which exists simply so that it might go on existing.

The Imperial presence in the Reach grants many other Imperial organisations great scope for their activities. Organisations like the Inquisition, Ecclesiarchy, and Deathwatch all enjoy a certain degree of autonomy within the Reach, fighting alongside the greater crusading forces while at the same time pursuing their own interests. The Deathwatch especially have a long standing interest in the region, their watch fortresses guarding not against the more visible threats to Imperial control but those that hide between its worlds in the dark corners of the galaxy waiting for their time to strike.

More detail on the Orpheus Salient, Acheros Salient and Canis Salient, the forces in them, their warzones, and the enemies they face can be found later in this book.



A HISTORY OF CONQUEST AND CARNAGE

"Just as they who do not do their duty are not remembered, so too will we be forgotten should we fail. In the annals of history let it be recorded that on this day and at this time, His most divine light shone once more onto this world, shrouded in darkness and hidden from His sight for these four millennia gone."

—First entry in the annals of the grand conquest of Karlack, meme-scribed 779.M41

It has been many years since the first ships of the Achilus Crusade breached the Warp Gate and entered the Jericho Reach. In that time, dreams of conquest have been turned into fatalistic duty, and the lightning assault across the stars into a bloody, defensive stalemate. Old enemies have been vanquished and new ones have arisen to take their place, often throwing Imperial plans into disarray and costing countless lives in the process. The Crusade has lost its father, and with him some of its spirit, embittering commanders and leaders to the cause while making others question the glory of their great undertaking. However, despite all of these events and the many others which lurk waiting on the horizon, the Crusade has thundered on. It is pushed forward by the will of its generals, the blood and steel of its armies, and the righteousness of the God-Emperor, in whose name humanity fights.

A DREAM OF GLORY

The origins of the Crusade began long before its first vessels were formed into battle groups and its first regiments mustered with the discovery of the great Warp Gate in 755.M41. Located in the halo margins of the Calixis Sector, the ancient and alien Warp Gate was first chanced upon by the Imperial frigate *Spear of Tarsus* when its Navigator sensed an unusual area of calm within the warp. In the years after the discovery, numerous Imperial vessels, explorators and agents travelled to the xenos gate to discern its purpose and assess its importance. What they discovered was a stable link to another system on the opposite side of the galaxy; the Jericho Reach. Long lost to the Imperium (the Jericho Reach had been cut off from Imperial control by terrible Warp storms for almost four millennia), scribes and adepts set to gathering what information was known about this area of space from deep data vaults and ancient cogitators. Scouts made the journey through the gate to bring back valuable maps and intelligence from the other side, painting a picture of a sector rich in worlds but wracked with strife.

For almost twenty years the scribes and adepts of the Administratum gathered and compiled information on the Jericho Reach and the gate, sending their slowly building mountain of reports, surveys and histories to the great

sorting houses of Terra where even more scribes and adepts complied, ordered and rated them. Finally in 774.M41, as dictated by millennia old protocol, and only after a process of careful study and consideration, the Praefect Maximus of the Adeptus Terra had his audience with the High Lords of Terra and presented his findings. As influential and vastly powerful individuals, many of the High Lords had long known of the existence of the gate, as they were aware of thousands of other discoveries, anomalies, and occurrences all across the Imperium. Some had even considered acting sooner on this tempting find, however as always a million other matters contested for their time. When the Praefect Maximus did deliver his report (an audience that lasted for almost forty days of droning oration-servitors and the whispering scratching of thousands of auto-quills) the High Lords were convinced that the gate presented the Imperium with a valuable opportunity to reclaim part of its domain and bring worlds long lost back into the light of the God-Emperor.

Plans began at once with the official sanction by the High Lords of Terra for the creation of an Imperial Crusade. From there, the order was passed down to the lords and commanders of the Adepta, as well as the Sector Lords of the Imperial sectors surrounding the gate (from where armies and materiels would most likely come). In these early stages only a handful of men and women knew of the Warp Gate, and less knew of the Imperium's plans to launch a Crusade through it. This was as the High Lords had planned it, and while they left the Crusade to others (such things being far beneath their direct attention) they decreed that the existence of the Warp Gate

IN THE EMPEROR'S NAME



ONWARDS TO VICTORY!

was far too valuable a thing to become known to the enemies of the Imperium, lest enemies from the Eastern Fringe use the gate to attack the Segmentum Obscurus (Tyrannids and Tau featuring prominently among those considered a threat). The next step was to choose a leader for the Crusade, a commander with the skill and determination to see it to its conclusion and one who would find favour and trust with the Sector Lords whose vast resources he would be calling upon. That man was Tiber Achilus.

Achilus was a veteran of a dozen successful Imperial campaigns, a member of the Segmentum Obscurus military elite and a favoured ally of Sector Lord Hax. His career had taken him to the edges of the Segmentum where he had faced numerous alien foes and heretic worlds such as the Khrave, Sons of the Bleeding Shadow, and the Ylarian Collective. His most notable triumphs however had come in the Formorian Sector where he cleansed the Sydratie Seven Systems of alien influence, including the destruction of the Ork Space Hulk *World-Cracker* in the month long engagement at the Gates of Liven (a battle immortalised in the famous portrait “Achilus’ Glory” which hangs in the personal chambers of Formorian Sector Lord Thortus). More than his victories, however, it was Achilus’ favour with the Sector Lords and reputation with both the Imperial Guard and Navy which gave him the political might he needed to seek mandate with the High Lords. Even so there was more than one assassination attempt, backroom deal, and noble house skirmish before he could make the long journey to Terra for his blessing, as various factions and forces made a play to get one of their own leading such an auspicious enterprise. Eventually, in 775.M41, Tiber Achilus knelt before the High Lords of Terra and received their blessing and the blessing of the God-Emperor upon his great endeavour, officially granted mandate by the Throne to raise an army and conquer the Jericho Reach.

INTO THE BREACH

It was to take several years to gather the needed men and resources for the Crusade, and in that time Achilus spent much of his waking hours with his tacticians pouring over the data gathered by the Explorator Fleets and advanced scouts. The large region beyond the gate (dubbed the Well of Night due to its lack of worlds or stars) worried him, and he set upon making his first priority finding a suitable world on the edge of the Well in which to set up a permanent Imperial presence within the Reach. Studying the charts of the region around the Warp Gate, Achilus settled on a number of possible life-sustaining worlds that would suit his purposes. Most prominent among them were Karlack, Calisi, Alphos and Spite. Though Calisi and Alphos were closer to the Warp Gate than either Karlack or Spite, Achilus ended up discounting them, even though they would make excellent outposts and strong points. They were too poor in resources to support the kind of production he wanted to eventually put out. Spite was seemingly ideal, however Imperial spies who had visited the world reported that it was tainted by xenos sympathizers and its weak governing council already considering treaty with the approaching Tau Empire. Thus, Achilus chose Karlack, a world still nominally loyal to the Imperium which could be quickly subdued and exploited, and which in turn could be turned into a factory to fuel the Crusade.

Another concern for Achilus was the nature of the Imperial force he would be commanding, comprising troops and commanders from nearly every arm of the Imperial war machine and coming from scores of worlds and several sectors, sometimes with bitter rivalries. Literally legions of diplomats and liaison officers worked ceaselessly to ensure that those commanders and units with grudges remained in different warzones. Troop ships and camps were often designated for regiments from specific sectors and systems, so that they would not mix with those they either hated or those that were too foreign to be trusted. All of this petty military and planetary rivalry however paled in comparison when measured against the problems Achilus faced when dealing with the Deathwatch, Inquisition, and Ministorum. Loosely under his command, each of these Imperial organisations had their own agendas and ideas as to the role they would play in the coming Crusade. The Ministorum, primarily concerned with the bringing of Imperial worlds back into the fold made extensive demands on Achilus for control over strategic placement of their forces and the right to be the first to land on heathen worlds or deal with heathen governments. In the case of the Inquisition and the Deathwatch, the Warmaster held a pivotal advantage; a secret source amongst the Lords of Terra had given him much information about the activities of both in the region. Achilus knew full well they held secrets about the Reach which could prove vital to the success of his campaign (the Deathwatch especially as they maintained a presence in the region and had done so for centuries). Try as he might though, Achilus could not exert any direct power over them or force them to pass on their secret knowledge.

In a relatively short amount of time Achilus had mustered a mighty armada of vessels and men and embarked through the Warp Gate and into the Jericho Reach—its was the eve of the Feast of the Emperor’s Ascension 777.M41. Aboard his flag ship the *Proclamation of Wrath*, Achilus made a pronouncement to his staff officers which was recorded by his war-scribes for the official Crusade annuals—“There can be nothing so great as what we do this day and though I may not live to see the completion of this mighty task, I can stand before the God-Emperor when I die and say I was here when it began.” Unknown to Achilus, his words would ring more true than he might have suspected.

Like a righteous tide, the ships of the Crusade spread out from the Warp Gate and set out for the worlds of Calisi, Alphos, Hethgard, Pyrathas, Spite, and Karlack. This was the first phase of the Crusade, and part of Achilus’ initial plan to take the worlds outlying the Warp Gate and fortify, creating an impregnable bastion with which to launch further assaults into the sector and with which to protect the Warp Gate itself. Calisi and Alphos fell quickly, within the first year and without great loss to the Crusade (the greatest disaster of the Alphos campaign was when the Mars-class Battlecruiser *Spirit of Penance* incinerated almost an entire regiment of the Terrax Guard due to an error by her Captain). Almost immediately, second wave forces moved through the Warp Gate and began the rapid fortification of the worlds, turning what were once minor colonies into towering edifices of plasteel and ferro-concrete bristling with macro cannon and lance turrets. Hethgard and Pyrathas took longer, both due to distance and

a greater resistance by their populations. Hethgard especially posed a problem for the Crusaders, and though many of its nations and minor city states were welcoming of the Imperium (or at least not foolish enough to oppose it), some resisted or tried to subvert the Crusaders. Achilus expressly forbade excessive planetary bombardment as the mines were too valuable, and so it fell to the Imperial Guard to root the enemy out themselves. Though it was not known at the time, agents of the Stigmartus had infiltrated Hethgard and stirred up some of its population against the Crusade, turning mines into underground fortress temples and people into slaves of the Dark Gods. Hethgard was eventually subdued, though not before thousands of guardsmen had lost their lives, hacked to death in the dark depths of her mines.

In contrast to the other setbacks, Karlack proved a perfect choice for the Crusade to create its headquarters and the simple farmers and peasants of that green world welcomed Achilus with open arms. Almost immediately the Lord Militant began to fortify and in a few short years much of the world's forests and farmland had been stripped bare, replaced with hive-like munitורים and factories or mustering grounds for troops. Everywhere great winches topped deep mines working endlessly as they harvested the world's untapped mineral riches. In orbit, the Mechanicus performed an incredible feat of engineering as they built a shipyard from space hulks and second line vessels. This feat was so large that it could be seen from the planet by the naked eye, glinting in the sky.

While Achilus fortified Karlack, his men were fighting for their lives on Spite. In one of the first great treacheries of the Crusade, the people of Spite turned on the Crusaders after welcoming them into their cities under banners of treaty. In the great Mirrored Palace, the emissaries of the Crusade were cut down in a brutal ambush while all across the landing zones Imperial Guard regiments found themselves suddenly under attack. The rebels of Spite (and their Tau masters) however had badly underestimated the will and strength of the forces arrayed against them. The Imperium's reprisals were swift and brutal. Even before the sun had set on the first day, the Deathwatch (represented by less than half a dozen Kill-teams) had killed the entire high ranking civilian and military command of Spite, including a number of Tau envoys. Within a week, the world was in the hands of the Imperium, and though civil unrest would continue for years, the Crusaders could now settle in and begin to fortify. Thus with the securing of the key worlds of Karlack, Calisi, Alphos, Hethgard, Pyrathas, and Spite, Achilus had in the space of less than five years secured a foothold within the Jericho Reach. He had created a defensive line which would become known by the Imperium and her enemies alike as the Iron Collar.

AGAINST THE TAU

Entrenched and well supplied, Tiber Achilus now turned his attentions to what he perceived as the first major threat to Imperial dominion with the sector: the Tau. His scouts had already gathered vast amounts of data on the Tau Empire's presence within the Jericho Reach, and even before the Crusade was formed it was believed that they would likely be the most significant and well organised opposition any Imperial force would have to face. These initial intelligence reports, as well as what little the Deathwatch were willing to pass on, seemed to paint a picture of a stable and expanding interstellar power with control over a significant number of both human and xenos worlds. The Crusade's experiences with Spite and the sedition of its population was also a factor and certainly for Achilus sealed in his mind the notion that these aliens were his primary adversary. It may have also been because Achilus considered xenos the most significant of all the Imperium's foes, more insidious and cunning than the heretic or rebel and more numerous than the daemon or servant of the Warp. This was a special hatred no doubt seared into his personality after decades of fighting Orks, Khraive, and Eldar raiders among the Halo Stars and its bordering sectors.

Whatever the motivation, the result was the same. The Lord Militant chose to make his first and most direct attacks against the Tau, pushing into the southern regions of the Reach to vanquish what he considered his primary foe. Mustering around Karlack and Spite, Achilus marshalled four battle groups, containing the bulk of his ships of the line and roughly half of his front line regiments, drawn largely from the Calixian levies. In the vanguard of each battle group, Achilus placed his shock troops and several companies from the Chapters of Adeptus Astartes operating in the Reach. Rheelas, Argoth, Kaggeran, and Wrath were the targets of these battle groups. Achilus hoped that with overwhelming numbers and by striking all four worlds simultaneously he would triumph over any Tau defenders or Tau sympathisers present, capturing the worlds and their systems in short order. Largely unknown to the Crusaders, however, was that the worlds they aimed to assault existed outside the Tau military cordon, and the Velk'Han Sept Fire Caste had already decided to pull back from the advancing Imperials. In their wake, the Tau left behind stealth teams with the dual purposes of confounding the enemy as well as gathering data on his strength and tactics.

The assaults on Rheelas, Argoth, and Kaggeran (which would later become collectively known as the "Quarantined Worlds") were swift and decisive. On the mining world Rheelas only minor skirmishes marred what otherwise would have been the triumphant return of the Imperium. Within hours of the fleet darkening Rheelas' sky, Adeptus Astartes had taken the Granite Spire of Rhee and placed the world's governor and his staff under their 'protection'. It was a similar story on Argoth and Kaggeran, a few rebels making feeble stands against regiments of guardsmen and planetary leaders quickly bowing to Imperial rule. This was of course according to the plans of the Water Caste, who in the days before the invasion had cautioned patience in their human allies and a promise that the Tau would return to take their world into



the fold of the empire. As a result, Achilus wasted little time setting up garrisons on all three worlds, but moved the bulk of his troops to more pressing warzones. Achilus' failure to completely pacify the quarantined worlds would come back to haunt the Crusade long after the Lord Militant's demise. For the moment, however, Rheelas, Argoth and Kaggeran had been taken. It seemed to the commanders that they have overestimated the strength of the Tau so close to the Well of Night, which in turn led to them blundering into an expertly timed counter-attack on the world of Wrath.

Wrath was the furthest of the four objective worlds and the only place where the Tau chose to make a stand, largely to test the capabilities of the Crusaders. Using auspex bafflers and echo-sentries scattered along the edges of the system, the Tau Tal'Sha Cadre was able to move its fleet in behind the Imperial assault forces undetected. As the Crusaders unloaded their vessels from low orbit the Tau attacked, targeting the vulnerable transport ships and strafing the drops as they fell into orbit. In the opening hours of the attack, thousands of guardsmen and millions of tonnes of materiel were lost before they even touched the ground, vaporised or incinerated in their grav-harnesses and cargo cradles. Only the timely intervention of strike cruisers from the Dark Sons Chapter managed to stop it becoming a complete massacre and allowed enough men to land and overwhelm the Tau defensive positions on the planet's surface. In the face of the Space Marine assault, the Tau Tal'Sha Cadre pulled back toward the Black Reef. The Tau forces disengaged smoothly and abandoned the world in the space of mere hours, as their commanders had always intended. This was a kind of warfare that at first baffled the Crusaders, and they could not understand how the Tau could so easily give ground or abandon whole worlds. It was, however, the Tau tactical and strategic flexibility which would make them so dangerous. Veteran commanders quickly learned that Tau retreats were usually only preludes to counter-attacks, often made once the Imperium had advanced and over-extended its lines.

Many commanders urged Achilus to press the Tau, and argued that if they could so easily snatch worlds from the xenos they should make an assault on the Tau core worlds themselves. In fact at the time the Tau were still reacting to the arrival of the Crusade and their forces were scattered across the sector (many committed to holding off Stigmartus attacks from those worlds facing the Hadex Anomaly). Thus a decisive and aggressive thrust through their lines might have been successful and prevented much of the carnage which was to follow. Achilus however was mindful of not over-extending supply lines and leaving vulnerable worlds in his wake, and so he gave the order to hold, reorganise, and fortify. While his commanders grumbled, the more hot-headed among them considering the 'old man' far too cautious, they could not deny that so far the Crusade had been incredibly successful, and it seemed that there was nothing that could halt its progress. Of course these first years were a time that would later become known by the commanders as the 'false dawn', a time when the true extent of the Imperium's enemies were still unknown and the true battle for the Reach had not yet begun.

BELIAL

Flagship of Commodore Vycorious, the *Belial* is an Emperor-class battleship of the Imperial Navy. Under the command of Commodore Vycorious, the *Belial* has become a legend of the Crusade battlefleets, having fought at the head of a dozen engagements against alien forces. *Belial's* presence amongst the other ships of the line is considered a sign of the Emperor's favour, and its crew is considered one of the most elite amongst the Crusade forces.

THE FIRST FAILURES

When the first Imperial scouts passed through the Warp Gate they found a sector of scattered rebel and alien worlds, but they failed to find any pattern or coordination between them. What they did not discover, and what Achilus was soon to encounter, was the Stigmartus, a sector-spanning cabal of Chaos worshippers. The Stigmartus had dominated the worlds around the Hadex Anomaly and beyond for centuries, soaking entire systems in an endless orgy of blood and depravity. Initially the Crusaders thought they faced minor rebels and scattered cults, such as those encountered during the pacification of Hethgard. However as the crusading forces made their first forays into what was once the core of the old Cellebos sub-sector, they met with organised and powerful resistance. Even as their forces fortified against the Tau and pressed forward into the wild zones of the rimward reaches, the Stigmartus was moving, gathering its forces and making prayers to its dark gods for victory over the servants of the false emperor. At this time, it was only some members of the Inquisition and the Deathwatch (given their long presence in the Reach) that were fully aware of the extent to which the Stigmartus commanded these core sector worlds, and the staggering amount of resources at their command. It was however a reality which the Crusade was soon to face.

In the shadow of this gathering storm, the Crusade was dealt its first real blow: the death of the Lord Militant Tiber Achilus. In the year 786.M41, a mere nine years after the Crusade was launched, Achilus' vessel—the *Proclamation of Wrath*—was lost to the Warp while making the relatively short voyage between the worlds of Alphos and Karlack where he had been inspecting new defences for the Iron Collar. Other ships within his fleet present at the time reported the *Wrath* suffering a massive Geller Field failure and vanishing from sight, while a few claimed a sudden and unexpected Warp storm crashed over the vessel carrying it away but leaving the other ships untouched. Regardless of the exact truth, in that moment the Crusade had lost its father and when the survivors reached Karlack they could only weep for his loss. Everywhere across the sector Imperial forces paused, holding their breath, unsure about the future and fearing the worst. Only the forces of the Deathwatch were unaffected by the event, almost as if forewarned. During this time, the Deathwatch dispatched Kill-teams to key worlds fortuitously (or suspiciously) placed close to weak spots in the Imperium's defence, denying the enemies of man the chance to exploit them.

In the wake of Achilus' demise, many Imperial operations were suspended and much of the Crusade's command staff returned to Karlack to take stock. Just as the mandate to undertake a Crusade is not a thing to be taken lightly, so too is the succession of a new Lord Militant. So sudden was Achilus' death that he had never made known his favour for a successor, and though there were numerous potential candidates among the lords and generals of the fleet, no clear path was apparent. For a time rumours and fears rippled through the Crusade and there was even talk that the passing of Achilus might mean the end of the great endeavour and the loss of the Imperium's drive to reclaim the Jericho Reach. During the dark days after the Warmaster's death, the Inquisition worked tirelessly to quell such rumours. Unknown to many commanders and their men, a score of secret skirmishes were fought by Acolytes on remote worlds and in hidden places against cults and rebels eager to exploit Achilus' death and the doubt it had sown in the minds of his followers.

Fortunately, the power struggle for command of the Crusade did not last long. While Achilus himself had been unprepared for the eventuality of his early death, others had not. Among them was Solomon Tetrarchus, a young man (relative to Achilus) and one with much support among the frontline generals. While Achilus had been carefully fortifying his worlds and inching forward across the Reach, Tetrarchus had been a high ranking member of the Imperial Guard and held command of many of the Calixian regiments. He was a bold man, and one which urged more aggressive tactics from the cautious Achilus. When Achilus was lost to the Warp, Tetrarchus wasted no time gathering his supporters and making his name known in the succession. Oddly, however, it was not the support of the generals, or his drive to engage in a more dynamic style of command, which was to finally tip the assembled lords and leaders in his favour. Instead, the final endorsement and support came from the Deathwatch Watch Captains. In a rare display of Crusade politics, the Deathwatch arrived in force to add their voice for the selection of Solomon Tetrarchus. Those present still recall that Tetrarchus himself looked as shocked as any of the generals as the black-armoured Battle-Brothers filed in, naming him their choice for Lord Militant. A shrewd and ruthless opportunist, however, Tetrarchus was not one to turn down such a gift and never bothered to find out just why the Deathwatch wanted him in command.

NEW STRATEGIES, NEW TACTICS

Solomon Tetrarchus wasted no time in gathering together his commanders and staff, including representatives from several Space Marine Chapters, the Inquisition, Ecclesiarchy, and Deathwatch. In an assembly which was to become known as the Council of Ashes, he sidelined more than fifty of Achilus' favoured generals, tacticians and key staff, replacing them with men and women he favoured and which he knew would not oppose his bold new plans for the direction of the Crusade. This new plan of attack involved splitting the Crusade into three distinct army groups, and making three impendent thrusts from the Iron Collar deep into the heart of the Jericho Reach. From these would be born the Orpheus Salient to the galactic north,

the Canis Salient to the galactic south, and the Acheros Salient between them. Already Achilus had committed a huge amount of resources into what would be designated the Canis Salient against the Tau and by the time of his death this was the site of the most fierce fighting the Crusade had faced. It was simply a plan Tetrarchus wanted to see repeated threefold, a plan he foretold would break the back of the sector and see a dramatic movement of the front, which had been largely static since the formation of the Iron Collar and the first clashes with the Tau.

Less than a year after the death of Achilus, Tetrarchus had finalised his plans and put into action his new army groups. Mustering the men and materiel had not been easy, however. Tetrarchus had stripped the garrisons of dozens of worlds and significantly reduced the regiments on all the fortress worlds of the Iron Collar to find the men and vessels for his grand strategy. He had also begun to recruit men from further and further afield, taking regiments from worlds throughout the Calixis, Scarus and Ixaniad Sectors. It was a testament to his logistical skill and relations with the Inquisition that Tetrarchus was able to increase the flow of soldiers to the Crusade and maintain the secrecy of the Warp Gate. However, rumours persisted that Tetrarchus enjoyed the services of an assassin cadre known as the Divine Shadows that worked in the home sectors and "took care" of security leaks. The true boon for Tetrarchus came when the Margin Crusade was lost within the Halo Stars and he was able to acquire men and materiel earmarked for its resupply and support. It was such a useful lie that both the Inquisition, Administratum and Crusade commanders embraced it to ensure the secrecy of the Warp Gate. Tetrarchus himself was merely pleased he now had a near-limitless supply of men to fulfil his threefold assault.

In a surge of men and ships, the Crusade pushed forward on its three fronts. In the Canis Salient forces poured into the war against the Tau and the contested worlds of the Greyhell front, already soaked in the blood of thousands of guardsmen after years of warfare. Under Lord Commander Ebongrave, Achilus' chosen commander of the region and one of the few frontline generals to remain in power after the Council of Ashes, the region took on a dark reputation among arriving regiments. Lord Commander Ebongrave's heavy hand among Imperial worlds also began to lead to a rise in Tau sympathisers and prompted him to quarantine the worlds of Rheelas, Argoth and Kaggeran for fear of full planetary uprising. These petty concerns, however, were quickly overshadowed by events unfolding in the Acheros Salient and the Crusade's first real battles with the Stigmartus and their allies. So far the Crusaders had only scratched the surface of what were once the core worlds of the Cellebos sub-sector, landing on the outer lying worlds and those not far beyond the reach of the Iron Collar. In the ruins of Vanity, on the edge of the Hadex Anomaly, they were to discover just how badly they had underestimated the heretics' hold over the heart of the Jericho Reach. In a series of bloody counter-attacks and massed assaults, the Stigmartus, assisted by elements of the Traitor Legions, hacked apart the Crusade's forward units and forced a rapid retreat and reorganisation in the face of their savagery. Tetrarchus was quick to respond, pouring more and more men into the breach and creating what would become known as the Cellebos Warzone, a bloody battleground of a dozen or more worlds and the front line against the heretic armies and their dark masters.

By contrast, the Orpheus Salient advanced rapidly under the guidance of its commander General Curas and his Argo battle group. Advancing further and faster than any of other Salient, Curas was able to capture and control dozens of worlds along the sector's rimward edge. While his most notable victory came against the Charnel Oracles of Eleusis (a triumph for which Tetrarchus himself awarded the general the Imperial Star Ascendant with Full Aquila), perhaps the most significant was making contact with Castobel many years earlier. A loyal Imperial hive world which had somehow endured the Age of Shadow and the millennia cut off from the Imperium, it proved to be a great prize for the Crusade and was to become a lynchpin for its operations within the region. In return, the citizens of Castobel rejoiced at the return of the God-Emperor's armies and eagerly offered up regiments of men and millions of tonnes of materiel and munitions to aid their cause. The Orpheus Salient was however to prove another false hope for the Crusade, and even as Curas and his fleets advanced, other alien forces were moving against them, stalking across the stars toward the Imperium's now hopelessly over extended northern flank.

TOTAL WAR

By 812.M41, twenty-six long, bloody years after the death of Tiber Achilus, little further progress had been made. Even with new reinforcements arriving regularly through the Warp Gate, the battle grounds of the Greyhell Front and Cellerbos Warzone were largely unchanged, worlds in some places having swapped hands numerous times. Even in the Orpheus Salient, Curas' advance had stalled as he lay siege to heretic worlds and called out for supplies and men being diverted to the more pressing fronts against the Tau and Stigmartus. Older and wearied by the endless war, Tetrarchus nevertheless pressed on with this three front strategy, confident in the small gains which had been made and the steady if painfully slow progress of his fleets, even if the first rapid gains of 777.M41–779.M41 were a distant memory. Unknown to the Lord Militant, however, the Crusade was about to face one of its greatest challenges aside from the death of its original Warmaster. Already a sector riddled with battlefields and enemies, the Jericho Reach was on the verge of being completely enveloped by conflict—Tetrarchus was about to face total war.

This dramatic change in events was to arrive from the rimward edge of the sector, where Curas and his regiments had been enjoying such success. First there were signs and portents, rumours collected by Inquisitors and Deathwatch Kill-teams that something was coming; coming from the dark of the galactic east. Then the shadow fell, worlds lost contact with each other and ships floundered in the Warp. In isolated incidents, battle groups and forward units were destroyed or vanished, only garbled transmissions of their fate reaching the Crusaders. Eventually after almost two years of uncertainty and growing chaos, the Deathwatch Strike Cruiser *Thunder's Word* arrived at Watch Station Erioch with conformation: the Tyranids had come to the Jericho Reach. Even as the news spread and Tetrarchus moved to shore up his northern defences, diverting men and equipment on route

to the Acheros Salient, Curas took matters into his own hands and plunged his battle group into the heart of the oncoming hive fleet. General Curas never returned.

Named Hive Fleet Dagon by the Imperium and believed to be a tendril of Hive Fleet Behemoth, the Tyranids began to swarm across the Orpheus Salient, and in a few short years laid siege to and devoured dozens of worlds. Alarming they also began to appear in random worlds along the Canis Salient and even on isolated worlds through the Reach, confounding organised defence and greatly hampering the Crusade's battle plan. Even with the vast resources at his disposal, Tetrarchus became increasingly desperate about the situation and the division of his men on three fronts against three capable and determined foes. His only consolation was that with the arrival of the Tyranids, his other foes would also have to face the indifferent attacks of the Great Devourer as heretic and Tau worlds behind the frontlines came under attack.

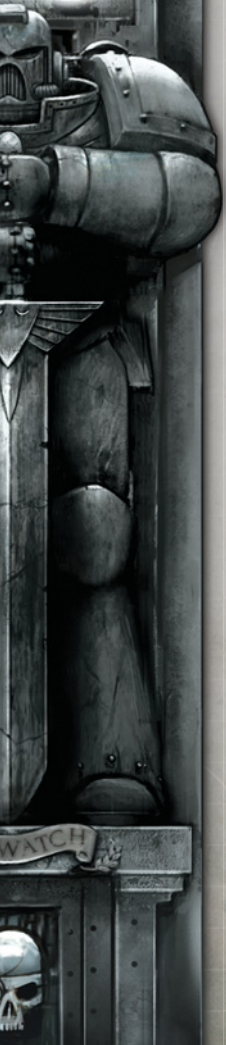
The opening days of 817.M41 have seen a bitter and bloody struggle on all fronts—from the coreward edges and the war against the Tau, across the ruins of the Cellerbos warzone and bitter conflict against the Stigmartus, to the desperate last stands and heroic assaults against Hive Fleet Dagon on the rimward worlds. This is the current state of affairs and the brutal sector-wide conflict which for forty years the Crusade has fought. Still wounded by the loss of its Warmaster, its presses on, dogged and determined to achieve dominion over the stars, like the Imperium itself unwilling to fade away into darkness while aliens and heretics howl in the night.

IMPERIAL OPERATIONS IN THE ACHILUS CRUSADE

When the Achilus Crusade forces launch a major action, the Lord Militant traditionally gives it a code name identifying it to the various forces involved. This is an ancient and traditional military practise, often overlooked by many of the Imperium's military forces. To date there have been several major operations undertaken by the Crusade and countless minor ones. Of these some of the most notable operations include:

- Operation Shackle—the initial conquest of the systems outlying the Warp Gate, and the creation of the Iron Collar.
- Operation Hammerfall—a massive engagement, fought largely by the Storm Wardens Chapter of Space Marines in the opening stages of the Crusade. This operation includes the first war against the Tau and the capture of Wrath and the Quarantined Worlds.
- Operation Tridentis—the three front war launched by Tetrarchus and the creation of the Canis Salient, Acheros Salient and Orpheus Salient.
- Operation Quicksilver—the mass redeployment of troops from the Acheros Salient to counter the arrival of Hive Fleet Dagon.

Operations usually however only exist in the military or regimental histories of the time, their results more often than not remembered as famous battles and lingering warzones.

**SUBJECT: Operation Hammerfall, post redaction archival submission****+Transmitted:** Karlak Bureau Ordinate Primaris**+Received:** 3789816.M41 [adjusted for localised temporal distortion phenomena]**+Telepathic Duct:** Beta Sigma/Lambda**+Transcripitor:** Pseudo-Savant Mklennan**Thought for the Day:** If a task is worth doing, it is worth dying for.**+Status:** Rejected [auth. Lord Bosch/ Dagma-Lupin cell] (on grounds of moral and spiritual infirmity). Author incinerated.

In the opening battles of the Achilus Crusade, it was the glorious Storm Wardens Chapter that committed by far the largest single contingent. Lorgath Maclir, honoured Chapter Master of the Storm Wardens, was appointed the leader of all of the Space Marine forces committed to the operation, and he planned every aspect of the assault in person, in minute detail. Emperor willing, the Crusade's objective was to push the vile xenos Tau out of the region and reclaim the sullied worlds of the Jericho Reach. It was our lord Achilus' most cherished dream that the xenos would be so undermined by the purging fires of the Crusade that they would fall back towards their own benighted region of space, and in time, destroyed utterly. But for now, Achilus and Maclir held the xenos capital in the Reach, Tsua'Malor, firmly in their sights, and nothing, or so they thought, could possibly distract them from their goal.

The xenos were initially unprepared for Operation Hammerfall, coming as it did from an entirely unanticipated quarter. The mighty Space Marines fought as angels of death, conducting planetstrikes, boarding actions and massive frontal assaults in the manner of the battles of the Great Crusade. Despite the potential for destruction, Maclir was magnanimous and ordered that those worlds occupied by human populations be allowed to rise up against the perfidious xenos and join the crusaders.

But tragically, the human populations failed to welcome the crusade, let alone join it. Instead, their deluded leaders declared the Imperium the enemy, rejecting all communications and asserting their independence. As world after world rejected the crusade, our forces were forced to divert around planets we had no immediate resources to suppress.

The xenos were pushed back along the Hyades Ebb warp route and down the length of the Arethusa Flux all the way to the Death World of Ravecene. The xenos threw every asset they had into a last ditch effort to repel the glorious Space Marine advance. The First Battle of Ravecene raged for three weeks, neither side able to gain the initiative or strike a telling enough blow against the other. Wise Achilus had always planned for a decade of war, yet Maclir sensed that victory could be won within months if one final push could be made. Knowing that reinforcements were fighting down the Hyades Ebb, Maclir ordered all available forces to mass at Ravecene and smash the Tau aside, so that the advance on Tsua'Malor could begin without delay. Lord Militant Achilus signalled his assent, and the final phase was ordered.

But Maclir's order was never enacted. All across the Jericho Reach, those worlds that had refused to yield to the crusade rose up, smashing the exposed and overstretched lines of communication. Underlying the resistance was the fell hand of those who must not be named, lending the traitors strength at the very moment when we could have pressed home our assault and driven the Tau from the Jericho Reach.

Lord Maclir's reinforcements never arrived. Transport fleet after transport fleet was ambushed, encircled and destroyed. Maclir raged in the face of such betrayal, swearing to avenge himself of the traitors who had cost the Imperium its victory. He saw that Achilus had been conservative in his estimation that the conquest of the Jericho Reach would take a decade. With [[[DELETED]]] raging in the central zones, Maclir knew the crusade might not complete its objective even in his own lifetime. To this day, Maclir pursues his mission, and has sworn never to leave the Jericho Reach until it is achieved.

WARMASTER TIBER ACHILUS

"All great deeds are the work of great men. Ours is a galaxy shaped by the will of those with the courage to keep the light of humanity burning and the God-Emperor's divine dream alive; a dream of unification, faith, and Mankind's domination over our galaxy, now and forever."

—Inscription on the wall of Achilus' Cenotaph

Much of what has come to pass during the Imperium's great Crusade into the Jericho Reach can be laid at the feet of one man: Tiber Achilus. During its planning and early years, the Lord Militant was the catalyst of nearly every move the Imperium's forces made within the sector, even influencing the decisions and actions of those only nominally under his control such as the Inquisition, the Ecclesiarchy, the various Space Marine Chapters, and the Deathwatch. Imperial scholars and historians have often used an ancient adage when talking of the Achilus Crusade; "If you know the man, you will know the mission." The truth of this wisdom can be seen in every fortified world and every glorious victory and every ignominious defeat which mark his nine years in command of the Imperium's bid to reclaim the Reach. Those that dig deeper into the man that was Tiber Achilus however have found more questions than answers and some disturbing and damning coincidences.

A RISE TO GLORY

The story of Tiber Achilus began thousands of light years from the Jericho Reach and many years before the Imperium's discovery of the Warp Gate. Born in the Ixaniad Sector on the hive world of Lordrium, Achilus was a product of a long and noble line of generals and commanders which had served the Ixaniad sector lords for centuries. The lexicographers of Lordrium however record his birth year as laced with prophecy and portent. It was written that on the day of his birth there was an unanticipated convergence of Lordrium's seven moons and a rolling eclipse that last for almost a week over the hive in which he lived. Other signs included sightings of strange visitors to the

hive: thin graceful men dressed in robes who never showed their faces and vanished when approached. Strange ships were spotted to in orbit, appearing only on the edge of sensor sweeps and disappearing before their existence could be confirmed. These peculiar events however were not associated with the then infant Achilus, as despite his high birth he was but one of a dozen sons of the Achilus line and merely another Spire brat in the eyes of the nobles of Lordrium.

As he grew to adulthood, Tiber Achilus began to distinguish himself from his brothers and sisters and live up to the grand legacy of his name. A masterful swordsman and canny tactician, he excelled in the ranks of the Lordrium officer cadre as a cadet, earning a bloody reputation as a duellist even before his second naming day. While his siblings largely succumbed to the vices of nobility and decadence of their lifestyle, Tiber became even more driven to succeed with each passing year, as if he knew somehow there was a task for which he had been born and which only he could complete. His first taste of combat came during the Redgarvi Ashlander Riots on Lordrium, as a twenty year old officer of the 38th Hive Korlo planetary defence force regiment. As in his previous endeavours, he made a name for himself quickly, securing the Hive's central lifters in a series of bloody battles and brutal holding actions against the Redgarvi hordes. For his courage and his skill he was awarded both the Lordrium Silver Shield and a place in the sector lord's own personal regiment, the Ixaniad Purebloods.

It was over the next forty years in the service of the Purebloods that Tiber Achilus would earn a sector wide reputation, even becoming a known commander in the nearby Scarus and Calixis Sectors for his role in the fringe campaigns. These were the years in which he faced the bloodthirsty Khrave, the Sons of the Bleeding Shadow and the Ylarian Collective in the depths of the Halo Stars and on the edge of the Ixaniad Sector. A rising star of the Imperial Guard and stalwart ally of the Imperial Navy, Achilus travelled extensively and made many contacts with the noble houses and prominent Imperial organisations of the region. It was said by those that met the man that he had an air about him, a natural charisma or presence that seemed to call out to those around him and put them at ease. Such was this strange effect he had on both allies and enemies that in the many years he served in the Purebloods not one of his peers had anything bad to say about him, nor did he seem to make any foes at all. This feat was remarkable among the Imperial military structure and practically unique among his kind.



It was during this period of ascension that one of the more unusual incidents surrounding Achilus occurred. It was while he was campaigning in the Formorian Sector against the Khrave and their allies, cleansing the cursed Sydratie Seven Systems. After defeating a Khrave vanguard fleet around the world of Taryo he made planet-fall with a battalion of Purebloods to clear out any xenos which had escaped the fighting and landed on the world. An uncharted planet, Taryo was a labyrinth of frozen canyons and ice tunnels which forced Achilus to divide his landing party into platoons to find the surviving xenos. After hours of searching, Achilus and the men with him became lost, stumbling into an ancient ruin of strange but familiar architecture. Almost immediately Eldar pathfinders attacked them and their platoon was cut down in a matter of minutes leaving only Achilus and a few of his men alive. A secret report from one of these survivors (gathered years later by the Ordo Xenos) recounts what happened next. Apparently even as the leader of the pathfinders loomed over the wounded Achilus to finish him, she seemed to pause, looking closer at the general before turning to her men and motioning for them to retreat. Why this occurred was never documented and Achilus never spoke of it, however the eye witnesses swear that when the alien looked at Achilus it seemed to recognise him.

FIRST LORD MILITANT OF THE CRUSADE

To lead an Imperial Crusade, a commander must have more than just experience, charisma and favour. In such an undertaking it is not enough for a man to be the greatest in his field or the most idolised among his peers, he must have something more. When the Warp Gate was discovered and the first whispers of Crusade began to permeate among the upper echelons of the Imperium, Achilus found himself drawn to the cause, struck by the righteousness of conquering the Jericho Reach and bringing its worlds back into the light of the God-Emperor. It was as if this was the moment of greatness he had been waiting for, and typical of his confidence and drive, he wasted no time in rallying support and gathering together allies to make his dream a reality.

Here history turns up yet more anomalies and curiosities, as even though Achilus was a man of power and influence, even he should have had a long struggle to win the hearts and minds of three sectors as well as the favour of the High Lords of Terra to mandate his claim to lead the Crusade. Typically such a political viper's nest could take years to resolve as families and military commanders circled and skirmished to gain the power to make a petition to the High Lords. In the case of Tiber Achilus it took only months. Rivals changed their allegiance when they learnt of his intent, while stubborn holdouts came round to his way of thinking. At the time it was seen as the great charisma and connections Achilus must have had and seemed to speak of his ability to hold together the many factions which would make up a Crusade and thus favour him for the job. A closer look however revealed more than just the persuasive tongue of a much loved commander, but in some cases complete shifts in stance or personality for particular opponents. Even the brief spate of assassinations (typical of many a significant ascension within the Imperium)

seemed as much for show as to aid Tiber Achilus. For better or worse however in those first months following the formation of the Crusade, Tiber Achilus was named Lord Militant and the Crusade had begun.

Tiber Achilus was only to lead the Crusade for nine short years, and oversee just the very beginning of its push into the Reach. In that time he proved an able commander and a strong presence for the Imperial forces, holding together the at times fragmented organisations and officers under his control. For an overview of this time and some of the great achievements of Achilus during these early years see A History of Conquest and Carnage on page 14.

LOST TO THE WARP

Achilus' death was to prove as interesting and unusual as his life, shrouded in mystery and strange circumstance. It was in the year 786.M41, during a routine voyage from Alphos to Karlack that the Lord Militant's vessel the *Proclamation of Wrath* was lost to the Warp. While the Warp is always a dangerous place, and no journey through it can ever be said to be completely safe, Achilus and his vessel were lost on a trip that should have taken days at most and in a Warp route as established and stable as any within the sector. Stranger still is that of the twelve vessels within his fleet that day only the *Wrath* was lost; all the others arriving at Karlack completely unharmed. Reports from the other captains and their Navigators are varied as to what happened to the *Wrath*, some saying it was swallowed by a sudden vortex in the Warp, others that its Geller Field must have failed allowing the horrors of the Warp to consume it. There were even some reports that Achilus and his vessel had translated from the Warp to real space, disappearing somewhere into the deep void between worlds. Whatever the truth, the *Wrath* utterly vanished and Achilus was considered lost.

Unwilling to accept such an explanation for the death of the Lord Militant, many agencies and individuals sought answers, not least among them the Inquisition. A secret inquest led by Inquisitor Kya Tellemain of the Ordo Malleus spent the next few years examining logs and hunting down leads. At first Tellemain was convinced that the disappearance of Achilus had been the work of the Stigmatists and the Dark Gods, an elaborate plot to rob the Imperium of one of its greatest leaders. She even discovered fragments of evidence which seemed to point her in the direction she hoped the investigation would lead. Unfortunately such leads always came to nought, and she only ever found more rumours and lies the deeper she dug. The most disturbing of these however, and the one which haunted her entire investigation, was the discovery that the Eldar assassin Syndilian had been sighted on Alphos only hours after the departure of the Lord Militant. Never able to undeniably confirm the sighting or establish why he had been there (the alien left no clues and made no attacks if he had in fact been present) Tellemain could only wonder what role the pathfinder might have had in Achilus' death, and why?

Eventually pressure from the new Lord Militant along with the pressing concerns of the Crusade put an end to Tellemain's investigation. The official histories recorded that Achilus and his vessel had been lost due to a Geller Field failure; a chance accident which could not have been foreseen. Strangely however Tellemain herself disappeared not long after the investigation was closed, vanishing on a mission deep within the Orpheus Salient. Rumours within the Inquisition speculate that she was silenced for what she knew about the old Lord Militant's death. Whether this is true or not, the day she vanished her Acolytes across the Reach went into hiding, as if they knew they too would soon be hunted for what they had learned.

ACHILUS' LEGACY

Tiber Achilus' death has been in many ways only the beginning of his role within the Crusade. In addition to lending his name to the Imperium's grand undertaking, his memory has become a corner stone of the morale and dedication to duty for many of the Crusaders. It has even become a tradition among many of the high ranking officers of both the Imperial Guard and Navy to take vows before Achilus' Cenotaph on Karlack before accepting their posts, pledging their loyalty to the Crusade before the tomb of its father. Ostensibly Tetrarchus seems to embrace this form of honour afforded his predecessor, though in reality he has little control over the ritual or the strong popularity it has garnered in the ranks. In the Imperial Guard, men favour those officers who have made their pledges at the Cenotaph of Achilus, the regiments responding well to those who have sought out the "Old Man's" favour before embarking on their combat missions. The Navy is little different, most Captains feeling more secure knowing a man with the blessing of Achilus leads them.

In addition to his lingering presence within the minds of the Crusader commanders, rumours also persist that Achilus has left behind another more sinister legacy. It is whispered that there exists a cult led by his most loyal officers, men and women deposed by Tetrarchus during the Council of Ashes and who still oppose the new Lord Militant's control of the Crusade. Known as the Children of Achilus, it is said that they hold positions throughout the fleets and armies of the Crusade, sometimes directly under the control of a veteran of the Council of Ashes, sometimes with no apparent connection to this old guard though loyal nevertheless. Not traitors to the Imperium (at least in their own eyes) the Children of Achilus work in subtle ways to undermine the strength of Tetrarchus within the sector, fouling up logistics, slowing down troop transfers and even passing on false or flawed intelligence to make the new Lord Militant look a fool or incompetent. The Ordo Hereticus made investigations into these rumours of a disgruntled officer cult within the Crusade, though to date their efforts have turned up nothing. This either indicates that the rumours are indeed just rumours, or possibly that the infiltration of the Children of Achilus goes far deeper than even the Inquisition could have suspected. Always willing to favour the more paranoid response several Inquisitors have chosen the latter and maintain open investigations into the

Children. However in a sector rife with alien sedition and true heresy, most can only spare a few low-ranking Acolytes for such a frivolous endeavour. Thus far their actions have potentially cost thousands of lives, but in the chaos of a full blown Imperial Crusade such military blunders regularly occur and draw little attention. It is said however that the Children of Achilus are escalating their operations and are currently planning something momentous to lay at Tetrarchus' door, something even he will not be able to ignore.



NEW DEED:

THE LORD MILITANT'S FAVOUR

A Deed is a special benefit that a character may select at character creation. For more information on Deeds (and many more options), see **rites of battle**.

Cost: 400xp

Prerequisites: Member of a Space Marine Chapter taking part in the Achilus Crusade, Fel 40+ Many Space Marine Chapters involved in the Achilus Crusade have won great honours in the service of Lord Militant Tetrarchus or his predecessor. A number of these Space Marines so honoured have become well-known by many Crusade officers in the Imperial forces, and thus carry great influence among them. Prior to your service in the Deathwatch, you were one of these Space Marines, and you have knelt before the Cenotaph on Karlak and taken vows of duty to Tiber Achilus, the father of the crusade. You wear the medal of the crusader and those who know you know that you have brought glory to the crusade and to the memory of the man which first led it into battle.

EFFECTS:

When dealing with either the Imperial Guard or the Imperial Navy of the Achilus Crusade (depending on which Peer Talent you possess) you add an additional degree of success on all successful Fellowship Tests or Skill Tests based on Fellowship. The Battler-Brother also gains the Peer (Imperial Guard) or (Imperial Navy) Talent.

COMMANDERS OF THE CRUSADE

"I see by your reports that there are naval vessels bombarding from orbit, a dozen divisions making their landings, and a Space Marine company somewhere behind the lines doing who knows what—can anyone tell me just who is in command of this invasion?"

—Inquisitor Sengir arriving at the Greyhell Front during Operation Silverback

The Achilus Crusade is a vast military operation pushing forward against multiple foes on scores of worlds across a front line measured in light years. To command, coordinate and control such an operation takes the kind of vast resources and byzantine power structures of which only the Imperium is capable. Gathered together under the leadership of the Lord Militant, each division of the Crusade's forces represented within the Jericho Reach has its own chain of command and localised leadership, which then form an intricate web of alliance, obligation and favour to other organisations, linking Inquisition to Deathwatch, Deathwatch to Adeptus Astartes and so forth. Quite often, however, each organisation within the Crusade operates independently of the others, following its own agendas and commanders, making the Crusade seem at times more like a grand alliance than the will of single galaxy spanning empire.

In the course of a Kill-team's operational lifetime within the Jericho Reach, its Battle-Brothers are likely to come into contact with most if not all of these disparate arms of the Imperial war machine, at times relying on them for support, at others cursing them for their meddling. As a result, while a Kill-team's orders descend directly from its Watch Captains, in the field they may find themselves dealing with Imperial Guard Generals, Naval Captains and Tech Magos at one time or another, and having to work closely with them to achieve their own missions and objectives. Listed here is an overview of the higher command structure of the Crusade, ostensibly covering Solomon Tetrarchus and his direct subordinates or peers within the various Adepta present within the Crusade.

IMPERIAL GUARD

By far the lion's share of the Crusade's struggle to liberate the Jericho Reach falls to the Imperial Guard. Present in every theatre of war and consisting of millions of men and hundreds of different regiments, they are the front line against the Stigmartus, Tau Empire and Tyranids. In direct control of these forces is Lord Militant Tetrarchus, himself risen from the Imperial Guard's high command and still having operational leadership of its forces. Directly beneath him are Lord Commander Ebongrave, Lord General Magratha von Karlack, and General Curas commanding the Canis, Acheros and Orpheus Salients respectively. More than any other arm of the Crusade, Tetrarchus has great influence and hands-on control over the Imperial Guard, directing its troop deployments and observing and adjusting its overall strategy. Direct control of the frontlines however remains with the Salient commanders; though they are wise enough to bow to pressure from the Lord Militant should it be forthcoming. The other major influence in the control and command of the Imperial Guard is Lord Commissar Salos Gygarus, who as a chief political officer ostensibly exists outside the normal chain of command. Gygarus takes his role and the role of the Commissariat within the Crusade very seriously and has on more than one occasion complicated matters for Tetrarchus and his three Salient commanders by either opposing their plans or exerting control over regiments via his commissars. This has mostly arisen because of orders issued by the high command which he views as 'cowardly', prompting him to have commissars assume command to keep troops fighting or abort retreats from combat zones. The end result is usually costly in terms of lives, though Gygarus is committed to the Crusade's effort and the morale of the men, both of which he feels the Salient commanders (and many of their generals) might have lost sight of. Regardless of the righteousness of his position, the time is rapidly approaching when Tetrarchus and Gygarus will come into direct conflict over leadership on the frontlines—a confrontation which will doubtless prove far more costly for the average Imperial Guardsman than for the high command.



ADEPTUS ARBITES

As soon as the Crusade conquered its first worlds within the Jericho Reach, the Adeptus Arbites began the process of imposing Imperial Law. Led by High Judge Vor Halbastan, the Arbites maintain numerous precinct-fortresses and several vessels within the sector, their headquarters based in the Bastion of Judgement on Karlack. In addition to maintaining the law across the sector it also falls to Halbastan and his men to train local enforcers to maintain control of their citizen populations. The largest of these operations is currently taking place on Spite, where Lord Commander Ebongrave, paranoid of Tau sympathizers and secessionists has increased local enforcer presence threefold in the last couple of years. Vast training camps dot the cities of Spite, miniature fortresses where the Arbites elite train and equip the enforcers and aid them in dispensing justice or hunting down rogue elements of the population. Such is the Arbites presence on Spite that they have earned a bloody reputation with the locals, often referred to as the Ebon Cosh, or just the Cosh after the much revered general who has put them into action.

High Judge Halbastan and his men do not normally take a direct role in the fighting of Crusade, and as such is largely excluded from the political wrangling of its officers. However they are used frequently by the Inquisition when operating on worlds either wholly or marginally under the control of the Imperium. A new development however may see the Arbites taking part in the pacification of what have become known as the Quarantined Worlds: Rheelas, Argoth and Kaggeran. The Adeptus Arbites have deployed large numbers of Judges and Arbitrators to these worlds in order to keep them pacified. These efforts have met with growing success, although the process is likely to take some time.

IMPERIAL NAVY

Just like the Imperial Guard, the Imperial Navy is a vital and integral part of the Crusade. The Navy transports the millions of soldiers of the Guard across the void and drops them into the warzones while defending them from enemy fleets and offering orbital fire support. The Navy is also the first line of defence against attacks on Imperial worlds, holding the line against enemy ships and hunting down raiders and pirates. The current commander of the combined Jericho Battlefleets is Solar Admiral Ram Thoen, a veteran of the Scarus Battlefleet and old friend of Achilus himself having served with the old man during his wars along the galactic rim. Thoen is a dour and serious man and has little love for Tetrarchus and his cronies (as he considers the Salient commanders). These feelings were reinforced after the Council of Ashes when Theon saw many of his peers sidelined or retired in favour of the new Lord Militant's supporters, a fate he avoided only through his Naval connections and high rank. This rift between the commander of the Imperial Navy and the Imperial Guard (i.e. Tetrarchus) has had a far reaching effect on the Crusade, and added to the existing distrust the two organisations traditionally have for each other. It is a festering wound built on much bad blood. While it is not true that all Imperial Guard officers or Naval Captains feel this way about

LORD GENERAL CASTUS IACTON

A stern man tasked with heavy responsibilities, General Iacton is in command of Karlack—the Fortress world that has become the hub of the Crusade's headquarters and operations. His responsibilities extend to the entire system, and General Iacton has no intention of shirking his duty. More information about the Lord General and Karlack can be found in **THE EMPEROR PROTECTS**.

each other, many have become infected with the feelings of their supreme commanders. As long as Tetrarchus remains Lord Militant, it is unlikely to change.

ADEPTUS MINISTORUM

Where the light of the Imperium falls so too does the might and influence of the Ministorum. Part of the Crusade since its inception, the Ministorum has had a role in every planetary invasion and every new world the Achilus Crusade has brought back into the fold of the Imperium. In the early years of the Crusade, much of the Ministorum's influence on matters within the Jericho Reach came from the Calixian Sector Synod, by virtue of their proximity to the Warp Gate. Cardinal Fortis oversaw the movement of confessors, preachers and other Ecclesiarchy personal through the sector and into the gate. He even visited the Reach a few times aboard his vessel, the *Pax Calixis*, to personally report to the Synod on the progress of its worlds. After the establishment of the Iron Collar, the Ministorum took a more permanent role in the sector and appointed Cardinal Dis Annalan as the first cardinal of the newly reborn Jericho Sector Synod. From the Ivory Cathedral on Karlack, Annalan has ensured the Ministorum has a hand in the day to day affairs of the Crusade, and has made close ties to the Lord Militant (one of the reasons she chose to site her church on Karlack). Annalan is quietly suspicious of Lord Militant Tetrarchus, and has opened a clandestine investigation into the circumstances of his ascension. She is already considering how she might use such knowledge to the church's advantage and increase its influence on the Crusade.

Under Annalan's direct control, and the instruments of her will, are Grand Missionary Agnar Clavan and Canoness Olya Valon. Together Clavan and Sister Valon command the expeditionary and fighting arms of the Ministorum, millions of pious men and women as well as several missions of elite Adepta Sororitas. Utterly loyal to their cardinal, they act independently of the Imperial Guard and Imperial Navy (the Ministorum maintains several of its own vessels) and therefore largely outside the control of the Lord Militant. Mindful of Tetrarchus' favour however Annalan makes a big show of 'lending' the Lord Militant's forces the church's support and aiding his military plans. For his part, Tetrarchus plays the game, knowing full well that he needs not just the troops the Ministorum provides but also its political support, support that becomes even more apparent when a world has been conquered and the Guard and Navy move on, while the church stays behind to ensure its devotion.

ADEPTUS ADMINISTRATUM

The Imperium would not exist without the billions of scribes, adepts and bureaucrats of the Administratum to oversee it. This is as true for the Jericho Reach and the Achilus Crusade as it is for the rest of the galaxy; wise generals know their men and materiel march to war to the sound of a million scratching auto-quills. Commanding the legions of Administratum personal accompanying the Crusade is the Prefectus Primus of the Adeptus Terra, Hors Knepp. An ancient wizened man, Knepp is rumoured to know more about the Crusade and its soldiers than anyone else alive, including the Lord Militant himself. In theory this makes Knepp an immensely powerful man, easily the equal of (if not greater than) the leaders of the other Adepta, and one with considerable political clout. However it is a power Knepp only uses to complete his countless tasks, having no desire to concern himself with the machinations of his peers as long as his ledgers balance and everything and everyone can be accounted for and neatly catalogued away. Tetrarchus learnt long ago to leave Knepp to his own devices, not least because of his vital role within the Crusade, but also because Knepp was neither willing or interested in becoming involved in affairs outside his world of numbers and tallies, either to side with the Lord Militant or work against him.

ADEPTUS MECHANICUS

The Adeptus Mechanicus has had a significant presence in the Crusade since the first discovery of the Warp Gate. Like the Administratum they are a fundamental part of the running of the Imperium and a vital component of the Crusade's armed forces. Without them, the ships of the Battlefleets and the tanks of the Imperial Guard could not be maintained, nor would the billions of tons of new weapons and munitions continue to flow into the sector each month. Representing the Mechanicus' interests in the Jericho Reach is Fabricator Tovos, a faithful servant of the Omnissiah. Much like Cardinal Annalas (whom he despises), Tovos spends much of his time on Karlack, close to both the Lord Militant and the Crusade's primary shipyards. From here he directs the Mechanicus' military formations, as well as its connection to vital Forge worlds (such as the Lathes in the Calixis Sector) via the Warp Gate. This gives him considerable power as he can choose what kind and in what amount certain weapons and munitions are made available, even favouring certain Salients and their commanders by choosing weapons suited to their purposes. Tovos is not overly interested in the politics of the high command or the backroom dealings of Tetrarchus, however he is interested in increasing the Mechanicus' foothold within the sector and laying claim to key worlds uncovered by the Explorator Fleets. To this end, he plays the high command off against each other to further his cause in the cold calculating way that only a Magos of his extreme age and augmentation could.

Two other members of the Adeptus Mechanicus play an important role within the Crusade and the Reach itself. The first is Explorator Magos Halvor, whose fleets catalogue and survey worlds as well as conduct research into newly encountered species and indigenous life of all kinds. The second is Titan Princeps

Korban, commander of the Jericho Reach Adeptus Titanicus Legio Venator (operating three Battle Maniples and two Scout Maniples) and master of the Emperor-class Titan *Hammer of Truth*. Both men have risen to the notice of the high command, and been courted by ambitious officers for their influence; Halvor for his control over advancement into newly explored regions as well as his access to sensitive knowledge about the Reach's inhabitants and Korban for the power the Titans can lend to an invasion and the support they attract when deployed to a warzone. Of the two it is Halvor which has attracted attention from not just the high command but also the Inquisition and the Deathwatch. The Watch Captains of Erioch especially believe that Halvor's explorations, including the recent incident on Sagacity, have uncovered matters which pertain directly to the Deathwatch. It is a delicate matter however as the Deathwatch and Inquisition have no direct power over the Mechanicus and cannot choose where and when the Explorator fleets go. One way or another however it is likely the Deathwatch will cross paths with Halvor and his Explorators, but whether it is as allies or adversaries remains to be seen.

ADEPTUS ASTARTES, INQUISITION AND DEATHWATCH

Unlike the other major Imperial organisations of the Achilus Crusade, the Adeptus Astartes, Inquisition and Deathwatch do not fall neatly under a single commander or a single well-defined military role. They are truly independent formations which work with, rather than for, the Lord Militant, often pursuing their own goals and agendas within the scope of the Crusade. The Adeptus Astartes especially have little in the way of centralised command, each Chapter falling under the direct control of its Chapter Masters, or the captains or company field commanders. These commanders do convene on occasion to discuss issues of importance to the Adeptus Astartes, but do not bow to the will of the greater Imperium. This means that even when working alongside elements of the Imperial Guard or the Imperial Navy, an Adeptus Astartes force will always retain its own independent leadership, and while they may take 'orders' from Imperial officers, Space Marines will never slavishly follow them, altering their tactics and strategy as battlefield conditions change or even withdrawing or assaulting a new target should their own commanders see fit to do so. The Inquisition is even more independent than the Space Marines, each Inquisitor representing a power unto themselves and operating completely outside of the Crusade's chain of command. Usually an Inquisitor will work alongside Imperial forces as long as it matches his own plans, however Inquisitors frequently do as they please, completely disregarding the Imperial military structure and even commandeering troops or supplies to complete their own personal missions. Finally the Deathwatch rest somewhere between the Inquisition and the Adeptus Astartes when it comes to their relation to the Crusade; while they often fight alongside the Imperial Guard to liberate worlds or vanquish foes, they ultimately answer only to the Watch Captains of Erioch.

The Adeptus Astartes Convene

During the early planning stages of the Crusade, both Warmaster Achilus and Chapter Master Maclir of the Storm Wardens dispatched agents to almost a hundred Space Marine Chapters, petitioning for their aid. Many Chapters refused, as they were dedicated to other theatres of war, or were uncomfortable committing their forces to an operation swathed in such secrecy. Both Achilus and Maclir had gathered many allies during their long service in previous campaigns, and calling upon sworn oaths of allegiance, several dozen Chapters finally came to contribute forces to the Crusade.

Maclir called together a council of the most senior Space Marine commanders of each Chapter. A humble man, Maclir called for an election of a leader to decide the direction of the Adeptus Astartes going forward in the Crusade. Taurinus Demos, Captain of the Dark Sons 2nd Company, was the first to step forward and challenge Maclir for the position. Demos was decorated and experienced, having achieved victory in countless battles against Xenos threats. Demos had been considered more than once for promotion to Chapter Master of the Dark Sons. However, his towering hubris and recklessness had held him back. Demos was a supremely prideful man, and many of the Battle-Brothers present at the council knew it. When the time came for the vote, the results were near unanimous, Maclir would lead the council in their decisions.

Demos was gravely insulted by the decision of the council, believing that only he was truly capable of success in such a grand undertaking in the name of The Emperor. To prove himself to the other commanders, he challenged Maclir to an honour duel. Several of the gathered observers noted afterwards that a duel of such martial finesse and power was rare outside the Feast of Blades. Maclir irrefutably had the upper hand for hours, his meticulous study of combat shield techniques gave Demos no opportunity for a decisive blow. Demos however, relentlessly assailed the Chapter Master with powerful blows, hammering Maclir with such force that the stone floor began to crack beneath the Storm Warden. In the end, it was Maclir who finally made a crucial error, and Demos landed the final blow. Defeated, Maclir knelt before Demos and officially declared him commander of the Adeptus Astartes council in the Crusade.

Taurinus Demos bowed his head and reflected upon the matter for many tense heartbeats. Finally, he beckoned Maclir to stand. Demos had never fought such a worthy opponent, and even through his own pride, he realised that the Storm Warden Chapter Master understood the burden of command. Thus, Demos declared that Lorgath Maclir should lead the Space Marines into the Jericho Reach. Demos returned to his Strike Cruiser content in the knowledge that the Space Marines of the Achilus Crusade possessed an exemplary commander.



+**Transmitted:** Karlack Bureau Ordinate Primaris
 +**Received:** 3773816.M41 [adjusted for localised temporal distortion phenomena]
 +**Telepathic Duct:** Alphos Terminus
 +**Transcriber:** Auto-logister Savant Madistcka

Thought for the Day: Deeds are but the pale ghosts of intentions.

SUBJECT: Cogitations on the true scale of the Achilus Crusade

The true scale of the Achilus Crusade is staggering beyond belief, and many adepts, even those with high-level clearance continue to voice the belief that our audits must be in error. Needless to say, the very suggestion is a matter of grievous concern to those of our division, and so I must address this matter directly.

I have seen with my own eyes the staggering scale of this endeavour and as such I can attest that the data presented to the bureau to date is, if anything, an over-simplification of the truth. The resources expended in the Crusade on a daily basis are astronomical, for the task at hand is herculean. Only a man as gifted as Lord Militant Tetrarchus could conceive of such an expenditure of blood and treasure and not be driven insane by the figures involved.

By way of an example, consider the numbers of Imperial Guardsmen serving in regiments assigned to the Crusade's combat arms, bearing in mind that these represent less than twenty percent of the total commitment, the remainder serving in combat support, internal security, occupation, reserve, lines of communication and rear echelon roles.

At the outset of the Crusade, approximately one billion Guardsmen were assigned to front line combat duties. Within one year of the launch of the Crusade over fifty percent of these had sustained injuries that took them out of the front lines for more than a week, while an estimated twenty two percent fell in combat in the first year. This rate only increased as the Crusade pressed on, and by the time the true extent of the enemy presence around the Hadex Anomaly was discovered, an estimated four billion Imperial Guardsmen were deployed in operational front line service—and remember, these represented but one fifth of total manpower deployed to the Reach.

As vast as these numbers undoubtedly are, they have only increased with the arrival of Hive Fleet Dagon. As casualty rates in those units facing the Tyranids have soared, so too has the throughput of units assigned to relieve those that have become combat ineffective. By my best estimates, something in the region of six billion front line Imperial Guardsmen are now deployed to the Jericho Reach, with the largest numbers serving in the Celebos Warzone against the forces of the Great Enemy. It is my belief however that the Orpheus Salient will soon have to be reinforced significantly, by redeploying units from the Acheros Salient, re-tasking second line formations, or by the deployment of yet more forces drawn from beyond the [DELETED].

While we are wont to think of the Imperial Guard in terms of regiments, for it is at that level that histories are written and battle honours preserved, we are forced to consider the numbers involved in far larger terms. Divisions, armies and even entire army groups are fed into the meat grinder, existing at full strength one day and being struck from the orders of battle the next. I can attest that I have seen senior generals issue orders to formations I know to have been destroyed weeks before, the chain of command taking weeks to obtain an accurate accounting of the units under its command, and that picture lasting only days before it is out of date.

If this illustrates the true extent of the Crusade's raw manpower, consider its relation to the supply of the essentials of war. How many lasgun power packs pass through the fortress worlds of the Iron Collar each day simply to keep the six billion Guardsmen firing their weapons? How many shells are expended by the hundreds of thousands of tanks employed in the Crusade's armies? How many millions of tons of fuel and spare parts are required to keep those and other vehicles moving? And what of the consumable foodstuffs and medicinal supplies each Guardsman needs each day? Needless to say, the flow of supplies, ordnance and other materiel through the [DELETED] is constant, for but a single day's interference might result in the loss of entire worlds.

The simple fact that such supplies are kept constant is made even more remarkable when one considers the necessity to obscure the true nature of the Achilus Crusade from the rulers of the [DELETED] from which so many tithes are taken. In many cases, the simple fact of interstellar travel serves to protect the secret, for even the most mundane of supplies travelling between sectors is ordinarily marshalled at multiple supply and storage nodes throughout its journey, being composited with the stocks of mass conveyance haulers. In the case of supplies bound for the Jericho Reach, this process is compounded, with multiple staging points existing along the supply route. No single hauler ever plies more than a single stretch of the route, and most loads pass through several dozen nodes and staging points between their point of origin and their final destination. That being the case, no single crew is aware of the origin or destination of its load, and neither would its members ever stop to consider the matter during the course of their routine duties.

How long this situation may be sustained of course remains to be seen, and I pray that the faithful hosts of the Emperor may hold the Great Devourer at bay. If they cannot, then more regions than the Jericho Reach may fall.



SOLDIERS OF THE CRUSADE

"On the honour of my line, on the blood of my family and the people of my world, I pledge my duty and my life to the most glorious Achilus Crusade, its Lord Militant and the most divine God-Emperor who watches over us all."

—First line of the Crusader's pledge, taken when crossing the threshold of the Jericho Gate

The Achilus Crusade is a massive military undertaking comprising of millions of men and hundreds of vessels gathered together from dozens of worlds and nearly every Imperial organisation. Among its numbers it counts contingents of the some of the most famous Imperial Guard regiments and Space Marine Chapters, such as the Cadian Shock Troops and the fearsome Blood Angels. However the vast bulk of its men come from the Calixis, Scarus and Ixaniad sectors, regiments raised from worlds that lie within the shadow of the Warp Gate and close to its connecting Warp routes. Likewise the Inquisition, Ecclesiarchy and Adeptus Mechanicus of these sectors (Calixis in particular) exert the most influence over the operations of their organisations within the Jericho Reach and the lion's share of their personnel is drawn from those operating close to the gate. Among these 'native' regiments, formations and special forces, several have made a name for themselves within the Crusade, their glorious deeds (or notorious infamy) bringing them to the attention of the Crusade's commanders amidst the teeming millions of Imperial soldiers fighting in its ranks.

LANDRIAN "DRUSUS' OWN" MILITIA

More a sector-spanning gang of conscripts than a true Imperial Guard regiment, the Landrian "Drusus' Own" Militia is comprised of followers of the Saint Drusus. Pilgrims from the Calixis Sector and beyond, the men and women of the Landrian Militia (most of which are not natives of the Hive world of Landunder) have embraced the teachings of the saint and journey to the Jericho Reach to complete his holy work and fight in his name. During the early years of the Crusade, the Landrian Militia first began appearing within Achilus' fleets, arriving on pilgrim vessels, supply transports and even Rogue Trader ships, eager to fight for the Imperium. These pilgrims believe that they have joined the ongoing Margin Crusade, and the vast majority are completely unaware that they have thrown their efforts into another conflict entirely. Though no clear cause of this exodus has been uncovered, some believe that the saint himself appeared to his followers on the eve of the Crusade and told them they must join in this endeavour for the sake of the Calixis Sector which Drusus watches over. Whether this is true or not, the pilgrimage of the Landrian Militia has become a steady flow pouring into the Reach by whatever means it can find.

At first both commanders and the adepts of the Departamento Munitorum paid little heed to the Landrian Militia and their desire to fight. Outside the official structure of the Imperial Guard and unclaimed by the Ministorum (which already had several "mob-regiments" of Frateris Militia attached to the Crusade) they were used largely for labour in the creation of the Iron Collar. It was not until the first forays against the Tau, when Lord Commander Ebongrave decided to create a company from the workers on Spite, that their true worth was realised. Fanatical in combat and filled with an intense hatred of their enemies, they proved themselves time and again in battle. Better yet, there seemed to be endless numbers of them arriving through the gate, an untapped source of reinforcements which first Achilus and then later Tetrarchus was more than happy to exploit. Grudgingly, the Departamento Munitorum dubbed this new formation the Landrian Militia (though to date the regiment's actual strength and assets have never been fully recorded) and assigned the title to all formations of Landrian pilgrims regardless of their actual numbers, world of origin, or where they fought.

Currently there are Landrian Militia fighting in every Salient of the Jericho Reach, from the ash plains of Castobel to the trenches of the Greyhell Front. Wherever a soldier travels within the Reach, he is likely to see groups of Landrian Militia in their tattered brown robes carrying their battered lasguns and scavenged weaponry, usually gathered together in silent prayer or listening to the rantings of one of their



confessors. Primarily used as auxiliary and support troops for more elite formations, they nevertheless perform well, often fighting better than more 'traditional' Imperial Guard regiments. Many Imperial commanders have come to favour them as shock troops, sending them in with the first waves of an assault (often assigning Commissar Cadets to earn some hard-won experience in battle) and relying on their fanaticism to break the line before following up with more disciplined troops to press forward the attack or hold the ground. For their part, the Landrian Militia don't seem to mind the role they have to play in the Crusade, eagerly selling their lives for the glory of their saint and arriving in their thousands every month to replace those that fall in Drusus's name.

CASTOBEL VENGEANCE COMPANY

The tale of Castobel is one that is fraught with tragedy and misfortune. A powerful Imperial world, it was one of the few places within the Jericho Reach which maintained its traditions and loyalty to the God-Emperor during the Age of Shadow and the four long millennia it was cut off from the holy light of Terra. When the Imperium finally returned, it eagerly embraced its long lost brothers and quickly reintegrated, forming a vital strategic world deep in the Orpheus Salient and greatly advancing the cause of the Crusade. Castobel's joy was short lived however, and no sooner had it rejoined the Imperium than the shadow of Hive Fleet Dagon darkened its skies. After a brutal initial assault, somehow Castobel's people survived and managed resist being completely obliterated, however now they find themselves locked in a terrible struggle for survival as Tyranids lay siege to their great hives and slowly but surely strip their world of life.

It is from this nightmare that the Castobel Vengeance Company was born—men and women whose entire life has been ripped away from them by the Great Devourer. Driven mad with rage or fear, they have pledged to end their lives fighting the Hive Fleet and seek revenge for the countless brothers and sisters lost to the beast. A small group at first, the notion of the Vengeance Company was largely created by Lord Castellan Ortarna Lokk, commander of the Imperial forces on Castobel, who latched onto the idea of fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers exacting their revenge on the Tyranids. A shrewd man, and one with serious manpower shortages, Lokk formed the first units of the Vengeance Company from survivors of Hive Tyralos (which had been destroyed by atomic fire rather than let fall to the invader). While these ad-hoc militia regiments performed poorly in combat (as expected), the morale they seemed to generate in both the Imperial Guard and planetary defence force regiments as well on the home front was significant. As a result Lokk has created more Vengeance Companies, even sending some to

other areas of the Orpheus Salient touched by the tendrils of the Hive Fleet. Other commanders too have been quietly observing the effect of the Vengeance Companies, such as Lord Commander Ebongrave commanding the Canis Salient, who wonders if the same tactic might work against the Tau.

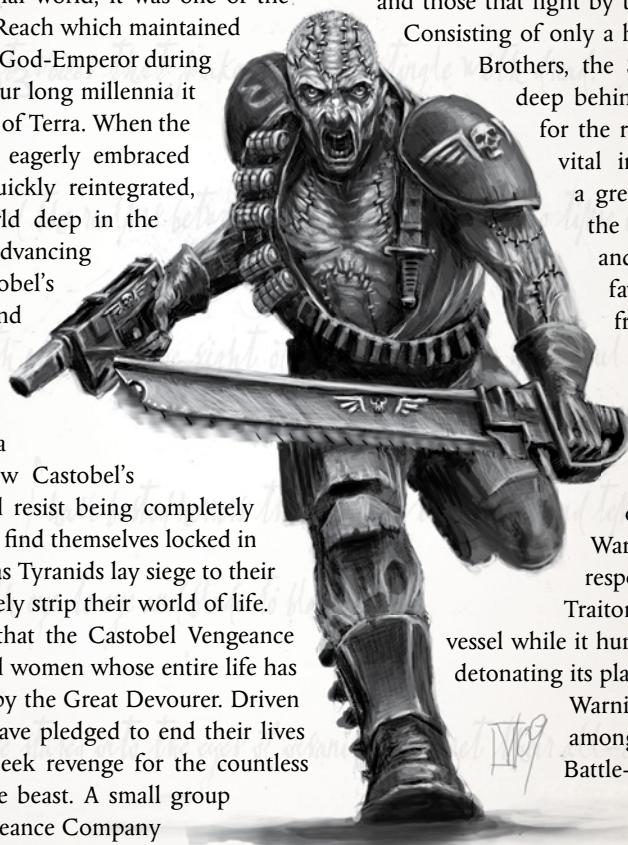
STORM'S WARNING

Among the Adeptus Astartes Chapters operating within the Jericho Reach, the Storm Wardens are the most numerous, having committed at least seven companies to the Crusade. For the most part these Space Marines are organised into battle companies including numerous assault squads, lending their impressive firepower and combat abilities where and when they are needed, only gathering together into larger formations against significant foes and for major engagements. In addition to these "frontline" Battle-Brothers, the Storm Wardens also employ specialised squads of scouts drawn from their 10th Company, often known among the Chapter and those that fight by their side as the Storm's Warning.

Consisting of only a handful of 10th Company Battle-Brothers, the Storm's Warning usually operate deep behind enemy lines, opening the way for the rest of the company, or gathering vital intelligence on the enemy. It is a great mark of honour to be part of the Storm's Warning scout squads and only the most promising and favoured Storm Wardens are chosen from among those of the 10th.

The current leader of the Storm's Warning is Battle-Brother Derak Styr, a veteran of the Reach who has won much glory for his Chapter against the Stigmartus on the worlds of the Cellebos Warzone. Rumour has it that Styr was responsible for the destruction of the Traitor warship *Cylopeus*, infiltrating the vessel while it hung in high orbit above Vanity and detonating its plasma reactors. Styr and the Storm's Warning have also earned a reputation among the Deathwatch, because the Battle-Brother's personal rivalry and thirst for glory has led him into conflict with Kill-teams.

The most notable incident was during the liberation of the Temples of Zynn, during which Styr altered his own mission so that he and his team of scouts could personally claim the head of the arch-heretic Nilmas, beating a Deathwatch Kill-team to their objective and robbing them of the glory of taking out the traitor themselves. Needless to say this has darkened the name of the Storm's Warning with the Deathwatch and created a rivalry between the two which has yet to be fully resolved.





II: THE CRUSADE BEGINS

DEATHWATCH INVOLVEMENT

"Ours is the long watch, the endless vigil against the dark and the first line against the creeping xenos rot which inflects this sector."

—Battle-Brother Xantis, Ultramarines 5th Company
seconded to the Deathwatch

Long before Achilus was even born, the Deathwatch had been keeping a silent vigil over the Jericho Reach. For centuries their Watch Stations have stood vigil over the dying stars and heretic worlds of the Reach and their Kill-teams gathered information on its alien empires. Now as the Achilus Crusade grinds on into its fifth decade of warfare, the Deathwatch's role in the sector is changing. More and more they find themselves acting on the frontlines, working to achieve objectives for the Imperial Guard, Navy or Adeptus Astartes rather than solely pursuing their own agendas. Nevertheless, there remains a rift between the Deathwatch and the Crusade's centralised command structure, and the perception that the Deathwatch cannot be relied upon or trusted to keep the Crusade's best interests in mind at all times. From the Deathwatch's perspective however their involvement in the Crusade and the missions they complete are more important than holding ground or taking worlds, and in the long run will make a real difference in the future of the region.

DEPLOYMENT AND RELATIONS

The Deathwatch's powerbase within the Jericho Reach has always been strong and is supported by its extensive system of Watch Stations and its understanding and experience of the sector. Largely independent of the rest of the crusading forces and existing outside the traditional command structure of the Imperial Guard, Navy and Adeptus Astartes, the Deathwatch deal mostly with special circumstance missions and Inquisitorial concerns. This means they can be encountered anywhere within the sector, often deep behind the lines though also in the midst of worlds engulfed in war. At times however their efforts will coincide with the Crusade objectives and they will lend their skill as elite special forces for larger operations. The Lord Militant has no direct control over the deployment and use of Deathwatch Kill-teams, in the same way he cannot compel the Adeptus Astartes. Rather they are treated as allies and requests are made for their support to the Watch Captains (or Chapter Masters, in the case of the Adeptus Astartes) which is then passed down the line. However, the Lord Militant can exert massive political and military pressure and has many allies within the Inquisition more than willing to use their resources for his goals—though he is understandably reluctant to do this often, for fear of ultimately alienating the alliances formed between his forces and the Deathwatch. The end result is that while a Kill-team may receive its orders from the Erioch Watch Captains, they might well have their origins elsewhere.



THE DEATHWATCH'S AGENDA

It is no mistake that the Deathwatch has a large and active presence in the Jericho Reach. This blighted, cursed region of space contains many dangers and threats that the Imperium cannot ignore. The Deathwatch serve their long vigil in the Reach as sentinels over the worlds of the Dark Pattern and other hubs of xenos civilisation. From time to time, alien forces stir upon these worlds, and the Deathwatch has held their line at great cost and sacrifice, fought in savage battles with no quarter or mercy—battles worthy of a thousand legends that may never be told.

While the Jericho Sector descended into its long night of anarchy and woe, the Deathwatch was not idle; the architects of many of the Reach's great atrocities were hunted and slain in hundreds, if not thousands, of clandestine missions over the centuries. In the years before the coming of the Achilus Crusade, these missions were often precision strikes designed to keep enemy forces off-balance, assassinations of key enemy leaders, or scouting patrols to lure the foe into a trap. During the time that the Jericho Sector fell into shadow, Watch Fortress Erioch was the centre of the Deathwatch's efforts to contain and secure the worlds of the Dark Pattern while simultaneously dealing with periodic outbreaks of alien invaders, heretic uprisings, and a myriad of other threats.

The arrival of the Achilus Crusade and the subsequent discovery of Hive Fleet Dagon's intrusion into the region has stretched the Deathwatch's resources to the limit. Kill-teams must face missions of greater import than ever before, and the Dark Pattern that the Deathwatch has so far been able to suppress stirs to greater wakefulness.

Watch Commander Mordigael believes that, unless the Deathwatch is somehow able to tip the balance, it is only a matter of time before the Jericho Reach is overwhelmed by darkness once more.

RECRUITMENT IN THE FIELD

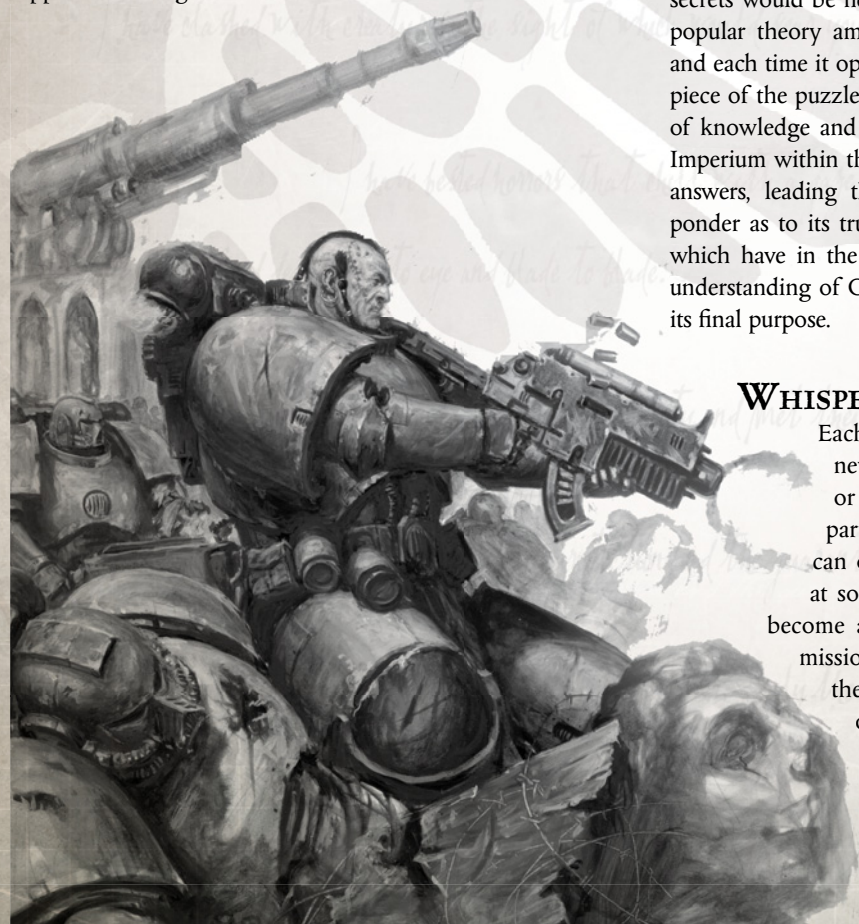
Since the arrival of the Achilus Crusade, the ranks of the Deathwatch have grown to accommodate an increase in their combat operations. Whereas for years each Watch Station was manned only by a handful of Battle-Brothers and a limited number of specialised vessels, now they have the ability to field entire companies should the need arise. Many of these new recruits to the Deathwatch have been drawn directly from the Adeptus Astartes Chapters present within the Crusade. Over the last forty years, dozens of Battle-Brothers have been seconded at the behest of the Deathwatch, after crossing the Warp Gate under the banner of their own Primarch. Thanks to their ancient agreements with the Ordo Xenos and the Space Marine Chapters, the process is usually a smooth one.

THE OMEGA VAULT

Few aspects of the Deathwatch's presence in the Jericho Reach are as perplexing or unusual as the Omega Vault. Located deep within the heart of Watch Station Erioch, its origins are shrouded in mystery as are those that built it, though presumably it was crafted by Imperial hands for a time when its secrets would be needed. This certainly seems to be the most popular theory among those which have studied the Vault, and each time it opens it reveals a little more and another tiny piece of the puzzle is unveiled. Unfortunately these fragments of knowledge and their purpose in the great mission of the Imperium within the Reach usually raise more questions than answers, leading the greatest minds of the Deathwatch to ponder as to its true purpose. There are two events however which have in the last few years changed the Deathwatch's understanding of Omega Vault, and raised new theories as to its final purpose.

WHISPERS IN THE DARK

Each time the Omega Vault opens it reveals a new clue, an ancient artefact, a piece of lore or even a captive or specimen. For the most part the Deathwatch and the Ordo Xenos can only puzzle over these finds, hoping that at some point in the future their purpose will become apparent and they will be vital to some mission or other to turn back the alien forces of the Reach. Taken at face value, many of these objects make no sense: a broken power sword of unknown origin, a blood-stained back banner of a lost successor Chapter, or a spent bolt casing with a single letter carved into its side. Others are more immediately useful, such as a star chart of the edges of the Hadex



Anomaly or the ciphers for a series of Tau sector relays within the Greyhell Front. What was overlooked for quite some time however was not the objects themselves, but the effect on those entering the Vault to retrieve them. At first those entering the Omega Vault seemed unaffected by its gloomy halls and the ancient fields which persevered and protected its walls, however over time they began to have dreams of darkness and distant voices.

These "Whispers in the Dark" were thought initially to perhaps be a side effect of the xenos-bane pathogen permeating the Vault, however only certain individuals were affected, and it seemed to affect Battle-Brothers just as easily as Inquisitors. It was then only after other possibilities such as daemonic influence were ruled out (subjects sleeping in warded chambers were still affected) that the Inquisition and the Deathwatch took a closer look at those hearing the whispers in their dreams, and just what the whispers were saying.

In all cases the whispers seemed to attach themselves to younger more idealistic men, and were always related to the object they had come into contact with. Often the whispers would be in languages the men could not understand or were too faint to hear, but other times they would speak in Gothic, reciting names or numbers. In a few rare cases the voices were distinct and understandable, whispering the object's history to the man who had touched it. This has led some Inquisitors and Battle-Brothers to theorise that perhaps some objects within the Omega Vault are physically impregnated with messages for those that retrieve them. Whatever the truth, the effect seems largely benign and in rare cases helpful, and so has not stopped the Deathwatch sending Battle-Brothers into the Vault whenever it opens its tomb-like doors.

THE PILGRIMAGE OF TIME

Perhaps more compelling than the Whispers in the Dark is the theory of the Pilgrimage of Time which several Inquisitors and Deathwatch Battle-Brothers have uncovered. Those that spend time in the Vault often take extensive notes or observations during their experience and even though they are limited in their time by those doors which have opened, some have glimpsed through half open portals and down sealed corridors hints of what might lie at the heart of the Vault itself. What they have seen and what has been hinted at by texts found in the outer chambers seems to suggest an elaborated warren of stasis caskets, this conclusion extrapolated from webs of power conduits and the familiar smells and sounds of active stasis fields. Those texts that speak of such things call them the Pilgrimage of Time, where objects (or people) from the past are sealed in stasis for a time in the future when they may become useful. From the clues gathered however the stasis field at the heart of the Omega Vault must be vast indeed, either holding in its grip single massive object or an army of smaller ones.

Speculation among the Inquisition has also led to some investigation into the matter outside Erioch, searching out other Watch Stations and dead worlds for clues as to what might be contained within the Vault. Among these, only Inquisitor Toalis Veer has made any progress, claiming to have discovered an ancient alien wall carving on the dead world of Nunc which he believes speaks of the Omega Vault. According to Veer, the

NEW DEED: SCOUT OF THE REACH

A Deed is a special benefit that a character may select at character creation. For more information on Deeds (and many more options), see **rites of battle**.

Cost: 500xp

Prerequisite: Adeptus Astartes

The vast majority of Space Marine Chapters have their Battle-Brothers serve time in the Chapter's 10th Scout Company before becoming a fully fledged member of the Adeptus Astartes. For many, especially those which have gone on to serve the Deathwatch, this will be a dim and distant memory, their time as a Space Marine Scout having taken place far from the Jericho Reach. Some Battle-Brothers however might have only recently become a full member of their Chapter and spent their time in the 10th Company within the Reach itself, learning skills and secrets about the sector that only those sent on scouting missions would know, as well as a familiarity with the recon and stealth elements of the Crusade.

Note: This deed is most appropriate for Codex Chapters of Space Marines that contain traditional 10th Companies of Scouts. Chapters that diverge greatly from the Codex Astartes (such as the Space Wolves and Black Templars) are unlikely to have gained this Deed. At the GM's discretion, this Deed may be limited to Codex Chapters only (such as the Ultramarines, Blood Angels, Dark Angels, Imperial Fists, and Storm Wardens).

EFFECTS:

A Battle-Brother with this Talent has served as a Scout within the Jericho Reach before becoming a full Battle-Brother and before being sequestered to the Deathwatch. This specialised training and experience grants him a +10 on all Concealment, Silent Move and Common Lore (Jericho Reach) Tests when operating on worlds within the Reach. In addition, when participating in an Objective with the Recon or Stealth Theme he adds an additional 10 Kill Markers to that Objective.

carving tells of the Obsidian Army, held frozen in time in the core of the final fortress, awaiting the time when fate will call them forth and they will march across the sector in an unstoppable tide of conquest and destruction sweeping all before them. Unfortunately for Veer, an earthquake on Nunc shortly after his discovery destroyed all evidence of the carving, leaving only his word as to its meaning. Those who support Veer in his theory claim the Obsidian Army must be a force of Deathwatch Battle-Brothers, perhaps numbering in their thousands, held in stasis for a time of great need, and this is in fact the final secret the Vault holds. Others however are more troubled by these theories, and caution if the Obsidian Army exists at all, it may be something else entirely...

A DARK WEB OF WORLDS

"There is a hole in the loom like a fist in my mind that makes me think of metal. The darkness moves like melted bone, while my eyes look elsewhere. It is the Pattern I see, it is the tapestry of death woven by their ancient hands, it is the herald of their return and the last marker on the road of mankind..."

—Looped vox recording discovered in the remains of an Explorator base camp on Sagacity, 817.M41

The Jericho Reach is an ancient and secret part of the galaxy, the place of forgotten empires and eldritch pacts made long before the coming of man. Like much of the Imperium and the void which surrounds and engulfs it, the Reach is a dark and dangerous realm, a piece of space filled with hostile worlds and unexplained mysteries. Even in the forty years the Crusade has been fighting for control of the sector, only a tiny fraction of its worlds have been properly surveyed or catalogued by the Imperium. Even the Deathwatch (who have had Watch Station in the sector for centuries) only know a small portion of its secrets; secrets they jealously guard even from the eyes of Lord Militant Tetrarchus. Foremost among these is the truth behind the dark web of worlds which many of the Watch Stations orbit or inhabit; dead worlds scoured clean of all life and considered of little interest to the Imperium. Known as the "Dark

Pattern," it is a secret which draws upon the very reason for the Chapter's presence in the Jericho Reach and Ordo Xenos' keen and enduring interest in the sector.

A PATTERN OF DEATH

No one knows for sure when the Dark Pattern, or simply the Pattern, was first uncovered. Though the most powerful Inquisitors and Librarians all agree it must have been at some point before the Age of Shadow. It was the information gathered by the Imperium on these dead worlds and their relation to each other and the sector itself which sparked the interest of the Ordo Xenos millennia ago and set in motion the eventual Deathwatch presence within the Reach. It is speculated that the Inquisitors of the time recognised in the dead worlds of the Cellebos Sector a familiar and ordered placement, strangely routine orbits, and exact degrees of mass and mineral composition seldom found in such systems. All these clues point to the fact that these worlds were more than mere stellar cast offs or failed proto worlds, but rather part of some grand design or ancient manufacture. This commonality is known as the Pattern, and is measured against similar systems in other far flung systems. It is believed by some that this is what led to the commencement of the Long Watch, and the establishment of Watch Stations and a Deathwatch presence within the Jericho Reach. This was considered to be a rare preventive step by the Inquisition, with a view to possible tomorrows, thinking centuries into the future to a time when the Pattern might reveal itself and the nature and ambitions of whatever created it became known.



AN ANCIENT ENEMY

Even before the involvement of the Deathwatch, once the Pattern was identified, the Ordo Xenos sent agents to survey the worlds and recover data which might grant them a clue to their origin and purpose. For centuries little progress was made and the existence of the Pattern become just one more in a long list of galactic mysteries, like the Floating Moons of Gnarlos or the Night Veil, to be kept secret by the Inquisition. As part of their investigations, when the Deathwatch began their Long Watch, the Inquisition guided them to build their fortresses on or around these dead worlds, so they might at once act as scholars and wardens to the lifeless planets. In time only a handful of Inquisitors and Battle-Brothers knew of the Pattern, passing down the lore they gathered from one generation to the next, creating a select and secret group known as the Dead Cabal to continue its study. For centuries this remained unchanged, until the Achilus Crusade arrived and things started to happen.

So far it is only isolated incidents, wild reports and unfounded rumours of activity on worlds within the Pattern. However the Dead Cabal are watching with keen eyes and piecing the information together, noting things such as the disappearance of twenty servitors on Vormos, a strange green glow in the skies of Castiel or the disappearance of an Explorator team on Sagacity. The Cabal has also noted the increased presence of the Eldar within the Jericho Reach, a race whose presence has formerly been limited to raiding pirates and lone wanderers but now seems to be seeding the sector with agents and taking an interest in these developments. Inquisitors within the Cabal have tried to extract information from captured Eldar agents about their interest in the sector and their knowledge of the Pattern, however even the deepest psychic probes are only met with walls of stark terror, a fear so great the subject expires before the psyker can recover his senses. For these reasons and others, the Dead Cabal firmly believe that something ancient is stirring within the Jericho Reach, something far older than man and far more dangerous than the might of the Tyranids and Tau combined.

USING THE DARK PATTERN

The purpose and nature of the Dark Pattern is deliberately left undefined so that a **DEATHWATCH** GM can modify and change the “true threat” to the Jericho Reach to fit his own individual campaign.

Whilst GM's are encouraged to come up with their own ideas for the Dark Pattern, some ideas and options for representing the Pattern's nature are presented below:

THE NECRONS

The pattern of dead worlds spread throughout the Jericho Reach strongly hints at the presence of a number of Necron tombs, and the Dark Pattern is particularly well-suited to act as a warning of the presence of these implacable aliens formed from living metal. For more on the Necrons in the Jericho Reach, see the adventure “A Stony Sleep” in **THE**

EMPEROR PROTECTS.

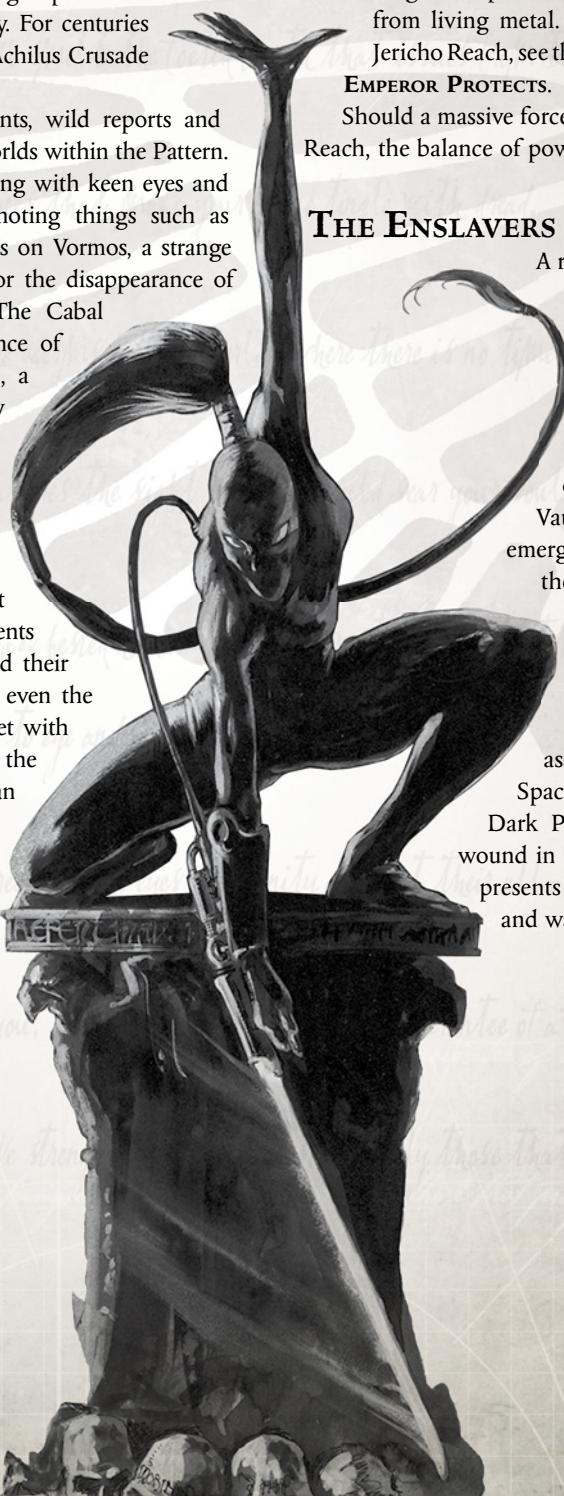
Should a massive force of Necrons awaken in the Jericho Reach, the balance of power will never be the same.

THE ENSLAVERS

A race of foul alien creatures native to the Warp, the Enslavers are also a prime candidate to be linked to the Dark Pattern. These xenos have a link to the presence of the Storm Wardens Chapter of Space Marines, and many of the discoveries in the Omega Vault can be linked to the eventual emergence of an Enslaver Plague into the Jericho Reach.

CHAOS

The emergence of a Greater Daemon, warp incursions, and assaults from warbands of Chaos Space Marines are all dangers that the Dark Pattern may portend. The gaping wound in reality that is the Hadex Anomaly presents a perfect focus for the prophecies and warnings of the Dark Pattern.



CRUSADE CAMPAIGNS

"These Imperial Guard officers would kill their foes with their words if they could. Enough talk, to war brothers!"

—Battle-Brother Ultheris, Subjugators 7th Company

The Achilus Crusade is a vast and epic conflict engulfing hundreds of worlds across the length and breadth of the Jericho Reach. It is also the bloody backdrop for the operations of the Deathwatch as they fight against the spreading influence of xenos forces and work to halt the rise of ancient and terrible powers. For the GM this war torn setting can provide a wealth of locals, hooks for adventures and adversaries for his players. The action can either come in the form of direct involvement on the front lines or deep in enemy territory working to undermine and overthrow the Imperium's adversaries. The Machiavellian power structure of the Crusade can also present a Kill-team with its own challenges, as they find themselves fighting as much against the enemies of Mankind as against the conflicting arms of the Emperor's armies. However it affects the GM's game, the presence of the Crusade is a powerful factor in nearly everything which takes place within the Jericho Reach and will play a significant role in almost anything his players undertake.



As a backdrop, the Achilus Crusade can be used as the GM sees fit, and he should draw upon the information presented in this book as well as the Deathwatch core rules to colour his campaigns with its chaos and carnage. Presented below are some guidelines for how the Crusade might be used to more directly influence games of Deathwatch and how it can be used as the foundation for a campaign in itself.

MILITARY INVOLVEMENT

The most obvious and likely way that the Crusade will affect the actions of the players is through the direct involvement of their characters in its operations. This involves the Kill-team's missions intersecting with the actions of the Imperial Guard, Navy or Adeptus Astartes at some sector hotspot where they aid in the completion of objectives for the Imperial advance. The GM can, however, play up this military involvement and have the Kill-team attached to a crusading formation for the duration of a campaign. While the Deathwatch do not exist within the clearly defined command structure of the Crusade, it is not unheard of for an Inquisitor or Watch Captain to 'loan' out the services of a Kill-team for an operation which aids their ultimate goals. The result is that the Battle-Brothers will temporarily fall under the control of a local Imperial commander. The GM can then use this special circumstance to have the players involved in an entire Imperial military action (rather than just an isolated mission) such as a planetary invasion, starting as part of the first landings and ending with the liberation (or virus bombing) of the world. The GM can involve the players in the tactical decisions of their commanders (almost all Imperial officers look up to Space Marines and value their combat experience) and allow them to choose when and where to strike, influencing the final outcome of the battle. The players can then also enjoy the end result of a liberated world, knowing that it was their actions which advanced the cause of the Crusade and pushed back the front lines.

Vital locations and ongoing conflicts, as well as their importance to the Crusade, can be found through this book and particularly in the chapters on each of the three Salients which follow.

A GLORIOUS HISTORY

For forty years the Achilus Crusade has been ravaging the Jericho Reach, plunging countless worlds into war and pitting the Imperium against foes old and new. Before the coming of Achilus and his fleet however the Deathwatch had watched over the sector, standing vigil over the stars from their watch stations and dead worlds. Many among the Deathwatch have therefore witnessed the entirety of the Achilus Crusade, from its first forays into the sector to its current brutal war on three fronts. The GM can tap into this long and bloody history and have his players experience the roll of years first hand. As Space Marines live longer than the majority of humanity (provided they do not fall in battle) the Kill-team may have already been in the Jericho Reach when the Crusade first began. This allows the GM to involve them in the major events of the Crusade, and weave their story into

the story of the Crusade itself. This could involve meeting Achilus, leading the first battles against the Tau and putting down the uprising on Spite, or being there for the first signs of Hive Fleet Dagon's assault on the sector. GMs can even skip from one notable event to another, having years pass in downtime while the Kill-teams rests or undertakes other tasks "off screen." Apart from the chance to have a hand in the major events of the Crusade, this kind of campaign also offers a chance to really meld with setting and let the players gain a familiarity and ownership for it.

SEDITION AND SUCCESSION

The leadership of the Crusade and the ambitions of its commanders are both constantly in flux. While the Lord Militant rules untouched from on high, below him the fortunes of thousands of officers of all kinds rise and fall. This is true for practically every organisation under the auspice of the Crusade, from the ranks of the Tech Priests of the Adeptus Mechanicus to the legions of Adepts serving the monolithic Administratum and its many arms. It is however the more numerous and martial powers, like the Imperial Guard and Imperial Navy, which suffer from this the most and whose actions will have the greatest effect on the lives of the players. The GM can use the ideas of succession, personal ambition and politics to add to his campaigns, drawing the players into the shadowy world of Crusade leadership and what it means to serve in the byzantine chain of command it creates. The most obvious way this may occur is if the Kill-team finds itself caught up either in the rivalry between competing officers (either from the same adepta or rival factions) or used as part of an ambitious commander's bid for power. In these situations the Battle-Brothers may well discover that the men and women giving them orders in the field are perhaps just as untrustworthy as the foes they are fighting, and must walk the line between doing their duty and bringing down those responsible for manipulating them. This can also provide an interesting counterpoint to combat heavy missions by providing more complex roleplaying situations and hard moral choices, especially as while Space Marines have few equals in combat they can be just as vulnerable to deception and diplomacy as anyone else. Another more involved way for the GM to include these themes in his games is to have the Kill-team ordered (or to choose) to directly aid an officer or commander in their bid for advancement. There are many reasons this might occur but it will usually be because the ascension of the individual aids the Deathwatch, and having them in control of a region or world will work to the Chapter's ultimate advantage.

A list of some of the most important Crusade personages can be found on page 132 of this book. There are however dozens of other prominent NPCs throughout this chapter and others which all have the potential to aid or antagonise the PCs in the pursuit of their own personal ambitions.

HOLD NOTHING BACK

DEATHWATCH campaigns focusing upon the massive assault of the Achilus Crusade is a perfect chance to showcase some of the most significant and impressive icons of the Warhammer 40,000 setting. Titans, Baneblades, and enormous military formations of Imperial Guard are just the tip of the iceberg for providing DEATHWATCH players with a front-row seat to some truly impressive and memorable battles.

Don't hesitate to bring in a Greater Daemon rampaging along the Cellebos Warzone, or describing a phalanx of Carnifexes threatening the flank of a Crusade advance in the Orpheus Salient.

The Crusade provides an excellent backdrop to get a Kill-team involved in all levels of military actions, from invading the innards of a Tyranid Hive Ship to attempting to disable a Tau Manta in flight.

Lastly, do not forget that the Crusade encompasses a wealth of powerful and important Non-Player Characters for your group to interact with; there will be few better opportunities to discuss tactics with a Space Marine Chapter Master, gain a personal award from the Warmaster himself, or to rescue an Imperial Navy Admiral's ship from being torn apart by Tau drone-controlled torpedoes.



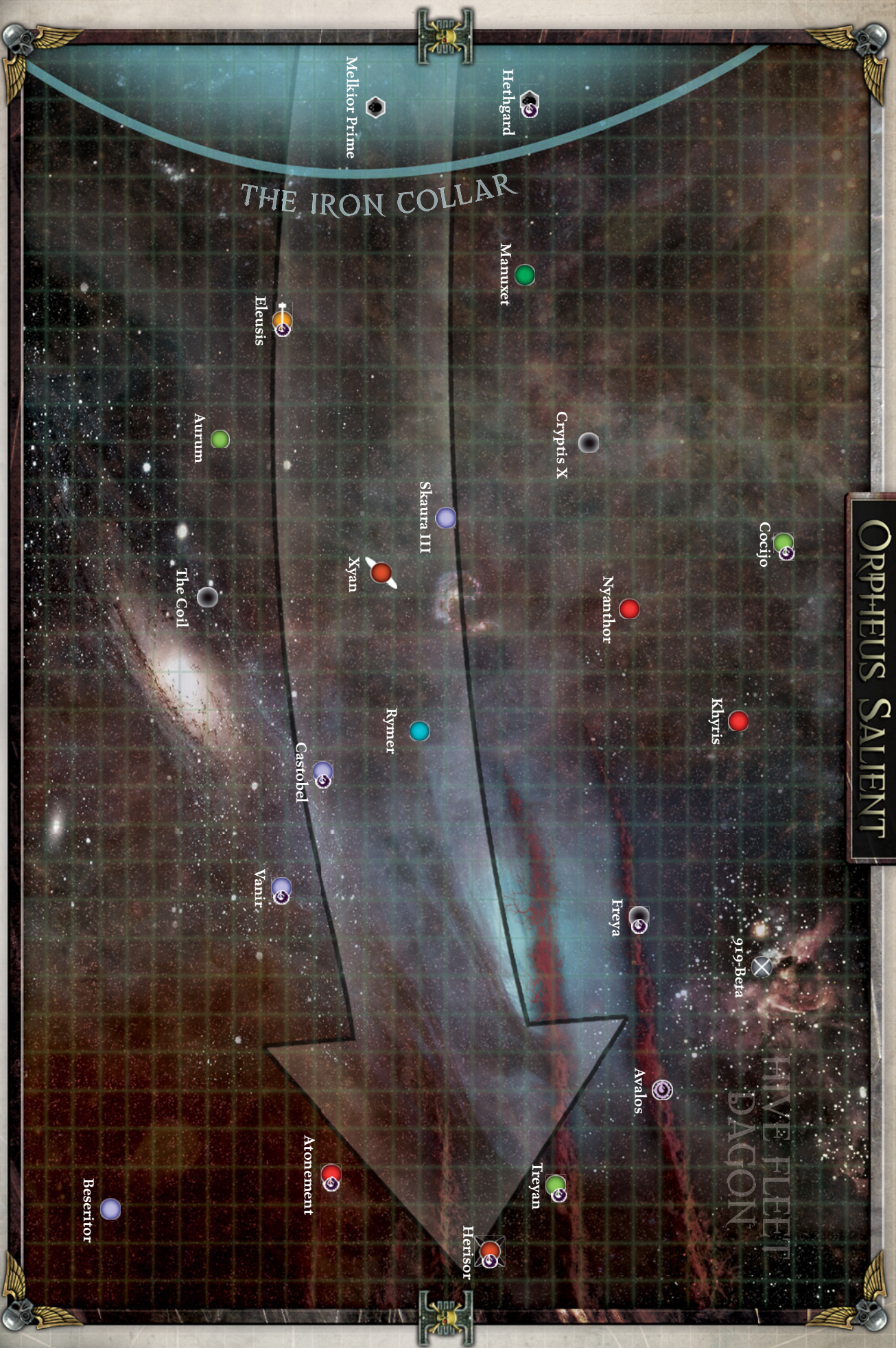


THE ORPHEUS SALIENT

- THE FIRST
SUCCESSSES
- - COMMAND OF THE
ORPHEUS SALIENT
 -
 - THEMES OF THE
ORPHEUS SALIENT
 -
 - HIVE FLEET DAGON
 -
 - THE SLINNAR DRIFT
 -
 - THE MORTIS THULE



ORPHEUS SALIENT



Cocito

Khyris

Nyanthor

Cryptus X

Hethgard

Manuxet

Skaura III

Xyan

Rymer

Castobel

Eleusis

Aurum

The Coil

Vanir

Ireya

919-Beta

Avalos

Treyan

Hertsor

Atonement

Besertor

Melkior Prime

III: THE ORPHEUS SALIENT

CHAPTER III: THE ORPHEUS SALIENT

"All ships, fire at will! Gunner, get me a lock on that hive ship... I want our nova cannon ready to fire the instant we enter optimal range."

—Final received transmission from the Dominator-class
Cruiser *Ferrum Aeterna*

At the furthest Rimward area of the Jericho Reach lies the Orpheus Salient. Originally the most successful of Lord Militant Tetrarchus' three-pronged assault, the Orpheus Salient has fallen into a state of drastic disarray in recent times. Morale is at its lowest ebb, supplies run short, manpower is difficult to come by, and most frightening of all, a new enemy has emerged. The ravenous Tyranids of Hive Fleet Dagon have begun their invasion of the Jericho Reach and have started with the Orpheus Salient. Truly, this is a grave situation for the Crusade as those in charge of the Salient attempt to mount a counter-offensive to retake the worlds that have been infested with the xenos threat.

THE FIRST SUCCESSES

When Lord General Tetrarchus began his assault into the Reach, he placed command of the Orpheus Salient under General Mikal Curas. Although his rank and prestige allow him to use the full honorific of 'Lord General of the Imperial Guard', Curas feels that using such an ostentatious title would alienate him from the rest of his officers. General Curas was a young and impulsive commander who enjoyed the patronage of Lord Militant Tetrarchus himself, and learned much of his command style from the Lord Militant. When he was apprised of his mentor's battle plan for retaking the Reach, Curas intuitively understood exactly what Tetrarchus was looking for. Curas gathered together his advisors, tacticians, and regimental commanders and laid out his goals for accomplishing the task set before him. His plan involved lightning fast raids on planets that had fallen into disloyalty with an emphasis on removing the corrupt leadership of a planet first. Curas had a strong belief in the theory of "Original Purity," that is, he felt that Mankind was inherently gifted with purity by the God-Emperor of Mankind and would only become corrupt if forced to perform corrupt acts. By removing the leaders of a planet in the opening stages of an attack, he felt that the general populace would return to this state of purity and be loyal to the forces of the Imperium. While publicly approving of his plan, most the officers under his command felt that this was a naively optimistic point of view. They could not argue however, as not only did Curas enjoy the favour of Lord Militant Tetrarchus, but the Ecclesiarchy also agreed strongly with the idea.



Whether or not his theory was correct, the results of his actions could not be denied. The Orpheus Salient quickly became the most successful of the three Salients. First Castobel fell, then Shoinmunt, Treyan and Eleusis, followed swiftly by Freya. These were just the first of hundreds of planets to fall before the might of the Crusade. At the forefront of all of these actions was General Curas himself, leading Battlegroup Argo personally. His dedication to the Crusade and obvious success made him an extremely popular leader with his men.

THE FALL OF ELEUSIS

The battle for Eleusis was the most significant success of the Orpheus Salient. When the Age of Shadows descended upon the Jericho Reach, the shrineworld of Eleusis was changed in a way most foul. The priests and attendants of the world slowly began to change the tone of their sermons. Where once they spoke of the golden light of the God-Emperor, they now only spoke of that glow dimming with another flare becoming brighter. This, they said, was obvious to anyone who looked to the sky. The bright glow of red light from the far-off Hadex Anomaly was plain to see, while the Astropaths brought no more messages from the Imperium. This was clearly a portent that a greater power would rise to guide the people of Eleusis to new glory and prosperity. With clever words, superstition, and likely help from beyond, the priests of Eleusis slowly began to turn the populace to the worship of the Dark Gods of Chaos. Those that gratefully began the worship of their new saviours were given special assignments to remake the

temples of the shrineworld into a new and more fitting tribute to their masters. Those that remained pure to the Emperor were hunted down. Many were used as sacrifices to appease the Dark Gods, while others were used as slaves to rebuild the temples and create new ones. So, did darkness come to Eleusis.

Upon the cessation of the warp storms that had hidden Eleusis from discovery, General Curas deemed that the shrine world would be his most glorious victory. Not only was the planet of strategic value to his overall plans, but it carried with it the possibility of being a great moral victory for his troops. They would be able to see firsthand that the cause to which they dedicated themselves to was righteous and good. Assisting him with his plans were his three most senior advisors: Lord Commissar Vance Theren, General Derian Arkelius, and Lord Admiral Anastasia Arkelius. Together with Curas they represented the greatest tactical minds within the Orpheus Salient. Additionally, General Arkelius and his sister Anastasia had been able to use their highly-placed family connections to speed up requisition requests for their respective Battlegroups. This allowed their forces to be equipped with the best possible gear and kept their general supplies at maximum capacity. For seven days, the four officers met in strategic planning sessions. They did not leave the suite, as General Curas had decreed that they would not return to their normal duties until a plan to retake Eleusis was formulated. On the seventh day, General Arkelius proposed Operation Onslaught. Within moments of hearing of the proposal, General Curas declared that they were finished. This was the plan that would retake the fallen Shrine world.

OPERATION ONSLAUGHT

Operation Onslaught's Order of Battle called for a prolonged bombardment of the capital by Lord Admiral Arkelius' naval fleet. After precisely seventeen hours and thirty four minutes of orbital bombardment, a spearhead would land on the planet's surface. This spearhead would be composed of the 3rd company of the Templars of Blood, including Scouts from the 10th company mounted on bikes. The Space Marines had three key objectives. First, they were to disable the capital's communications centre. This would prevent the traitors from calling for reinforcements. The second objective was to disable the spaceport defences. This would allow the Imperial Guard to land in sufficient strength to establish a firm beachhead on the planet's surface. The final objective was for the Space Marines to act as a disruptive force once the Imperial Guard had landed. This would cause massive problems for the enemy supply lines, as well as causing the entrenched heretics to panic as they would never be able to guess from which direction they would receive righteous retribution.

The Second Phase of Operation Onslaught called for General Curas to lead a total of thirty Imperial Guard regiments to Eleusis' surface. The main thrust of this attack comprised mostly of infantry regiments, but would be supported by an armoured column of two thousand main battle tanks. Should the second objective of Phase One be unsuccessful, General Curas was to hold in orbit while the Imperial Navy resumed bombardment targeted at the space port. Once on planet, the

primary objective of the Second Phase was the capture and control of any military installations remaining. Agents of the Commissariat would be deployed to townships to rouse the citizens to throw off their shackles and join the liberators in fighting off the vile oppressors of the priesthood. Should the citizens prove unwilling, artillery fire from the Gunmetallican 13th Armoured would destroy all habitations that could not be brought to compliance.

Phase Three of Operation Onslaught was to see the Scintillan 84th Grenadiers, under command of General Arkelius, deploy to the surface and claim the planet's capital building. Once they had landed, they were to push through any remaining defenders and seize the capital. The Gunmetallican 13th would be available for close fire support, as well as Light Cruisers of the Imperial Navy for punching through any extreme resistance.

This was the plan as drawn up by General Arkelius. The orbital barrage from the Imperial Navy began at precisely 0900 hours ship time, and ended at 2134. Lord Admiral Arkelius called a stop to the bombardment five hours earlier than planned, as her sensor operators informed her that all significant structures and defences had been destroyed. The 3rd company of Space Marines launched from their Strike Cruiser at the cessation of the barrage. Upon making planetfall, they immediately fell under attack by fifteen full regiments of Chaos cultists. Brother-Captain Kristoff ordered his Space Marines to abandon the first objective and proceed in force to the space port, as securing a landing zone for General Curas was a higher priority in his mind. His squads fought their way through the throng of cultists until they had formed a defensive perimeter around the space port. Tritus Squad, one of the Assault squads, took to the air to get over the space port's walls and began their demolition efforts on the defences surrounding the landing pads. Once the planned beachhead was secure, Captain Kristoff signalled to General Curas that it was time to begin the Second Phase of the assault. General Curas' force landed soon after and squadrons of Chimera troop transports began pouring from the landing craft, with General Curas himself on the lead transport. Seeing that the original plan needed to be adjusted, General Curas asked Captain Kristoff to take his men and drive a wedge through the heart of the enemy. He also ordered the artillery regiments to begin setting up and to fire for effect as soon as they had targets. He ordered a spotter to follow the Space Marines closely to provide accurate targeting data once there were friendlies within the zone of bombardment. The next order was to the Gunmetallican 13th that was even now still unloading. They were to take their heavy vehicles and begin circling around the enemy to the left flank. General Curas would take his Infantry regiments to the right flank and clean up anything that the Space Marines had missed.

When General Arkelius landed, he found that the Templars of Blood had left no traitor alive as they cleared the way to the capital. On the left flank, the Gunmetallican 13th had met with similar success and was even now pushing into the main thoroughfares. On the right flank, General Curas had led his men to a stunning victory. As his command Chimera pulled up to the main capital building, General Arkelius had enough time to climb to the top of the rubble before he saw General Curas summarily execute the High-Priest of Eleusis and plant the Imperial Aquila standard in front of the Grand Temple.

COMMAND OF THE ORPHEUS SALIENT

As the planets began to fall for General Curas, portions of his task force began being redeployed to different Salients. Lord Militant Tetrarchus felt that they would be put to better use in the more hostile zones of the Crusade. This was to be a costly miscalculation on the part of the Lord Militant. On 999812.M41, Astropathic communications began to flicker in and out. The Salient's Sanctioned Psykers and Astropaths began receiving strange dreams of terrible creatures devouring all they saw. Hearing of this unknown shadow that was blanking his communications, General Curas transferred his command to Battlegroup Argo and immediately ordered them into the heart of the shadow. Six months had gone by without any word from Battlegroup Argo when a stray picket ship was found floating in space by Lord Admiral Arkelius. Taking the ship into the hold, she recovered the ship's logs and discovered the grim fate of Battlegroup Argo. After plunging his group into the shadow in the Warp, General Curas discovered that the disruption was a previously unknown force of Tyranids, a numberless fleet of massive bio-ships and ravaging alien organisms. The very presence of these terrible creatures created a shadow in the Warp that disrupted all communications.

All of the ships within his Battlegroup had been destroyed, and the General himself was killed when his vessel was boarded by the Tyranids. Knowing the damage that this information could do to Crusade morale, Lord Admiral Arkelius sealed the logs and made all haste to meet up with the late General's senior advisors. In orbit around the Fortress World Hethgard, General Derian Arkelius, Lord Admiral Anastasia Arkelius, and Lord Commissar Vance Theren met aboard the Admiral's flagship to discuss what would be done.

THE DECEPTION

During their closed meeting, the remaining senior members of the Orpheus Salient command structure began discussing what should be done about General Curas' death. Within minutes it devolved into petty bickering between the General and the Admiral over who would take command. Lord Commissar Theren allowed this to go on for approximately thirty seconds before he fired his bolt pistol into the ceiling. Warning that the next round would go into the head of the first person to interrupt him, he outlined a plan for the command structure that was bold to say the least. Lord Commissar Theren's plan was to inform the other Salient commanders of General Curas' death at the hands of the Tyranids, but with communication blackouts he knew that it could take years for such a message to be received and years beyond that for a response to be sent back. During this period no one beyond the three of them and the Crusade's High Command was to know of the death of General Curas until a replacement had been sent. In the meantime, and to keep the discipline and morale of the Orpheus Salient at workable levels, Theren proposed that a Triumvirate be formed to command the Salient. General Arkelius would be in command of all ground operations, Admiral Arkelius would be in command of all naval actions, and Lord Commissar Theren would play the mediator, as well as having final say over any disagreements that cropped up.

Now commanding from the flagship of Battlegroup Cerberus, Lord Commissar Theren is able to effectively deceive the rest of the ranking members of the Imperial Guard and Imperial Navy by combining his authority with that of either one of the Arkelius siblings. The word of a Lord Commissar backed up by either an Admiral or a General is something no lower ranking officer would dare question.

For Recognition of Strategic Excellence

Granted this day 094 806.M41, upon the recommendation of General Mikal Curas, we of the Achilus Crusade High Command do hereby officially commend General Derian Arkelius for his bold and innovative tactics in plotting Operation Onslaught. While the necessity of battlefield fluidity required drastic changes to the original Order of Battle, the plan itself was nonetheless excellently devised and will be distributed to all Crusade commanders as a shining example of a battle plan that is perfect under absolutely ideal conditions. So in recognition for your Strategic Excellence, we do hereby award you the Achilus Halo with Aquila Cluster.

Congratulations and may the God-Emperor of Mankind watch over you.

Lord Militant Solomon Tetrarchus

Commander of the Achilus Crusade



THEMES OF THE ORPHEUS SALIENT

The Orpheus Salient is a sector of the Reach that no sane Guardsmen would ever hope to be assigned. Too few regiments of the Imperial Guard are deployed there, and every one of them is slowly being whittled away in horrible battles of attrition against the seemingly never-ending tide of creatures from Hive Fleet Dagon. Those that are not forced into purely defensive actions against the Tyranids find themselves posted to worlds such as Vanir, a planet in open rebellion. To make matters worse Militant Tetrarchus' constant movement of men and materiel to the Cellerbos Warzone has caused supplies levels to drop below critical. The few reinforcements that arrive are usually newly founded regiments who originally thought they would be shipped to the Margin Crusade, and once these new units find themselves up against the threat of the Tyranids their desertion rates become uncommonly high. The Commissariat is stretched so thin maintaining discipline in the regular line units that they are able to attach no more than one full Commissar to each regiment, and in some cases have been forced to attach inexperienced Commissar-Cadets to vital areas of the defence.

The Space Marines that have chosen to assault this region of the Reach, most notably the Templars of Blood and the Dark Sons, have found that the task before them is more trying than any other they have undertaken. With only two companies worth of Space Marines fighting regularly within the Orpheus Salient, the most puissant Angels of Death find themselves overwhelmed by the crush of oncoming Tyranid swarms. Despite the bleak outlook, hope has arrived. Reports come in daily to Lord Commissar Theren of Deathwatch Kill-teams operating within the Salient. Each time they appear, the forces of the Imperium are able to carry the day as the Deathwatch creates vital openings within the enemy's defences. With more interventions like these, the Orpheus Salient might yet be won.

KILL-TEAM ORGANISATION WITHIN THE ORPHEUS SALIENT

Those Deathwatch Space Marines that find themselves assigned to this portion of the Jericho Reach are often of the Devastator speciality. Their long range heavy weapons can cause untold devastation to the hordes of the enemy while still being effective against the larger bio-organisms. Often, a Kill-team operating in a planetary defence aspect will consist of two Devastator Marines, two Assault Marines, and one Apothecary. This gives the Kill-team some flexibility when dealing with the xenos, as the Assault Marines can be used to exploit a hole in the enemy forces caused by the heavy weaponry of their Devastator brothers. The Apothecary is invaluable for his knowledge of all things biological, being not only able to heal his injured brothers, but also to work on creating biological agents that could possibly stop the Tyranids themselves.

WATCH STATION TRYPHON

Located in the heart of the Orpheus Salient, Watch Station Tryphon has somehow been able to get an occasional Astropathic message through the shadow created by the presence of the Tyranids. It is currently unknown how they are able to do this. Some of the more Puritanical members of the Ordo Xenos feel that this is the Emperor's will being manifested through the Astropaths on station. Other more Radical Inquisitors feel that the Deathwatch have captured a piece of xenos technology and are keen to acquire this for themselves. Where the truth actually lies is unknown, as the Deathwatch are too busy fighting off the Tyranids to offer up an explanation, and the Inquisition is hesitant to order a full-scale investigation into the Watch Station while it remains as one of the only means of contact with the Orpheus Salient.

THE DEATHWATCH

Within the hallowed halls of Watch Fortress Erioch, the prayers (or at least the frantic messages relayed from Watch Station Tryphon) have been heard. The Deathwatch have taken notice of the rapidly deteriorating situation within the Orpheus Salient. Kill-teams are dispatched with regularity to some of the most brutal and violent warzones to gather more intelligence on this new threat. Often these Kill-teams are led by members who were drawn from the Ultramarines Chapter due to their past experience with the Tyranids. On rare occasions, these Battle-Brothers are in fact veterans of the Battle for Macragge from the First Tyranic War. By deploying these men into such brutally hostile areas, the Ordo Xenos can ensure that the information they receive is of the highest quality and the utmost importance. In the highest ranks of the Deathwatch, the Orpheus Salient is being watched with a very close eye, as Inquisitor Carmillus knows the absolute terror and destruction the xenos abominations of the Tyranids can inflict should they ever break free of their current area.

Those Kill-teams that are not specifically tasked with the defence of an obviously endangered planet are often sent into the Orpheus Salient on Search-and-Destroy missions to root out any hint of Lictor infestation. These Kill-teams are usually of a more blended grouping, often containing a Librarian to help find these dangerous creatures. One of the more notable engagements of the Deathwatch happened on the planet Terrien. There, a Kill-team was assigned to find evidence of, and if found destroy, a Lictor that had been rumoured to be amongst the lower levels of the hive. For thirty-two days straight, the Battle-Brothers hunted the beast throughout the underhive until, on the thirty-third day, they cornered the beast in an old waste-processing facility. There, they found themselves in a dank and moist environment that played havoc with their power armour's auto-senses. For another full day, the Battle-Brothers and the beast found themselves playing a very deadly game of hide-and-seek. It wasn't until Brother-Librarian Alistayr of the Storm Wardens Chapter forced the creature from its hiding spot with a vicious psychic assault that the Kill-team was able to finally vanquish the foe.

HIVE FLEET DAGON

From the moment that Lord Militant Tetrarchus named it, there has been controversy as to whether Hive Fleet Dagon was worthy of this designation. Certain members of the Administratum, including some associated with the Crusade, feel that the incursion is a splinter tendrill from Hive Fleet Behemoth. They argue that the designation may be seen as a ploy to draw extra support for the Crusade. More conservative elements, including leaders of several Adeptus Astartes chapters, are concerned that this threat is the leading edge of an entirely new Tyranid invasion. Several of the Lord Militant's advisors have urged him to withdraw the naming, but he has not conceded to these requests.

MORPHOLOGY

The first noticeable difference between these invaders and those of Hive Fleet Behemoth is that of colouration. Those xenos belonging to Hive Fleet Behemoth had a blackened carapace that faded to a deep blue in places. In contrast, the xenos that have been seen in the Jericho Reach generally have a carapace that is a mid blue, which shades to dark grey. Similarly, the exposed flesh of the xenos in Hive Fleet Behemoth tended towards a shade of blood red, while these specimens are generally seen in darker shades of red that edge towards purple. Members of the Divisionis Biologis have been unable to identify the reasons for this variation. The hues are remarkably consistent throughout the hive fleet, so these adaptations are unlikely to grant camouflage on any particular world. Rather, they are thought to be a



THE SHADOW IN THE WARP

Most of the organisms in a Tyranid swarm are non-sapient with an intelligence focused solely on fulfilling their instinctive behaviour. This limitation is overcome by the presence of the species' powerful psychic link, known as the Hive Mind. A constant two-way communication between the Hive Mind and the lesser organisms allows for tactical control and information gathering. The massive hive ships are a primary source of these broadcasts, though some other organisms, including Hive Tyrants, Broodlords, and Tyranid Warriors, may also function as nodes to coordinate swarms of smaller Tyranids.

This control requires a phenomenal amount of psychic activity through a region, which some scholars suggest is the root cause for the so-called Shadow in the Warp. Whatever the reason, the Tyranids' arrival heralds a blanket of psychic static that scratches at the mind. Normal citizens experience uneasiness and terrible nightmares, while psykers and any with a sensitivity to the Warp may be afflicted with severe headaches, uncontrollable screaming, bleeding eyes and even unconsciousness. The Shadow blocks most astropathic signals, complicates Warp travel, and may disrupt other psychic phenomena. At the Game Master's discretion, psykers may face a penalty of -10 to -50 for any Focus Power attempts when under the Shadow in the Warp. This penalty also applies to any Navigation (Warp) Tests undertaken by Navigators.

characteristic of the source genetic materials of the fleets.

Morphologically, the comparable biomorph strains are similar, but not identical with those of Hive Fleet Behemoth. Comparable strains show different placement and structures of their bony armour plates. In some cases, these changes have been substantial enough that defenders have incorrectly identified different biomorph strains. This was particularly true with the head crests of the Tyranid Warrior strains. Those on the specimens within the Jericho Reach are substantially more pronounced than the ones which characterised these strains on Ultramar.

The Genestealer strains identified on infiltrated planets have shown variants that were not frequently observed during the battles with Hive Fleet Behemoth. Specimens with feeder tendrils have been a comparatively common sight. These closely resemble examples which were once believed to have come from the moons of Ymgarl. In contrast, few field reports have indicated the presence of large talons on any of the Genestealer specimens defeated to date. Some of the specimens have also indicated colouration changes that may be suited to better blend in with patterns used in Imperial architecture. The Adeptus Mechanicus have not clarified if these variations are due to a genetic predilection of Hive Fleet Dagon or simply a situational adaptation made as these xenos breed.

Spore Mines have been dropped from orbit and fired into defensive outposts by living artillery pieces. Anecdotal reports of the specimens seen during the Orpheus Salient's battles suggest that they have been exceptionally effective at

piercing defences. Samples recovered from damaged Imperial armour indicate that these utilise an exceptionally potent bio-acid. Notably, the enzymes and catalysts that have been identified are not consistent with anything that was observed during the advance of Hive Fleet Behemoth. Veterans of the wars with Hive Fleet Behemoth have posited that these may be an adaptation derived specifically to penetrate the ceramite armour used by the Adeptus Astartes.

Many Magos Biologis of the Adeptus Mechanicus in the Crusade believe it is premature to make analyses of the larger Tyranid creatures until the Crusade has more experience with this threat. Initial reports suggest that some of these specimens may be larger, incorporating additional armour and a greater variety of natural weaponry than previously observed. However, many of these reports are fragmentary, largely due to a low survival rate among observers. Preliminary analysis suggests that some of these strains, particularly the Carnifex, may have incorporated genetic material obtained by Hive Fleet Behemoth. Some Tech-Priests have argued that this could be a sign that this fleet is derived from a tendrill of Behemoth. Others have countered that this supports their theories regarding transmission of genetic data between different hive fleets. If their theory concerning genetic transmission is correct, additional adaptations may soon be observed, as further worlds are lost to the swarm.

Variations have also been seen among the armaments used by the various Tyranid organisms. The specimens involved in this assault have strongly favoured the use of the weapons designated as fleshborers. Fewer examples of devourers and spinefists have been seen during Termagant assaults than previous reports would have suggested. Similarly, Gargoyles

strains seem to favour fleshborers over the previously characteristic bio-plasma attacks. The living 'ammunition' of these fleshborers also seems markedly different than specimens recovered from the battles in Ultima Segmentum. While effectively comparable, these specimens have a thicker outer shell and an enlarged boring proboscis. Data compiled by field surgeons has produced debate among the Crusade's Tech-Priests, but no conclusions regarding whether or not these weapon variations are more effective.

SCOPE

Based upon the time stamps of various incident reports, Hive Fleet Dagon has no fewer than three subfleets. Reports of historical Tyranid strategies suggest that a hive ship rarely leaves a system prior to completing the assimilation and destruction of all planets within that system. As there are large-scale attacks currently in progress on no fewer than nine systems, Crusade tacticians, including the Lord Militant, have been unable to reconcile this broad battlefield with the notion of a limited engagement by a Tyranid splinter fleet.

Each of these subfleets requires a separate hive ship to coordinate its Hive Mind. In order to ultimately defeat the Tyranid attack, each subfleet must be eliminated, so that the Hive Mind throughout the Reach may be compromised. Until that happens, surviving hive ships could travel to a contested system, throwing their added might into a battle. Coordinating the battle plan to simultaneously defeat all of these ships may be impossible while dealing with the limitations of astrotelepathic messaging under the shadow of the Warp.

Classification: Achilus Orpheus Code Citrine

Date: 945814.M41

Author: Magos Vatsoon, Divisionis Biologis

Subject: Xenos physiology and physiognomy

Recipient: Lord Militant Tetrarchus

We have begun analyses of the samples presented and have prepared this preliminary report for your review, with the blessings of the Omnissiah. To corroborate these samples, additional materials from those battles fought against Hive Fleet Behemoth have been requested. Those requests were denied, though extensive records were provided. Unfortunately, some of those records were fragmentary. This was further complicated by our inability to replicate some of the analyses performed in compiling those records due to limitations of the resources at hand.

In spite of these challenges, we have conducted scans from the genetic materials received. These scans have been frustratingly inconclusive. More variation than would normally be expected has been seen between samples from what were identified as comparable biomorphs, even within samples taken from assaults on the same system. This may be due to contamination introduced during collection, or it could be a consequence of substantial variation between different structures of a hybrid host organism. These samples have also exhibited significant genetic drift from the incomplete data in the records of Hive Fleet Behemoth. This differentiation may be a consequence of adaptation and incorporation of genetic materials absorbed as these vessels continued their journey through the galaxy. However, it may also be an indication of a substantial difference at the common source. The rate and nature of changes indicated leave us limited in the degree to which we can confirm the relatedness of these different organisms.

At this time, scouting reports have not provided the Crusade's command elements with information to clearly define the scope of Hive Fleet Dagon. The Orpheus Salient has met the leading edge of Tyranid incursion, and there have been no successful missions to penetrate and monitor deeper into the advance. Numerous vessels have been sacrificed in the effort to determine if these initial attacks represent the entirety of the Tyranid forces.

PLANETARY DEVASTATION

"Though never a verdant world, the lifeless ball of rock that we discovered was unrecognizable as Tyran Primus. The creatures that did this are a threat to the galaxy and must be exterminated by the light of the God-Emperor."

—Inquisitor Kryptman, concluding his report on the ruins of Tyran Primus

The Tyranid threat is unprecedented in its ability to transform a planet thriving with nature's bounty into a barren orb of lifeless rock. While this process occurs at a voracious pace, there are several characteristic stages required before the xenos can complete the task. The Deathwatch forces at Watch Fortress Erioch possess significant lore detailing the course of Tyranid devastation, along with numerous theories and strategies to attempt to avert it.

Reconnaissance

The earliest stages of a Tyranid infection are best characterised by their subtlety. At this stage, the xenos evaluate the planet's viability for attack and begin to infect the native life forms. The three species most active during this stage are Vanguard dronships, Lictors, and Genestealers. These biomorphs share two critical characteristics for identifying new target planets and performing infiltrations: stealth and independence.

All of the organisms involved have physiological abilities that are focused upon concealment. These talents are exploited to the utmost, so that they can initially observe the native environment safely. As there are often a very limited number of Tyranids involved at this stage, these specimens exhibit an uncharacteristic degree of self-preservation. The creatures are clearly aware that they must survive and propagate before the invasion may proceed.

These specimens are distinctive from most of the Tyranid horrors in that they are also capable of stable independent action. The vast majority of known Tyranid organisms are incapable of coordinated activity when separated from the psychic emanations of the Hive Mind. As these creatures must be capable of acting when light-years distant from the swarm, they manifest a greater degree of intelligence and animal cunning than would otherwise be expected. This becomes most evident in the often unexpected subtlety of their plans.

Vanguard dronships depend upon speed, their relatively small size, and their reduced psychic and propulsion signatures to enable them to quietly scout out new systems. In many cases, a Vanguard dronship will deposit a portion of its cargo onto the surface of a likely planet, and then quickly leave the system to scout out targets in other systems. As their time in the system is both brief and stealthy, Imperial

HIVE SHIPS

While little is definitively known of Tyranid vessels, most analysts agree that within a given Tyranid fleet there is a single mature hive ship which serves to coordinate the Hive Mind. It is also theorised that many of the hive ship's escort vessels may be immature specimens of the same biomorph. The substantial morphological differences and the challenges involved in obtaining a comprehensive genetic sampling leave this fact debated amongst Tech-Priests of the Divisionis Biologis.

However, there is limited evidence to support this theory. In three battles where the hive ship was destroyed, elements of the Tyranid fleets split off from the battle and fled, rather than reverting to an animalistic and uncoordinated assault. Some members of the Adeptus Mechanicus have theorised that the death of a Hive Mind node may catalyse the rapid maturation of other Hive Mind nodes in the system. This may turn a bravely fought victory into a longer term problem as additional smaller fleets proceed to attack more vulnerable targets.

agencies may remain completely unaware of the foreboding intrusion. In those cases when a dronship is identified, it must immediately be considered the highest priority target in the system, as destroying it before it can deploy its cargo may significantly delay any Tyranid intrusion.

Lictors are masters of unseen reconnaissance. After insertion from a dronship, these xenos immediately begin scouting the wilds of the newly identified planet. Using their feeder tendrils, they analyse the atmosphere, mineral availability, and the characteristics of all life forms. In addition, these fierce predators also target isolated animals and even sapiens to absorb their memories as they devour them. This information is compiled and sent back to the Hive Mind as soon as a node within range is available. Any Lictor that can be eliminated prior to the start of a full Tyranid invasion can substantially slow the attack, as the invading xenos are less optimised for the planet's ecosystem.

Genestealers are the most insidious of these early invaders. As they scout out the planet, they also infect the planet's fauna with Tyranid genetic material. The corruption of the planet's native gene-code eventually results in hybrid creatures that are subject to the will of a Broodlord or other representative of the Tyranid Hive Mind. It is also believed that Genestealers may use their cunning and stealth to infiltrate planets without the aid of a dronship. Specimens have been found on abandoned space hulks and hidden among the cargo holds of Warp-capable vessels. These creatures must be eliminated with extreme prejudice, before they establish a breeding nest and a community of dedicated hybrid organisms.

Once Tyranid species have established a toehold on a planet, their strategy soon changes. Successful integration of the planet's wildlife triggers these infiltrators to emit a psychic call to the swarm. This call draws a fleet of vessels, including a hive ship to the system. The arrival of the hive ship and its escorts heralds the next phase of the invasion.

Infestation

The arrival of the hive ship and its escort vessels heralds the next stage of a Tyranid system invasion. As a powerful node of the Hive Mind, the hive ship disrupts the Warp in a radius of several light years. By the time one of these massive voidfaring creatures has arrived, it is often too late for a planet to send out an astropathic cry for help. Even vessels sent to defend a system under threat of Tyranid attack may be unable to exit the Immaterium in a system that has come under the influence of the Shadow in the Warp.

Once the hive ship has come into range of a target planet, it immediately begins to launch a rain of mycetic spores into the atmosphere and towards the planet's surface. Some of these pods are filled with microbial life. These hostile micro-organisms immediately begin to change the planet's atmosphere, oceans, soil, flora, and fauna. Complex organic molecules are broken down and recreated in formats that are best suited for absorption by the swarm.

Other spores bear more complex Tyranid creatures. Some of these, including the various strains of Gaunts and Gargoyles, immediately begin preparing for the assaults that are to come. Other strains begin to burrow deeper into the planet's crust. These may include Mawlocs and Trygons. As these creatures burrow, they plant the spores that can later grow into Capillary Towers. Other organisms may use the tunnels these massive forms create to access a planet's mineral wealth and subterranean life in the shelter of the tunnels.

At the same time that this rain of devastation begins, those Genestealers and Lictors which have already infested the planet reveal themselves. Using the knowledge that they have obtained and the hybrid fauna they have spawned, these creatures sow confusion through the ranks of the defenders. By selectively targeting officers and communications hubs, the infiltrators can effectively delay or even compromise a planet's defences.

During this phase of the encroachment, a planet's defenders must take rapid and decisive action or all hope may be lost. Cutting the attack off at its source is the optimal solution. If the hive ship can be destroyed, the remainder of the Tyranid fleet may lose its cohesion, falling into confusion. This presents the defenders with an opportunity to divide and conquer the remaining forces.

While less effective, destroying mycetic spores as they fall to the planet may also help the cause. Even the massive bulk of a hive ship has a limit to its resources. Each spore destroyed may mean greatly fewer organisms to face on the ground. The Tyranid hive mind possesses the ability to make a tactical assessment and modify its strategy. On admittedly rare occasions, a fleet facing unexpectedly stiff resistance may break off the assault and retreat to attack an alternative target.

Countermeasures against Genestealers and their ilk are crucial to this stage. With astrotelepathy restricted, any additional loss of communications on the planet could quickly doom the defenders. Extensive security measures must be taken to preserve the integrity of all communication and command centres.

++Incoming Transmission++

Sender: Lt. Col Harland Oberon, Tauxian 7th, Commanding

Recipient: General Mikal Curas

General Curas,

Upon landing on this planet, I immediately ordered eight Sentinel patrols to begin concentric overlapping sweeps of the area where the last team was located. We viewed no trace of the previous group at their landing site, and indeed the very landscape of the planet had changed drastically since we were here last. After approximately one hour, ship's time, my communications officer received a fragmentary message from Sergeant Jerell. Sergeant Jerell is one of my best men and not known to panic under heavy enemy fire, and as such, I am responding to his call with dire urgency. I beg of you sir, to call in the Adeptus Astartes for this. Once you hear the piece of message at time index 0:49 you will understand. My men and I will attempt to locate Sergeant Jerell's squad and confirm that which I most fear. I, and every man under my command, will fight to our last breath in the hope of still being alive to provide the Adeptus Astartes and yourself with solid intelligence.

May the God-Emperor protect us,
Lt. Col Harland Oberon
Tauxian 7th Tithe Guard

++Begin Playback++

...Bring all weapons to bear...Tyranid vessels closing... God-Emperor protect us...

+++indistinct vox noise for 28.3 seconds...+++

+++Message ends abruptly with screaming+++

Assault

Once the Tyranid forces have established a foothold on the planet's surface, they quickly begin the process of eliminating any resistance. Endless swarms of the smaller breeds—including Gaunts, Gargoyles, and Genestealers—rampage through the skies, across the land, and under the oceans. Interspersed with these creatures, the larger biomorphs—including Carnifexes, Tyrannofexes, and even Hierophant bio-titans—accompany their smaller brethren, sowing endless destruction across the planet. These varied breeds come together in large hordes, that sweep forward to create battlefronts that may be hundreds of kilometres in length.

Behind the battlefront, Capillary Towers, many thousands of metres in height, burst forth from the planet's crust. These towers consolidate the biomass that the swarm has already absorbed, using it to breed additional organisms to assist in the assault.

While the towers may appear to be a Tyranid plant analogue, they are no less aggressive than the more mobile forms. Capillary Towers extend tendrils throughout the planet that can absorb indigenous species—both plants and any small or slower moving organisms. As they do this, the towers also filter the planet's atmosphere, absorbing the biomass of microbes and small flying creatures.

Along the battlefield, Termagants use their ranged weapons to lay waste to opposition, while Hormagaunts boldly engage any opposition in close combat. These xenos, along with other variants of the Gaunt genus, may be found in swarms of hundreds coordinated by Tyranid Warriors. In those instances when sheer numbers prove inadequate to overcome the planet's defences, the Hive Mind may direct larger strains to assist in the battles. For those planets with extensive defences, the swarm may grow exceptionally large creatures. Specimens of the Dominatrix and the Hierophant strains have been observed which are comparable in size and strength to Imperial Titans.

In cases when a defensive point seems insurmountable, the Hive Mind is quick to adapt its strategy. In many cases, Raveners and Trygons may be used to burrow under defenders, attacking from behind or beneath enemy lines. In other cases, Shrikes or Harpies may make strafing runs from above. While the swarm will readily sacrifice thousands of biomorphs to take a single metre of ground, it will not waste them needlessly. Alternative strategies are consistently employed, as the Tyranids are clear masters of adaptation.

It is worth noting that the battlefield swarms that cross the planet's surface do not typically devour the planet's defenders. Rather, they leave a swathe of refuse in their wake to be consumed by the next wave of organisms. This carpet of the dead may, of course, also include those Tyranid organisms that the defenders have managed to overcome. Their deaths hold little meaning to the Hive Mind. They have served their purpose, and will serve the swarm once more after their corpses are devoured.

In the skies over the planet, Gargoyles and Harpies swarm in numbers large enough to block out the light of the system's star. While they may assist in land-based battles, they also serve two additional purposes. Like the Capillary Towers, these flying organisms devour the biomass of the skies, returning it to the Tyranid swarm upon their deaths. They also serve to block out the sunlight from any photosynthetic life. Over time, this can have an effect on the planet's atmosphere and climate as plant life is unable to synthesise oxygen.

The only effective recourse at this stage of the invasion is all out war. By this stage, the invading forces have firmly established a presence on the target planet. Eliminating the hive ship would not avert the damage done. Further, depending upon the numbers and types of creatures on the surface, the Hive Mind might still persevere. Even if the Hive Mind were overcome and the majority of the xenos were eliminated, the battles to cleanse the planet completely could continue for millennia. The Tyranid taint extends to the microbial level, and all of these xenos are strongly resistant to biological and chemical toxins. Even the tiniest organism could have the potential to spawn more dangerous organisms given time and opportunity.

THE REBIRTH VESSEL

Several reports from the Imperial Navy in the Jericho Reach have indicated a smaller, seemingly unique voidfaring creature that has been observed travelling in the shadow of a hive ship in Hive Fleet Dagon. While still a massive creature, the reports indicate that it is no larger than a frigate-class Imperial craft. Holopicts that have been obtained and analyzed show no obvious external armaments. Oddly, none of the encounter reports have identified this vessel (or vessels) as directly involved in the battles.

In spite of this, members of the Ordo Xenos have targeted this vessel for further analysis because of two key factors. The first is that psykers have observed an unusual pattern of emanations from this vessel. Reports and divinations suggest that it shows a far lower level of communication with the hive ship than most other creatures in the fleet. Instead, the creature seems to receive an increased level of traffic from the surface of a targeted planet. This indicates that it may exhibit a greater level of independence than would otherwise be expected. The second factor is that this vessel has been observed to launch smaller than usual Mycetic Spores to the planet's surface. These spore launches have preceded the appearance of several organisms believed to be field commanders of the Tyranid assault force. In multiple instances, after these vessels deployed spores, organisms that had previously been identified as slain were seen on the battlefield once more.

Several theorists now suggest that this creature may be storing and growing specialized Tyranid creatures. It is feared that the psychic traffic it receives are the memories and adaptations of specific organisms. If this is the case, eliminating the rebirth vessel might prevent these patterns from reappearing. It is feared that as long as it is allowed to survive, some of the more successful battlefield leaders of Hive Fleet Dagon may be effectively immortal.

Subjugation

Even as the more militant biomorphs continue to battle the planet's defenders, others begin sweeping up behind them, collecting all available biomass. Some of the substrates collected are used to generate additional Tyranid creatures. In this manner, the planet's natural resources are turned against it, providing additional tools for the swarm. The majority, however, is set aside to feed the hive ships orbiting the planet. Those massive creatures generally delay their feeding until after the planet has been secured.

Near the battlefield, untold thousands of maggot-like Rippers are deployed from the sky to form massive, tightly packed swarms. With fang-filled jaws, they devour every organic substance they can find—living or dead. Once these abominations have eaten all they can, they slowly drag their bloated bodies towards digestive pools formed by the Capillary Towers. Rather than spewing the devoured biomass into the pools, the Rippers hurl themselves in, to be digested along with all that they devoured. New Rippers are continuously created to propagate the cycle of gluttony.

As the planet's surface is depleted, similar biomorphs deplete all of the life in the oceans and within the planet's crust. Eel-like Rippers swarm through the oceans in massive swarms devouring all of the native sealife. Burrowing variants expand the tunnels dug by Trygons and Ravens, consuming subterranean fungus, root systems, and any burrowing fauna. Mineral reserves are also depleted, particularly rare ores that may be incorporated into the exoskeletons of the various biomorphs.

Massive Capillary Towers develop in even the deepest parts of the planet's oceans. These towers, which may stretch several kilometres up through the sea, are capable of withstanding the crushing pressures of the depths and thriving in even the coldest of waters. As they grow, they may even modify the planet's tidal flow as their powerful metabolic filtration systems draw in all biomass.

The only effective recourse at this stage is Exterminatus. Planets which have been subdued are no longer salvageable. The only hope for the Imperium is to destroy the feeding system before the biomass can be used to feed the fleet for further attacks. The one positive aspect is that at this stage, the Tyranid fleet may have expended their resources in preparation for the gluttony they expect as the planet's biomass is absorbed. Attacking the voidfaring biomorphs and annihilating the planet may be easier than it would have been at an earlier stage of the invasion.

AVALOS

A Deathwatch Kill-team recently played a vital role in preventing a Tyranid invasion of Avalos, a world previously secured by the Orpheus Salient. Genestealers had deeply infiltrated the planet and initiated a rebellion against the Imperial Governor. The Kill-team was sent in to investigate an Inquisitor who had failed to report to his superiors. Unfortunately, the Inquisitor was slain by a Broodlord prior to their arrival.

Shortly after that grisly discovery, a hive ship with a substantial escort arrived. The timely intervention of a small Imperial Fleet, led by the *Emperor's Wrath*, provided the Kill-team with a means to lead a boarding action against the hive ship. To the honour of the Primarchs and the Emperor, the Kill-team carried the day and managed to destroy the vessel's synapse chamber. This desperate act threw the invasion into disarray.

While the invasion was halted, countless xenos did make landfall. The clean-up may take generations to complete, and still might draw another hive ship to the planet. Further Deathwatch actions will be necessary to assist in the process of eradicating the xenos intrusion.



Absorption

As the last of the system's defenders fall, the Capillary Towers begin to feed biomass back to the hive ship and its escorts. The massive living vessels extend tendrils through the atmosphere which make contact with the Capillary Towers, as they grow to pierce the edges of the atmosphere. Biomass is drawn up the towers, through a combination of massive pumping organs and suction.

Once the last of the defenders have fallen, the surviving creatures of the Tyranid hordes hurl themselves into the digestive pools near the Capillary Towers. Their bodies are broken down and devoured so that the biomass may be returned to the fleet to be recycled into new creatures for future conquests. Along with their biomass, their memories, genetic innovations, and the gene patterns of all of the planet's life forms are also absorbed.

After the last vestiges of life have been absorbed, the Capillary Towers begin to absorb the planet's water systems. All of these liquids are transferred into the voidfaring organisms, some of which may grow dramatically in size as their storage vesicles expand to accommodate the newfound resources. As this happens, many of the Capillary Towers are also broken down so that their biomass may be reabsorbed.

Finally, the planet's atmosphere, and then the last few massive Capillary Towers are absorbed into hive ships. Some Magos Biologis theorise that this may require even more massive voidfaring Tyranids than those previously identified. Others postulate that the ships use previously unseen techniques to compress the atmosphere into a solid state. Though the precise mechanism is unknown to the Imperium, the outcome is certain: nothing is left behind but a barren, airless rock of little value.

As it travels between systems, the Hive Mind analyses the new genetic patterns it has identified. Some of these may be used to develop new biomorphs. Of course, these new strains may not appear immediately. The Hive Mind may save them for deployment at a time when a new strategy is required. Clearly, adaptation is a key factor in the Tyranids' long-term success and survival.

By this point, the battle is well and truly lost. Any defenders who arrive are far too late to save the planet. Their only possible hope is to spread word to neighbouring systems, in the hopes that they might arrive before the Tyranid threat. Attacking the voidfaring biomorphs immediately after they have fed is to attack them at the height of their power.

THE FIRST ENCOUNTER

WITH HIVE FLEET DAGON

The earliest encounters with what would eventually be named Hive Fleet Dagon went almost entirely unnoticed by the Crusade High Command. The first Tyranid biomorphs encountered were Genestealer Hybrids, and the members of the planet's Enforcers that destroyed them thought them to be merely hideously deformed mutants. It wasn't until an encounter with a full-scale infestation on the death-world of Herisor that word of a new xenos threat reached the ears of the leadership of the Crusade.

During the early stages of the Achilles Crusade, General Curas pushed his troops to the far ends of the Reach. Along their push, they ran into many different types of worlds. One of the most interesting was the planet of Herisor. From orbital surveys Imperial assayers were able to see that the planet had a breathable atmosphere, even though they could find no trace of vegetation. In fact there appeared to be no life at all on the planet's surface. General Curas ordered a regiment of Iaxian Tithe Guard down to Herisor's surface to assist the Imperial assayers in determining whether or not the planet held any value to the Crusade. If the world lacked plant life, then perhaps it was rich in ores that could be turned into weapons of war to help resupply the Crusade, or possibly it could act as a forward supply depot for other Salients.

Upon landing, the assayers were shocked to find that not only was the planet rich in ore, but it also contained vast underground reservoirs of promethium gases. The planet's crust was easily drillable, and this seemed to be a find of the greatest magnitude. Here was a planet that was completely devoid of life, and was overflowing with resources that would prove invaluable to the Crusade in future years. General Curas immediately ordered a group of pioneers, with assistance from the Adeptus Mechanicus, to begin construction of a settlement that was expected to produce these resources within a year's time. Battlegroup Argo then moved off to prosecute the Crusade further.

THE SCINTILLAN 84TH GRENADIERS

The Scintillan 84th are General Derian Arkelius' personal regiment of Imperial Guard. These soldiers are highly trained, modelled after the elite Imperial Guard Stormtroopers. The Guardsmen, culled from the best and brightest of Scintilla's hive nobility, are outfitted to the man with full Stormtrooper Carapace Armour and the powerful Hellgun. It is not uncommon to find at least one member of each squad equipped with a grenade launcher or some other form of heavy weaponry. Having seen minimal action during the early stages of the Crusade, they were wholly unprepared for the current situation that has befallen them on Hethgard (see pages 343-344 in the **DEATHWATCH** Rulebook). Even so, they fight on determined, due in no small part to their field commander Colonel Titus Rone.

While General Arkelius is a master strategist and a decent combatant, Colonel Rone is the complete reverse. He knows what strategies will work to accomplish certain tasks, but he is an unsurpassed leader of men when it is time to get down to the bones of combat. His men adore him, his peers respect him, and his superiors fear him. They feel that one day, this man who leads the common trooper so well will come to take their position from them. He currently has an uneasy working relationship with General Arkelius due to an ancient family pact that bonded the Rone noble family to the much higher ranked Arkelius family.

Slightly over a year later, Battlegroup Argo returned to Herisor to find the landscape completely changed, and no sign of the pioneers or the members of the Adeptus Mechanicus. Once again, the Iaxian Tithe Guard were sent down to the surface to investigate what happened. Once they had made planetfall, the men who had been there previously were stunned to find that in place of a barren wasteland was now a mighty tundra that stretched as far as the eye could see. The commander of the Tithe Guard sent out scout patrols in all directions to attempt to find some trace of the missing group. For the first hour or so, all was normal. No sign of the previous landing group, but nothing to indicate what happened to them. That's when all communication was lost, except for one broken transmission. The commander of the Iaxians had his communication officer relay a message to the fleet in orbit, along with his plans for dealing with this new menace on the planet's surface. Receiving an acknowledgment from command, he proceeded to carry out his mission.

The Iaxians were never heard from again.

THE DEATHWATCH ARRIVE

After receiving the foreboding message from the Iaxian 7th, General Curas deployed Battlegroup Cerberus, under the command of Lord Admiral Arkelius back through the Warp shadows. Her task was to send a message directly to Lord Militant Tetrarchus and any officer of the Adeptus Astartes regarding this new and terrible threat. Cerberus immediately departed back towards the Iron Collar at all possible speed.



The ship stopped once, for their Navigator to realign himself with the Astronomicon, and during this brief stopover they encountered the Strike Cruiser *Bellaron*. Seeing it was a Space Marine ship, Admiral Arkelius transmitted the message to them, then proceeded on towards her original goal. What she did not realise was that the Strike Cruiser *Bellaron* was currently under extended secondment to the Ordo Xenos to transport the Deathwatch to new locations within the Acheros Salient. Hearing the message, Inquisitor Ghent had the Captain of the vessel come to a new heading. The Deathwatch headed directly to Herisor. This new information had to be confirmed with all possible speed. If the Tyranids had indeed come to the Jericho Reach, then there were now more pressing matters to deal with than the recent surges in Tau activity around the Black Reef.

When the Deathwatch arrived at Herisor, they deployed in numbers more akin to a typical Codex Astartes planetary siege than the usual Kill-team deployment. More than fifty Deathwatch Space Marines deployed to the surface that day. They fought a campaign that lasted nearly six months, until they were convinced that the menace was ended. To be certain, Inquisitor Ghent had the planet declared a death-world to ward off any who would be greedy enough to attempt harvesting the natural resources of the planet. From the original fifty Space Marines that deployed at the beginning, only twenty made it back alive.

At the same time that the Deathwatch were attacking the Tyranid force on Herisor, word of this new threat had reached Lord Militant Tetrarchus. He quickly requested the Battle-Barge *Blood Sword* to investigate where these creatures had come from. By tracing a line amongst the stable Warp routes, the Navigators aboard the *Blood Sword* came upon what may have been the first planet infected by the Tyranid swarm within the Jericho Reach. It took three long months of Warp travel before the Adeptus Astartes of the *Blood Sword* were able to set foot on the planet that was once known as Zanatov's Harbour.

Zanatov's Harbour

Zanatov's Harbour was named for the legendary Rogue Trader Corsair-Captain Zanatov. This planet was one he frequented on his trade runs coming in from the Eastern Fringe of the galaxy. At one point it boasted excellent ship repair facilities, and the lack of contact with the Imperium made an excellent place for smugglers and other members of the so-called "Cold Trade" to meet up and swap goods. This all changed at the end of 812.M41. Early reports recovered after the fact state that many people saw what they believed to be a meteor shower in the night sky. No one thought much of it, as a meteor shower is often a good omen for ship's captains. Slowly the reports began to filter in. These were no mere meteorites that had hit the ground, but instead housed a more sinister cargo of Tyranid bio-organisms. The merchants and crew on the surface put up a decent fight, but were utterly outmatched by the lethal killing machines. Some managed to make their way to their ships, but found that larger organisms were floating through the void, firing caustic projectiles of a biological nature. None survived the onslaught of the ravenous beasts. All that were on planet were devoured, their genetic patterns added to the primordial soup that comprises Hive Fleet Dagon's gene pool. Ships in orbit were left abandoned. Most had had their hulls ruptured

RESEARCH STATION EPSILON

Constructed in the ruins of Treyen's Imperial Guard Outpost, this heavily fortified building represents what could be the greatest threat to the Tyranid Hive Fleet. This building houses the combined works of the Adeptus Mechanicus and the Deathwatch Apothecaries in regards to Hive Fleet Dagon. Numerous technological devices litter the floors of the Mechanicus wing, all of them constructed to combat the Tyranids. Within the Deathwatch area of the compound, vast arrays of test-tubes and beakers hold genetic samples from every world where the Deathwatch have encountered the Tyranids. The planet Treyen was itself a goldmine of usable data after the battle, as this was the first instance of the Deathwatch being able to collect a sample from the largest Tyranid bioforms without the threat of the samples being corrupted on the way to the lab. Five Apothecaries work around the clock in an attempt to better understand how the Tyranids are created, so that they can one day understand how to end them.

in hundreds of places by Tyranid bio-spores attaching to the hull and eating their way inside. Any ships not completely wrecked were now floating abattoirs, a sickening testament to the utter brutality of a Tyranid swarm on the warpath.

So it was that Brother-Captain Kristoff and his company of Templars of Blood made their way to this graveyard of a planet. They expected to have to use the Battle-Barge's bombardment cannons to clear the way of Tyranid vessels, and then deploy Thunderhawk Gunships, as they would not be able to get close enough to use Drop Pods. What they actually encountered was something far worse. When the *Blood Sword* translated back into realspace, it found nothing but a dead planet. Every bit of biological material had been stripped bare from the planet's surface. Setting down in their Thunderhawks, the Templars began a thorough search of the planet for any clue as to how the massive Hive Fleet had arrived in the Jericho Reach. Realizing that he could not take a full battle company off of the front lines, Brother-Captain Kristoff left behind a small contingent of his available Space Marines to continue the investigation. Currently, there has been no communication from the Space Marines left behind that day, but the commanders of the Orpheus Salient still hold out hope that some day there will be news that can help them turn the tide of this war.

THE TIDE BEGINS TO TURN

Backed into a corner by the ever encroaching swarm of Tyranids, the Imperial Guard began to retreat towards the Iron Collar. Lord Commissar Theren and General Arkelius pulled almost all of the Imperial Guardsmen that were not already engaged with the Tyranids back to the Feral World of Treyen. Here, they determined, was their line in the proverbial sand. They would fall back no further and they would either die to the man, or push the foul xenos back into the Warp from whence they came.

Treyen

A largely temperate world, Treyen's population is centred primarily in the Western Hemisphere. The last Imperial Census had the population at roughly 250,000 with an average technology level equivalent to that of a Bronze Age. The primary star within the system is entering into its last stages of life, and as such solar flares are beginning to spread a blanket of radiation around the planet. This has a nasty habit of causing long range vox transmissions to be unreliable at best, but it also seems to have an equal effect upon the communications of the Tyranids on planet. Treyen was chosen as a suitable battleground by the leaders of the Orpheus Salient for these specific peculiarities.

When the Crusade first encountered the planet Treyen, it was found that the natives there worshipped their sun as a God. While this deity provided them with warmth, he could also bring terrible vengeance upon them when he was angered. The Ecclesiarchy had little trouble in slightly altering the perceptions of the natives so that the God-Emperor of Mankind was seen in the same light as their false sun god. He would provide them with warmth, shelter, food, and protection, but if they ever angered Him or his chosen representative, he would strike down upon them with a furious anger the likes of which they had never seen before. While the Departamento Munitorum was attempting to calculate what the planets tithe grading would be, it was discovered by an adventurous group of Imperial Guardsmen that the large native beasts had a unique pelt that, when skinned, had the ability to change colouration with the lighting. With this discovery, the planets primary export was quickly changed from baseline foodstuffs to luxury goods. Rumour has it that General Derian Arkelius himself has his Crusade dress uniform made from the hide. No one has seen this uniform, but it would fit his public persona.

After classifying and settling the planet, a small defence force was left behind, mainly to hold off any Orks tempted to raid this deep into the Crusade's line. Much of their time on planet was spent with very little to do, as the native population was fairly tame and had nothing but love for the God-Emperor. Occasionally there would be a small uprising by one of the tribes that had been displaced when the Imperial Guard claimed certain land as their headquarters, but savages with swords and axes do very little against trained men with lasguns. At the beginning of 815.M41, the small garrison received a rather abrupt wake-up call. Lord Commissar Theren and Battlegroup Cerberus arrived in force to stand in the way of a new xenos threat that was approaching.

When Theren landed, he exited his lander quickly and set up a command post inside the Imperial Guard headquarters for himself and the rest of the Triumvirate. Immediate orders were given to begin erecting defensible positions. Swarms of Mechanicus servitors skittered off of the lander in his wake and began stripping the compound of all materials needed to enhance the base's defence. Over the next two weeks thirty-three full regiments of the Imperial Guard, almost the entirety of the Orpheus Salient complement, landed with the Scintillan 84th and General Derian Arkelius at their head. Artillery pieces were quickly placed in defensible positions. Sentinels and snipers were sent to reconnoitre the surrounding terrain. Lord Commissar Theren barricaded himself in his command post with General Arkelius in an attempt to find a way to effectively hold the line at Treyen. It wasn't until the fifteenth day that Theren received

THE TEMPLARS OF BLOOD

The Templars of Blood are a successor Chapter to the Blood Angels. Like their parent Chapter, they pride themselves on their ability to meet the enemy head-on. That is where the similarities end, however. The Templars have moulded themselves into a more balanced fighting force than their progenitors, as they do tend to carry a higher number of Tactical Squads than the Blood Angels. They also do not organise those that have fallen to the Black Rage into a Death Company. Those that lose the struggle with their inner darkness are left to fend for themselves in combat. When a Chaplain begins to notice the tell-tale glossy look in a Battle-Brother's eyes, he performs a Benediction in the name of Sanguinius and the Emperor before removing all of the Space Marine's Wargear, save for his knife and his power armour. Should the Battle-Brother survive the combat, his company commander is duty-bound to formally honour the Brother for his service in the name of the Primarch and the Emperor before executing him. Surprisingly, the number of victims who succumb to the Black Rage is shockingly low, something that has not escaped the watchful eyes of the Inquisition and the Blood Angels themselves. No one for sure knows how the Templars of Blood are able to shake off their curse. Their supporters, and the Blood Angels, prefer to think that it is through dedication to the Emperor and Sanguinius, coupled with an iron will. Their detractors, however, prefer to look for a dark secret that the Chapter may be hiding.

BROTHER-CAPTAIN KRISTOFF

Brother-Captain Kristoff is the Captain of the Third Company of the Templars of Blood. He has served his Chapter for many centuries, owing to his exceptional combat skills and the long lifespan granted him by his gene-seed. He is also a man who strongly believes in omens and portents, something that his Chaplain has tried to dissuade him of. Specifically, he feels that the number three holds special significance in the eyes of the God-Emperor. When he heard of Lord Militant Tetrarchus' plan (a three-pronged assault) for expanding Imperial control within the Jericho Reach, he convinced his Chapter Master to allow him to take his battle company (the third) into the Reach. Another point of interest that drew him to the Reach was that the Reach itself was under the careful stewardship of the Deathwatch. Kristoff had previously served two full secondments with the Deathwatch, and is fully expecting to be pressed back into service for his third time. Until that day comes, he is content with taking his company into battle against the most terrible and vile xenos creatures the galaxy can throw at him.

three communications. The first was from the Lord Admiral Arkelius, saying that if the shadow being cast in the Warp was any indication, the Tyranid fleet was massive. The second came from the Dark Sons Chapter of Space Marines. The 1st company with its squads of Terminators would be arriving in three days. The third was from his fleet Astropath. The Tyranids would arrive in two days.

When the Tyranid fleet arrived, Lord Admiral Arkelius proved to any doubters exactly how she had achieved her position. Fully one-third of all Tyranid vessels were destroyed in the naval engagement above Treyen. Her fleet was badly damaged, but she was still able to order her picket ships in to provide close fire support for the upcoming battle. On the ground, despite the situation in orbit, the task ahead of the sixteen million Guardsmen seemed hopeless. What appeared to be a monsoon of living monstrosities began pouring out of the sky and wave upon wave of hungry xenos beasts rushed towards the Imperial battle lines. For twenty-four hours the entire planet of Treyen was a battlefield. Millions of Imperial Guard were killed, and even more were wounded.

Eighteen hours into the engagement, streaks of light came hurtling towards the planet's surface. Over the communication system came a message telling Lord Commissar Theren to order a full counter-assault in exactly one hour. Attached to the message were the authorization codes of the Deathwatch. Precisely one hour later, the Tyranid horde fell into absolute disarray, and Lord Commissar Theren sent planetwide orders to begin the counter-assault. Five hours later, Lord Commissar Theren met up with the Deathwatch Kill-teams that had been inserted on the planet via drop-pod. These Kill-teams had destroyed the largest Tyranid bioforms, thus disrupting the creatures' ability to communicate with one another. With no enemy leadership in place, the Imperial Guard were able to take advantage of the Tyranid's confusion and drive them back into an open area where the fleet in orbit could bombard the xenos.

When compiling his after action report, General Arkelius noted that if the Tyranids had continued engaging the fleet in orbit, it would have been impossible for the Deathwatch to get close enough to be successful. By committing to the all-out attack too early, the Tyranids had cost themselves the battle. When the Dark Sons arrived the next day, they were quickly able to hunt down and remove all obvious signs of Tyranid infestation. All three Imperial Guard commanders were acknowledged for their bravery and skill in handling what would normally have been an impossible situation. The one drawback was that the attacking Tyranid force had now splintered apart. One part moved towards Hethgard, and the other appeared to be heading for Tryphon. The Deathwatch are currently keeping a very close eye on Treyen, as they need to make sure that the planet is thoroughly cleansed.

THE BOLD DECISION

Fresh from their successful defense of Treyen, the Triumvirate decided that they would now have to make a gamble on their next move. The Tyranid infestations must be wiped clean from Jericho Reach, so as not to risk another splinter moving somewhere else and continuing the destruction. Lord Admiral Arkelius suggested that they concentrate their naval resources into one massive fleet and overwhelm the Tyranids at every

encounter. Her brother suggested luring the xenos to either an uninhabited or sparsely habited world and just bombard them from orbit. Lord Commissar Theren had another idea. Battlegroup Cerberus would swing coreward and skirt the edges of the Orpheus Salient until they had reached the end of the push. At this point they would turn about and begin to give chase after the trailing edges of the Hive Fleet. Battlegroup Daedalus would move rimward and skirt the other edge of the Salient. They would then hold position until they received acknowledgment that Battlegroup Cerberus were in place. At this point, the two fleets would converge on the Tyranids and make them pay for the suffering that they had caused the Imperial Crusade. Only time will tell if their plan is successful.

ORPHEUS SALIENT NPC:

THE MIST REAPER

The Mist Reaper is a mysterious predator that has only been encountered by the Imperium on Xyan. It is believed that the Mist Reaper is a unique form of Lictor, and that it is responsible for many of the recent disappearances from that planet. The Mist Reaper has been known to lurk near the boundaries of small communities, taking those who venture into the planet's mists. Under the cover of darkness and the sulphurous fog, it occasionally enters the city proper and abducts inhabitants from their homes. Seldom are any identifiable remains left behind, leaving most citizens unaware of the Tyranid incursion. Most often, the Mist Reaper prefers to attack from ambush, striking only in areas where both cover and opportunities for concealment are plentiful.

The Mist Reaper (Master) Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
70	35	⁽¹⁴⁾ 70	⁽¹²⁾ 60	⁽¹²⁾ 60	25	⁽¹⁰⁾ 55	45	—

Movement: 6/12/18/36

Wounds: 85

Skills: Acrobatics (Ag), Awareness (Per) +20, Climb (S) +20, Concealment (Ag) +20, Contortionist (Ag) +10, Dodge (Ag) +20, Shadowing (Ag) +20, Silent Move (Ag) +20, Survival (Int) +20, Swim (S), Tracking (Int) +20.

Talents: Ambidextrous, Assassin Strike, Berserk Charge, Blind Fighting, Catfall, Combat Master, Crushing Blow, Fearless, Furious Assault, Hard Target, Heightened Sense (Hearing, Sight, Smell, Taste, Touch), Leap Up, Lightning Attack, Sprint, Step Aside, Swift Attack.

Traits: Dark Sight, Fear 3 (Horrifying), Improved Natural Weapons, Instinctive Behaviour (Lurk), Natural Armour (Reinforced Chitin), Multiple Arms, Size (Enormous), Tyranid, Unnatural Agility (x2), Unnatural Perception (x2), Unnatural Strength (x2), Unnatural Toughness (x2).

Armour: Reinforced Chitin (All 6).

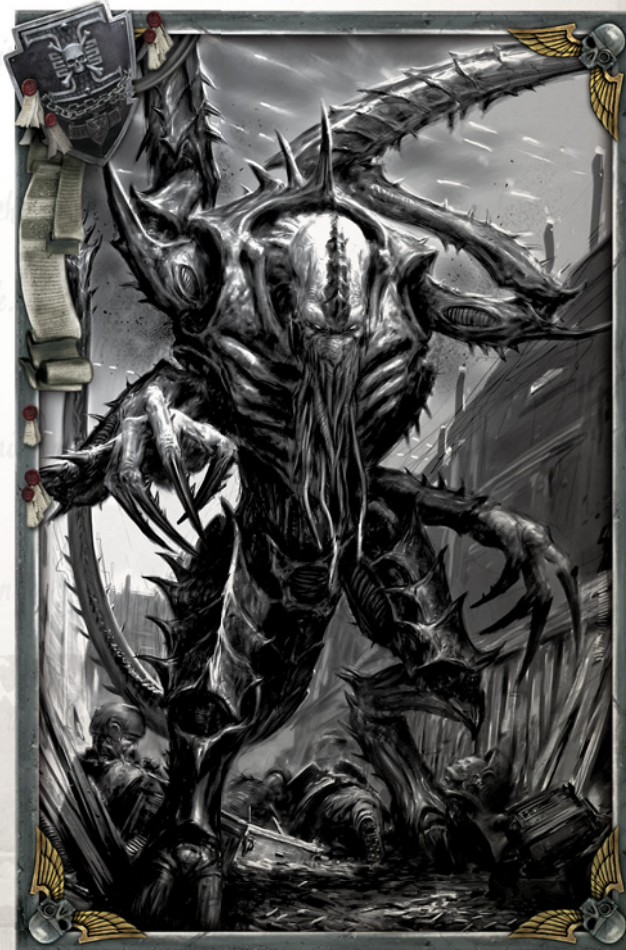
Weapons: Scything Talons (1d10+18 R; Pen 3; Toxic), Rending Claws (1d10+16; Pen 5, Razor Sharp, Toxic).

Special Rules

Chameleonic Scales: The Mist Reaper is covered in chameleonic scales, which shimmer and shift to match its surroundings and can make it practically invisible to the naked eye, including most other methods of visual detections such as infrared and ultraviolet scopes. Whenever the Mist Reaper uses its Concealment skill to hide all tests to detect it visually suffers a -30 penalty. In addition, the scales allow the Mist Reaper to make Concealment tests as a half action rather than a full action and can even do so when being observed or when there is no nearby cover. The Mist Reaper does not suffer any penalties to Concealment and Silent Move due to his Size Trait.

Flesh Hooks: The Mist Reaper is armed with a unique set of flesh hooks; barbed lengths of gristled flesh that are expelled by a powerful muscle spasm. The Flesh Hooks have the following profile: (10m; S/-/-; 1d10+12 R; Pen 6; Clip —; Rld —; Razor Sharp, Tearing). Any target that is hit by the Flesh Hook's attack is immediately the subject of a Grapple (see page 240 in the **DEATHWATCH** Rulebook) as a Free Action. The Mist Reaper may continue to fight normally whilst grappling with an opponent via its flesh hooks. While the Mist Reaper is grappling with an opponent in this way, it may not fire the Flesh Hooks again until the Grapple ends. The Mist Reaper may engage a target in melee as normal whilst grappling using his flesh hooks.

Supreme Warrior: When using the All Out Attack Action, the Mist Reaper may make a single melee attack that may not be dodged or parried. The Mist Reaper may perform this attack a number of times per combat equal to its Intelligence Bonus (normally 2).



THE SLINNAR DRIFT

Stretching out among the far reaches of the Crusade is a dense star cluster known as the Slinnar Drift. With dozens of closely positioned stars, the planetary systems within the Drift are hostile wastelands. The value of the Slinnar Drift is not measured in its habitable planets, however, but in its vast mineral and chemical resources available to any who dare enter. Every Imperial commander within the Jericho Reach is aware of the strategic value inherent in the virtually untapped resources of the Slinnar Drift.

SEDU

Marking the entrance to the Drift is the planet Sedu. It is notable for being the only planet within the Drift to be capable of supporting life. Before the Age of Shadows, Sedu was the border planet for the Jericho Sector's civilised edge. Previously, it was a typical frontier planet. The citizens were mostly miners who would venture into the Slinnar Drift to gather resources that could be either sold or put to use on Sedu itself. When the Dark Times came to the Jericho Sector, Sedu was one of the first planets to lose contact with the rest. When the Achilles Crusade pushed outwards towards the Drift, attempts were made to re-establish contact with the planet, although no answer was received. A detachment of the Volg 47th was deployed to the planet's surface to determine what had happened to this once proud border world. Upon landing, they found that the face of the planet itself had changed completely from the ancient maps of the Jericho Sector. Sedu was now a complete desert with no signs of human life. Exploring deeper into the desert, the Imperial Guardsmen came upon a few ragtag bands of mutants, and the occasional Ork tribe. Returning to their ship, the Crusade forces were puzzled as to what could have caused this drastic

ROSENMAN'S REFUGE

Undiscovered by the Crusade forces that landed on planet, there exists a small city built underneath one of the largest mesa's of the planet. Accessible by most only through a rigorous climb, here lies the true nature of Sedu. Rosenman's Refuge is a den of smugglers, pirates, and xenos slavers. Using the Refuge as a stopover point has become a standard part of any run through the Jericho Reach for outlaw traffic. Approximately ten thousand people call this place home, most of them simple traders, and find that they are able to eke out a modest life for themselves. Unbeknownst to all of the residents, except the select few that call themselves 'The Council', there is a terrible secret to the Refuge. Housed within one of the deepest caves lies a strange machine of xenos origin. Shaped like a metallic disc thirty metres in diameter, this object pulses intermittently with a dim red light. The light grows brighter and pulses more aggressively every time a ship exits the Warp in orbit of Sedu. Needless to say, the Deathwatch would be very interested in getting their hands on this device.

++Incoming Vox Message++

Sender: Unknown (likely Ork)

Wot 'er dem Marine-Boyz doin' 'ere?
We's gots to get outta 'ere 'fore dey
take our new shiny bitz! I bets dey
think we's dumb and don' know wots we
got. Tell da Kaptain we's goin' now!

[[Archived by the 2nd Expeditionary
Force, copy forwarded to Watch Station
Erioch by order of Lord Militant
Tetrarchus]]

change to the planet's bio-sphere. Not only had the entire surface of the planet been changed, but no sign at all existed of the cities that had been built there. Marking it as an anomaly, the Crusade pushed onward, deeper into the Drift.

THE DEEP DRIFT

Once a ship has crossed the Sedu threshold they enter into the Drift proper. The Drift itself is comprised of dozens of proto-stars and their corresponding planetary systems. So far, the Crusade has not charted a single life-sustaining planet within the Drift, but the mapping process has fallen by the wayside due to the extraordinary demands placed on all ships and crew by Lord Militant Tetrarchus. All of the planets that have been mapped have been given simple numeric designations with annotations for the specific type of resource, be it chemical or geological, that the planet harbours. During the early parts of the mapping expeditions, strange vox signals were received by the Crusade forces any time that they went near a planet that was rich in either adamantium or any material used in the creation of ceramite. The signals were not encoded, nor did they have an apparent meaning to them. The commander in charge of the exploration fleet catalogued the signals and classified them as echoes from a long ago past.

FRAGMENTS FROM BEYOND

During their long stewardship of the Jericho Reach, the Deathwatch have encountered many strange and ominous things. The most puzzling of all though is a discovery that was made within the Slinnar Drift. On various worlds, most notably those that produce materials for repairing power armour, fragments of an as yet unidentifiable metal have been found. This material, classified as Metal X-1794, has an unknown origin, but rigorous testing by the Adeptus Mechanicus has shown that if significant quantities of this could be found they would be able to craft a suit of Power Armour that would afford the wearer the same level of protection as if they were wearing Tactical Dreadnought Armour. Because of this incredible find, the Deathwatch are scouring the system for any traces as to the origin of this material. Should the source ever be found, it would enhance the already prodigious abilities of a Space Marine to a level never before seen.

PLANET 1274-PM

Within the heart of the Slinnar Drift lies a planet that is only designated 1274-PM. Like all other planets within the Drift, this one is completely incapable of sustaining life. What sets this planet apart from the others within the system is the presence of an Adeptus Mechanicus ship in orbit and a promethium processing plant on the surface. When the Crusade forces investigated the presence of a factory on the surface, they were shocked to discover that it was not only in working condition, but also still processing the raw gases that it was mining from beneath the planet's surface. The stock rooms were overflowing with barrels of refined promethium, and when a representative from the Adeptus Mechanicus travelled to the ship in orbit, it was obvious that the ship was in perfect working condition. Perhaps the most shocking thing of all of this though, was the lack of any sort of servitor or Tech-Priest presence on either the ship or in the factory. All of the equipment was in perfect working condition and had the appearance of recent maintenance.

WORLDS OF THE ORPHEUS SALIENT

In spite of the impending Tyranid threat, the status of systems with this portion of the Jericho Reach varies substantially. Even before the encountering Hive Fleet Dagon, the Achilus Crusade had not yet completed the task of reuniting the Orpheus Salient systems with the Imperium of Man. Some of these worlds had fallen to the worship of false gods. Others had collapsed into barbarism. For those worlds that have been recovered, the light of the Emperor has had scant time to achieve its full brilliance as the shadow of the Tyranid horde encroaches.

Atonement

At first glance, Atonement is a paradise world that appears lush and ripe for humanity's incursion. The planet has a broad temperate zone, with temperatures that are ideally suited to human life. The atmosphere is oxygen rich, the gravity is close to that of holy Terra, and the seas and lands have lush vegetation and abundant, herbivorous fauna. No predators or parasites that target humankind have been identified.

Appearances are deceiving. The air, soil, plants, and wildlife of Atonement are all heavily tainted with levels of cadmium and other heavy metals that are toxic to humanity. Mankind first settled Atonement when they arrived in sleeper ships before the Great Crusade. Those settlers died, probably of heavy metal poisoning, before their colony was even completed. The ruins of their vessels remain on the planet as a monument to early human history.

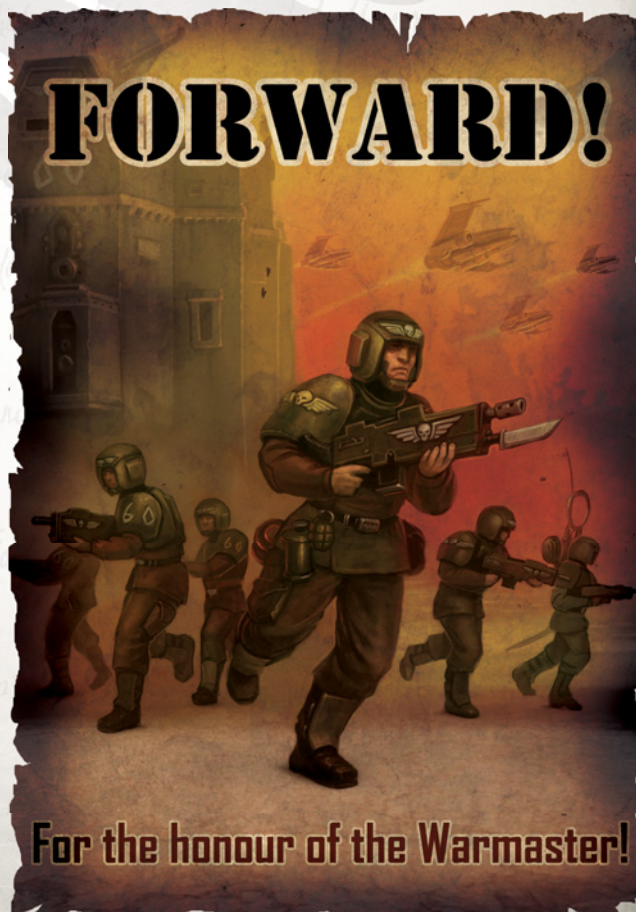
Human settlers established a new colony on Atonement in the waning days of the Jericho Sector. Equipped with a broad range of filtration devices, these settlers chose the name Atonement to honour the ancients who had desperately attempted to tame this world. When Imperial contact and support were lost, troubles swept through the colony. As filtration equipment failed, construction stalled. Like the first attempt, many of these settlers died of heavy metal poisoning. Unlike the ancient settlers, some members of this colony survived in isolation.

The few million who dwell on the planet today are descendants of the surviving settlers. They are a stubborn and sickly lot, dependent upon the few remaining filtration systems that have been maintained through the millennia. Many have genetic modifications that enable them to better tolerate the planet's living conditions, though even with these their life expectancies are far shorter than Imperial averages. Aside from filtration, their technology base is far below that of the modern Imperium, almost entirely dependent upon petrochemicals.

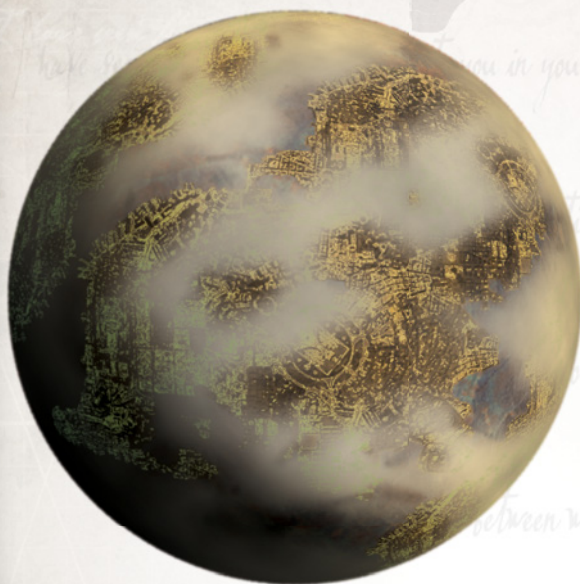
The natives initially rejected Imperial interference when the Achilus Crusade made contact. A show of force, which included an example of orbital bombardment, quickly convinced them to change their minds. They have shown lip service to the Imperial Cult, and have begun to provide limited mining resources to the Crusade. The ever-present taint of heavy metals prevents most Imperial units from utilising agricultural products provided by Atonement.

In early 815.M41, a Tyranid hive ship with its entourage was seen entering the system. A few vessels that were in orbit attempted to engage the fleet, while a pair of destroyers were dispatched to send a plea for reinforcements. One of those destroyers, Thorn of Truth, made contact with elements of the Salient stationed at Castobel.

A sizeable fleet element was dispatched to Atonement, with orders to make every effort to hold the planet. When they arrived, they found only Tyranid vessels in system, and a world already seeded with Tyranid spores. To their surprise, however, the planet's natives responded to vox inquiries and explained that they were maintaining a defensive action against overwhelming numbers of xenos.



Support units rapidly deployed to the planet, as the fleet launched a counter-assault against the Tyranid vessels. The battles still rage both on land and in the void. Though the odds are not in their favour, the defensive efforts—especially on the surface—seem to be going better than expected. The organisms involved in the attack appear less vigorous in their actions than those observed throughout the Salient. Agents of the Adeptus Mechanicus have not determined if this is due to the planet's contaminants or another unidentified variable.



Beseritor

The Hive World of Beseritor was one of the Orpheus Salient's last great successes prior to the first encounter with the Tyranids. Prior to the Age of Apostasy, Beseritor was a thriving system that provided munitions, recruits, and food to fuel other planets of the sector. Construction had begun on the first of several planned hive cities, and the manufactories and mining engines had begun the work of exploiting the world's resources for the Imperium.

When communications with the Imperium ceased, Beseritor's sudden growth and development came to a screeching halt. Civil wars broke out, as various factions vied for control in the power vacuum left behind. Construction on the partially completed hive was abandoned. Initially the manufactories and mines were strategic assets, but they were soon turned into dangerous ruins where survivors dwelt.

As the millennia passed, the population fell further from the standards of Imperial civilisation. By the time the Crusade made contact, the planet's once thriving civilisation had been reduced to little more than warring city states made up of subsistence farmers whose most advanced technology was coal-powered steam engines. Though a few of these cultures still remembered the ancient legends of the God-Emperor, the majority had fallen prey to heathen nature worship.

The missionaries of the Ecclesiarchy, with the support of the Imperial Navy, were able to convert much of the world's population to the Imperial Cult over the span of just a few months. With the assistance of the newly converted, General

Curas chose to use overwhelming force to make examples of the resistant cities. After the second city was laid to waste, the remaining resistance elements surrendered.

The General quickly pronounced the system compliant, and brought in the Tech-Priests of the Adeptus Mechanicus to begin reconstruction. To everyone's surprise, many of the Imperial ruins, including the partially completed hive, were salvageable, even after having been abandoned for millennia. No explanations for this unusual state of preservation have been offered. In a matter of weeks, construction was resumed, and the process of relocating the population to the hives was begun. In short order, the manufactories belched smoke once more and the planet began tithing their due to support the Crusade. Today, the planet's single hive city is thriving, and construction on a second hive has begun.

As the Tyranid incursion has continued, the Orpheus Salient has become increasingly reliant upon Beseritor's production. The manufactories have been pushed to capacity, and ancient mines are being examined for viability. Some members of the Munitorum have even begun to argue that it may already be time to raise a Beseritor regiment.

Because of this success, several light vessels, designated Battlegroup Vishnu, have been assigned to keep station over the system. Communications between the system and the command elements of the Orpheus Salient have recently become restricted, as the Shadow of the Warp has encroached. Similarly, there have been some difficulties in maintaining consistent supply lines from the planet. Many fear that were it not for the presence of the battlegroup, this breakdown could offset the recent progress, causing the system to slip once more into anarchy.

Beseritor is within a short Warp voyage of several systems currently under attack by Hive Fleet Dagon. This proximity has enabled it to serve as a rally point and resupply station for elements directly involved in the fighting. Oddly, no Tyranid incursions have been seen in the system. Rather than question this absence, the command elements of the Salient have chosen to graciously thank the Emperor for his protection and exploited the resources at hand.

Cocijo

The desert planet of Cocijo was a surprise for the Achilus Crusade. Ancient charts identified the planet as a lush and verdant world. Administratum records showed it to be a populous system, with ample agricultural capabilities that provided for several of the sector's hive worlds. Instead, the Crusade found an arid world, with only a sparse, primitive population that had diverged too far from the human standard for the Inquisition's taste.

The Inquisition branded those few descendants of the ancient settlers as mutants. The Crusade cleansed the planet of the majority of these reviled creatures. The remainder were designated for use as slaves or assigned duties with penal legions. A few of these loathsome beings may yet survive in Cocijo's extensive wastelands.

There was no obvious cause for the collapse, and the surviving descendants were in no condition to explain it. Background radiation was within normal limits. There were almost no ruins for the expected cities, with very few exceptions; the locations were nothing more than flat, barren plains. An apocalyptic event had clearly happened, but the Imperium has been completely unable to identify its cause. Extensive cartographic analyses of the planet's surface were even performed to verify that it was the same planet.

Once the mutants were eliminated, settlers were brought in from the overcrowded hive worlds of the Calixis Sector. With the aid of the Adeptus Mechanicus, the settlers began water mining initiatives as an effort to improve the planet for colonisation and future agriculture. These initiatives met with early success, as extensive aquifers were discovered. Within a few months, the colonists established surface lakes, which were used as reservoirs for their small towns.

As construction began on the frontier towns, the troubles began. Equipment failures suddenly became endemic. Repeated scans of the planet's atmosphere showed changes in the ionic background, and astropaths began to complain about the instabilities in the Immaterium. Hundreds of water miners died in freak accidents, as earthquakes, sinkholes, and volcanoes suddenly appeared from places that were believed to be stable.

As Mechanicus experts analysed these changes, archaeologists came to examine the sparse records of the planet's lost civilisation. The few remains that could be found amount to records that are fragmentary at best. Worse yet, the colony used an archaic derivation of Low Gothic as their primary language. Researchers' analysis hints that the planet's surface water abruptly vanished over a matter of days. After that, rioting and panic triggered the planet's collapse in a matter of weeks. A few of the fragmentary records seem to suggest that spirits took away the water and punished the natives for daring to dwell on this planet. However, there has been no evidence to corroborate these stories, and even some of the stories are in dispute. Many simply dismiss them as legends, but others have begun to wonder if the water reserves and the new problems are signs of things to come.

It is certain that the Crusade needs to make this planet habitable if they can. If the water mining can be stabilised, this would be a tremendous reserve for the Orpheus Salient. Preliminary scans also indicate that there may be substantial reserves of useful ores within the planet's crust. The combination of these metals and the water could make Cocijo a crucial factor in shortening the Crusade's supply lines.

The disappearances and the accidents have substantially damaged morale among the planet's colonists. Many are demanding transit off world. Riots have already occurred, and some are even threatening rebellion as rabble-rousers openly speak heresy. The Salient's resources are stretched thinly. Units have not been allocated to deal with this uprising, and it may be some time before anything can be reassigned. It is possible that patience might provide its own solution, but it is also possible that the colony could self-destruct if no actions are taken.

Manuxet

Largely a water world, Manuxet's human population is scattered across the thousands of islands that make up the endless archipelagos spread over the planet's surface. Though fairly distant from its system's star, the planet has a temperate environment due to high levels of insulating gases in the upper atmosphere. The relatively small amounts of land surface and its three moons combine to trigger frequent and severe storms that often accompany the unpredictable tidal cycles. The rich sea life has provided a reliable source of food for these settlers through the dark millennia of isolation, which enabled them to survive and thrive down through the ages.

When the Crusade made contact with the world again, they found a population that had suffered a severe technological regression. The natives lived a nomadic lifestyle, typically following the seasonal migratory patterns of some of the sea's enormous schools of fish. Their religion had drifted away from the Imperial Cult, and was instead focused on appeasements to gods of the sea and sky. Imperial technology was initially heralded as magic, which missionaries of the Ecclesiarchy used to aid in conversion efforts.

NEW DEATHWATCH RELIC: THE DRAGON'S FANG

In 801.M41, a Deathwatch Kill-team under the personal command of Watch Captain Servais recovered an ancient weapon of xenos manufacture from the depths of a huge tomb complex beneath the surface of the dead world of Hestus. The weapon took the form of a two-handed sword, its blade massive even to a Space Marine's proportions, composed of an unknown metal that seemed almost alive and responsive to the wielder's every blow. The weapon lay in stasis for nearly a decade until Inquisitor Adrielle Quist, in consultation with Watch Commander Mordigael and Forge Master Greyweaver, declared the weapon safe for use by Deathwatch Kill-teams within the Jericho Reach. Dubbed the Dragon's Fang by Forge Master Greyweaver, the weapon has recently entered service with a few of the more bold and non-traditional Deathwatch Space Marines, and always on missions that do not involve other Imperial forces. Most often, this blade is entrusted to a Deathwatch Space Marine during a mission involving the assassination of an important alien foe. This is a two-handed melee weapon.

Name	Class	Dmg	Pen	Special	Wt	Req	Renown
The Dragon's Fang	Melee	2d10+8 E	10	Felling (2), Power Field	18	45	Hero

Conversion efforts went reasonably well, and compliance was achieved within a span of six months. After that time, refineries were established to process the bounty of Manuxet's oceans. Over the ten years since compliance was achieved, an estimated 40% of the planet's sea life has been processed and shipped off planet to feed the soldiers of the Achilus Crusade. The munitorum insists that the oceans are being reseeded with additional life so that the planet may maintain its newfound status as an agriworld, but the current consumption rate vastly exceeds the rate of aquaculture.

While the Imperial forces feast on this system's bounty, the natives have been forced to change their lifestyle. The schools of fish that they once followed have been depleted. Though they are not starving, the foods they eat are new and unfamiliar to their palates. Their gods have been replaced. New habitats have been built that protect them from the forces of nature, but which trap them in sterile buildings away from the natural environment in which their culture had flourished for millennia.

At the same time as these changes were implemented, the Imperium was forced to withdraw troops to deal with the Tyranid threat. In their absence, the natives have grown increasingly restless. Numerous incidents have occurred where members of the population have abandoned their Imperial responsibilities and attempted to return to their nomadic lifestyle. Priests of the Ecclesiarchy have filed reports of heresy, as natives return to their primitive religions.

Worse yet, there has been an increase in the numbers of missing persons reported among members of the Imperial government station on Manuxet. Some reports indicate that these loyalists have been swayed and gone native. Others are gruesome tales

of hideous murders over petty matters. Interspersed with these reports are sightings of man-sized creatures with exoskeletons and claws creeping through the civilised regions under the cover of darkness.

Xyan

Xyan's atmosphere is tinged yellow by the sulphurous fumes that constantly bubble from the hot springs scattered across its surface. These dense fumes leave the planet's surface a dim place, as the thick acidic clouds diffuse light. While breathable, the atmosphere leaves a foul taste in the mouths of those who visit, and lasting scar tissue in the lungs of those who stay. The planet's active core causes frequent tectonic instability, which is likely tied to the constant eruptions from the assorted geysers and the steady emission of gases through the hot swamps.

The planet's ubiquitous swamps are filled with aquatic life that thrives in the intensely acidic environment. Plant analogues draw energy from the heat that flows through these swamps, using this as an energy source rather than the light of the system's star. Small predatory animals are common throughout these bogs, but they represent far less of a threat than the atmosphere and the sulphuric pollutants.

Those few million humans who have dwelt on the planet have done so in small communities, typically of less than a hundred members. Through the ages, they have adapted to their environment, and can tolerate the highly sulphuric atmosphere and diet far better than an outsider. Their vision has also adapted to the haze, though not so well that they would generally be classified as mutants.

During the age of the Jericho Sector, Xyan became a penal world. Heretics, criminals, and cowards were dumped on the planet's surface, where survival of the fittest was allowed to run its course. Little was done to monitor the system, as the hazardous environs were deemed sufficient punishment and an effective prison. Millennia later, the planet's population are the offspring of those who managed survive the brutal conditions. Largely amoral filth, the natives have not responded well to the Achilus Crusade's efforts to reunite their planet with the Imperium of Man.

Some of the Crusade's officers argued that, as descendants of prisoners, these inhabitants could scarcely qualify for membership in the Imperium. Of course, as a penal world, they were not due any support from the Imperium either. This combination meant that reasserting compliance, after once more designating Xyan a penal world, was an easy feat. The Salient has already begun the process of raising penal legions from the system's hardy population. These descendants of Imperial outcasts have co-operated reluctantly, as they have little recourse.

As units of the Munitorum have begun to spend time on the planet to train the first regiment, they have come across a number of worrisome legends. It seems that there are many tales of aggressive xenos that lurk in the hottest and murkiest parts of the swamp. While there is no evidence to confirm this, there are always disappearances. The atmosphere makes tracking anything difficult, which has led to numerous unexplained disappearances among natives and soldiers of the Crusade. Even establishing stable outposts on the murky surface has been a challenge for the Imperial units.



THE MORTIS THULE

"This foul rock has haunted our space for far too long, and by my hammer Doombringer we will shatter it and empty the vermin inside once and for all! For Russ! For the Eternal Vigil!"

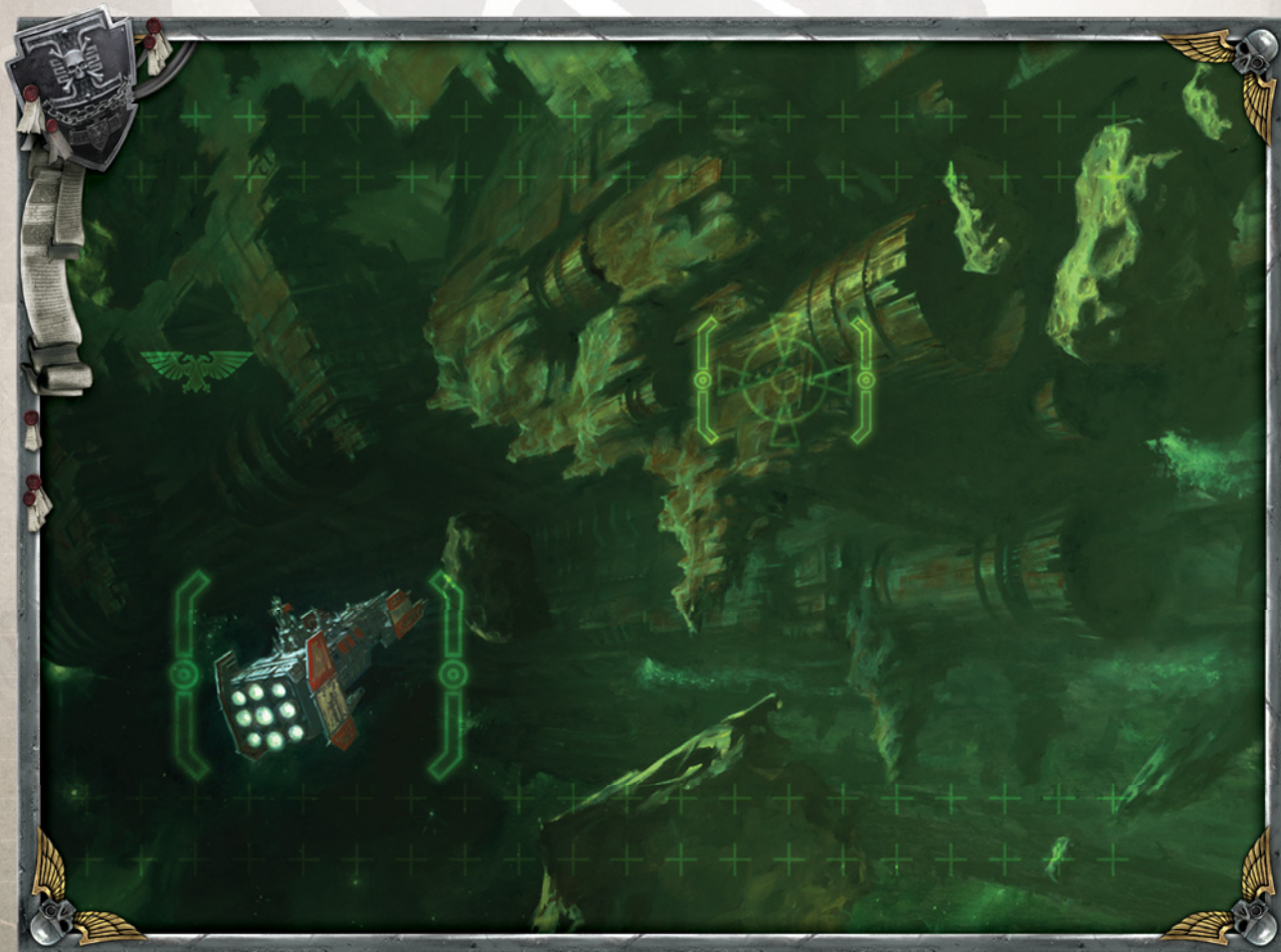
—Captain Haakon Draugrsbane of the Space Wolves

In a region of space known for the numerous derelicts floating between the stars, there is one space hulk known even to the people of primitive worlds that have never travelled beyond their own system. It is the dark form that blots out local suns, causing civilizations to fall into barbarism or new religions to sprout like weeds. Under hundreds of names it is the blight on the void, the bane of Warp travel, and the ruination of innumerable ships from its catastrophically sudden appearances. In their secret language, Navigators call it The Doom that Awaits. Deathwatch Librarians officially record it as Warp Artefact Aleph-Omicron-002. For most in the Jericho Reach (and particularly in the Orpheus Salient) it is known as the *Mortis Thule*—Death From Beyond the Horizon—the largest space hulk known to exist in the region, and very possibly the most dangerous.

Space hulks are not an uncommon occurrence in areas of space with advanced interstellar travel. These massive conglomerations of discarded hulls and space debris are legendary across the galaxy, famous both for the lurking dangers they host as well as the possible treasures hidden inside. Though each is unique, *Mortis Thule* stands out not only for its enormous size but also for its long history in the Reach, dating back to before the arrival of the Imperial Expeditionary Fleets of the Great Crusade. Most hulks either fall apart given time (or sufficient massed firepower), or disappear back into the Warp never to be seen again. The *Mortis Thule* seems older and than many such space hulks encountered before however; its curious longevity and increasing mass possibly tied to that other mysterious artefact of the Reach, the Warp Gate.

A LINEAGE OF DOOM

The sighting of a space hulk is a significant one for any void travellers, sure to be logged and studied for possible plunder and hazards to Warp travel. Thus it is not unusual for fairly detailed records to exist of such a vessel, especially one as exceptional as *Mortis Thule*. The Inquisition and the Deathwatch are believed to have the most numerous and complete records extant, but even these contain much apocryphal and contradictory information. Such is the nature of the hulk however, that even the most factual of sightings become spun into legend after only a few short tellings.



The earliest suggestions of the hulk's appearance were uncovered on Shinnor, an otherwise unremarkable planet rimward of the Slinnar Drift, its native civilisation routinely eradicated during the Crusade. Xenos-archaeologists of the 427th Expeditionary Fleet uncovered what appeared to be ancient pictograms dating roughly twelve thousand years before the Great Crusade, indicating a dark shadow in the sky and tales of earthquakes, meteor showers, and invasions of terrible, unnatural beasts.

There are few other records until the coming of the Great Crusade itself to Jericho, but its arrival and the subsequent increase in Warp traffic seemed to trigger further contacts. Throughout the millennia before the Fall, the *Mortis Thule* appeared sporadically across the sector and was the subject of many hundreds of boarding actions. It was one such attempt to conquer the *Mortis Thule* on the empty shoals near Phonos that gave rise to its common name. In M33 there was a joint landing action of a consolidated massive attack force led by Adeptus Mechanicus Arch-Magos Mitsfian Delphos and Rogue Trader Hyrus Tarrant. After initial successes against hosts of aliens in the main landing zones and breaches into several cargo holds, fighting began anew but seemed to be due to the multiple boarding forces fighting each other. There were few survivors rescued along with some pillaged archeotech treasures, with wild claims of death itself stalking the derelict hulls. Of Delphos or Tarrant there was no sign, and daughter Minerva Tarrant cursed the *Mortis Thule* to forever be a distant death to her lineage. True to her word, her fleets soon departed the sector though there are rumours the enormous bounty for information on her father's final disposition still stands.

The Deathwatch itself leads numerous, though less well known, actions against the *Mortis Thule* as well. As is their wont, through the centuries Ork raiders have often established bases on the many ships contained in the assemblage, using these as springboards for marauding operations. Deathwatch Kill-teams were called in on occasion when the raids became especially threatening to Imperial systems, but for the most part acted to eradicate the specific menace and (perhaps wisely) did not attempt to infiltrate the rest of the *Mortis Thule*. There were also at least 37 recorded incursions at the specific request of the Inquisition, including five to rescue or recover valued Imperial agents trapped on the *Mortis Thule* for unrevealed reasons and one to destroy an interred vessel broadcasting unfathomable Warp-beacon transmissions to parties unknown. Not all have been successful; there are multiple shrines in Erioch to those who never returned from the space hulk, where those of their chapters may hold private ceremonies in their memory and swear anew their oaths of vengeance.

During the Fall and the Age of Shadows, the records become less precise; amidst the collapse of the sector, few seemed interested in recording the appearance of even this ominous craft. Those that did investigate it, such as the adepts of Samech before they were lost to tech-heresy, left no history behind of what they found. As Warp storms increased and sightings diminished, it seemed that perhaps the *Mortis Thule* was even lost to the Empyrean forever.



The re-emergence of the Imperium through the Warp Gate into Jericho also saw the return of *Mortis Thule* as it began to be detected with greater frequency especially in the Orpheus Salient. This of course could be attributed to the increased number of Imperial vessels and their travel in the Reach. Some faction-cants in the Adeptus Mechanicus who also study the enigmatic Warp Gate insist that there could more than coincidence here and strive for greater research on the space hulk's unnaturally growing size. There have certainly been more Deathwatch missions assigned against it in recent years. On manifold occasions Kill-teams have been sent to mitigate the predations the *Mortis Thule* brings to a system or travel route, acting to keep pockets of the Salient from collapsing. With the arrival of Dagon, Tyranid infestations on the space hulk have grown and more missions have been purely to burn away growths that would have become new mycetic spores otherwise. Some operations have been purely to map out as much data as possible on its vast interior and the cluster of hulls melded inside, while others have simply been to visit empty space to see if the newest predictions based on history, divinations, and aetheric soundings for arrival are accurate. Several have been logged purely as "Omega Vault Decree" with no other data recorded. Information is Power, and the Inquisition and the Deathwatch seem to be very eager to gain as much of both concerning the *Mortis Thule* for reasons they have not shared with any other Imperial agencies as of yet.

THE DEAD HULLS

Mortis Thule is quite simply one of the largest artificial objects found in Jericho space, easily outmassing even Bastion-class space stations. Like all space hulks it appears out of the Warp at seemingly random times, ejecting into real space with a roaring thunder of psychic energies such that Navigators across the region are alerted. Its violent appearance disgorges a trail of debris, as megatonnes of metal and rock crack away from the harsh arrival. This loss is more than made up for by new additions of void debris and those unfortunate vessels that find themselves melded into the *Mortis Thule's* conglomerate mass by powerful Warp tidal forces or worse.

From the outside, the *Mortis Thule* is roughly flattened and ovoid in shape with large jagged spikes of torn rock and broken prows. The surface is pockmarked with craters from impacts and explosions, some so ancient that other bonded hulls obscure their shape. Not only Imperial vessels make up its body, for the ruins of numerous xenos ships are also littered across the surface and undoubtedly are located inside as well. Elegant Eldar wraithbone structures, crude Ork plating, and even fleshy Tyranid bioships can be seen strewn in the synthesis that makes up the space hulk, along with xenos vessels of unknown origin and archeotech ships predating the Imperium. Inside the *Mortis Thule* are the remains of countless more dead ships, each a story of uncaring fate or grave accident. Some are nearly intact, caught in sudden eddies while sailing the Empyrean's powerful seas and fused into the space hulk as both emerge into real space. Others are broken hulls, ships dashed against the rock and sunken deep along with other Warp flotsam. Many have become connected together through random internal collision or artificial actions. All

seem to contain artefacts of such exquisite value that despite the dangers there have been no shortages of those seeking to plunder the *Mortis Thule*. The items recovered range from ancient archeotech relics still being deciphered to baneful xenos weapons declared heretical by joint Ordos decrees, as well as modern devices left behind by failed boarding parties. The sheer weight of treasures estimated aboard the *Mortis Thule* are one of the main reasons that the massive joint efforts needed to destroy or break up the space hulk have failed to coalesce long enough to perform the deed. For every one agency or power base that would wish it gone, there are a dozen more eager to plunder its secrets for their own benefit.

Attempts to create a definitive map to guide future explorations have been doomed to failure however; each sighting reveals new arrangements of the melded assemblage with new ships appearing and older ones broken away. Pulse-mapping transponders buried deep via burrowing torpedoes have proven somewhat useful, but these invariably fail after only weeks of operation due to the stray radiation that permeates the *Mortis Thule* and even through internal sabotage. The latter is certainly a disquieting thought but not one unexpected given the nature of what lives inside. The space hulk is certainly a dangerous environment due its shifting construction—sections break away or settle deeper into the core with each Warp passage or close orbit to a demanding star—but it is those that still live amidst the dead hulls that make the *Mortis Thule* a truly terrifyingly place.

THE DWELLERS WITHIN

Like most space hulks, there are numerous creatures infesting the dark hulls buried in the rock. Some ships still retain furtive power, flickering and undependable as it may be. The *Mortis Thule* hosts a multitude of races striving to survive in the artificial carcass. Each new hull added to the *Mortis Thule* often also brings new occupants, some advanced enough to maintain some semblance of their culture but most descending into barbarism or worse as each Warp immersion leads them forever into deeper darkness.

The most common denizens of the *Mortis Thule* are that most widespread of Tyranid species, the Genestealer, a presence even greater now that Dagon has spread its tendrils across the Salient. Genestealers are perhaps perfectly suited to existing on space hulks. They are extraordinarily tough, with reinforced circulatory systems and leathery protective skin; even their weakest surface membranes are able to withstand complete vacuum exposure for extended durations. Their flesh and their genetic material itself is resistant to most mutating or debilitating radiation, and they seem to have no fear of unprotected Warp travel. They are very long lived and able to shut down their metabolism for long periods of time when there is no prey to be had. Their agility and multiple clawed limbs allow them to easily manoeuvre in the hazardous ruins of wrecked gangways, collapsed decks, and areas with failed grav plating. Their eyes can penetrate total blackness or obscuring smoke, and their senses can detect the smallest twitch or droplet of blood. Unlike most other Tyranid organisms, they are able to operate effectively when unconnected to the Hive Mind that related species need to act above mere instinctual behaviour.

III: THE ORPHEUS SALIENT



Add to this their preternatural strength, ferocity in combat, and talons that can rip through even Terminator Armour, and the Genestealer would already be one of the most dominant threats of any space hulk. It is their means of reproduction that changes them from dangerous predator to an extreme threat to the Imperium itself.

Genestealers reproduce through implanting their viral genetic material into a host organism, often when the unwilling host is unconscious or subdued through a psychically induced hypnotic state. This material corrupts the parent DNA, causing any offspring to be born an unnatural mixture of the parent and Genestealer. The host is mentally conditioned to care for these twisted progeny, each of which is also able to quickly mature and infect others through the same genetic implantation. Future generations lead to new Genestealers of a nearly pure strain, unrecognizable from the original species but now carrying partial physiological reminders of the host morphology. In this way the creature extends its influence across populations and has become the bane of the Ordo Xenos; entire planets have been put to the torch to conclusively prevent their spread. In the *Mortis Thule*, there are numerous Genestealer controlled hulls and even more overrun by their hideous offspring. Any vessels that depart the space hulk and are not willing to submit to extensive examinations of both ship and personnel, have been utterly destroyed by their colleagues lest they possibly spread the infection to others. With the Genestealer there can be no half measures; even one creature can lead to the downfall of an entire world.

While the presence of such Tyranid creatures in the *Mortis Thule* is somewhat to be expected, it is the existence of Enslavers on the space hulk that makes it even more hazardous. Most explorers do not encounter them, or at least never return having done so. Early Deathwatch squads only reported remains of the grotesque organic flesh-arches that serve as their gateways into reality, but fresh ones have been sighted more recently. Each of these portals was once a psyker, but their unguarded minds have allowed these threats to menace not only the Imperium but every living

being in the galaxy, as they once did untold millennia ago. Even the merest threat of an Enslaver outbreak has brought numerous Deathwatch teams to a planet, ready to obliterate their danger. Entire hives have been razed rather than leave any possible Warp portals remaining, and forces sent to the *Mortis Thule* are on a constant vigil to destroy them on sight, no matter what their original mission might entail. The *Mortis Thule* contains many nascent psykers though, almost none with the necessary defences to ward off the dominating alien mentalities. It is the presence of the Genestealers which paradoxically provides such a rich feeding ground for this menace from times before humanity descended from trees.

All Genestealers share a psychic connection that allows them to function as an independent brood. This extends to their offspring; indeed Genestealers will actively seek out psykers as hosts to strengthen this link and their own Tyranid psychic powers. However, these psychically attuned offspring shine in the Warp as a near irresistible beacon to the Enslavers who follow the vessel as it dances between the Empyrean and real space. The broods have become themselves prey, as subjugated brethren have turned on their alien parents at the command of their new masters. Some Genestealers have sought the sanctuary of stasis tubes within heavily reinforced cargo vaults, their still-loyal children sealing the vault from the inside and committing suicide as a desperate measure against Enslaver-dominated forces. Ferocious battles between the horrific Tyranid predators and the ghastly Enslavers are nightmare tales of legend. The rending claws of the Genestealers rip through hordes of bound puppet-races to reach their enemies' floating bulbous bodies. Tendrils writhe beneath Enslavers over the blood-soaked decks as they command their slaves to die for their protection.

These are not the only xenos engaged in combat through the *Mortis Thule*, as the Orks aboard live for little else. The sight of the *Mortis Thule* drives mekboys by the thousands to prepare ramshackle force-bubbled rokkits; these ferry mobs into the void and to the space hulk where they use the random travel it provides to bring them to new systems for raiding and conquest. Once the space hulk reappears they launch themselves at whatever they can find, continuing their Waaagh! into areas unready for such devastation. There are few Ork worlds in Jericho, due perhaps to successful eradication policies during the Great Crusade, and scholars believe many of the Orks aboard the *Mortis Thule* originated from other sectors. This possibly means the space hulk travels even further than suspected, and may bring even greater horrors in future visitations.

While the Orks live for combat, for many of the humans stranded inside the *Mortis Thule* there is only the endless struggle to survive. Most have become little better than animals, devolving after exposure to radiation and Warp-induced mutagens into bestial Hullghasts. They roam from hull to hull, migrating as decks lose air or water seeps away into the rock-loam binding ships together. Each is a perversion of the human form; bleached scabrous skin with eruptions of horn and bone, long fingers of talon-like nails, oversized mouths filled with rotting but needle sharp teeth. Any they find in their way becomes new food, as do the weaker of the tribes should their hunger grow too powerful.

Deep within the *Mortis Thule* there are others also fighting to survive but still retaining a semblance of their humanity. The courier *Emperor's Gaze* was trapped many years ago near the end of the Achilles Crusade's initial successes when their Navigator failed to detect the space hulk drifting near them in the Warp. Surely His gaze was indeed upon them, for they managed to stay alive in the years since in that forced union. Carefully rationing their remaining power to keep their now-priceless Gellar Field intact when the *Mortis Thule* returns to the bosom of the Warp, and sustaining themselves on meagre supplies and fungal growths, they must also fight off raiders eager to steal their functioning systems. Their prayers are perhaps their greatest defence; the reverberating devotional hymns rise above the foul chatter of the tainted xenos such that some explorers have found themselves unknowingly joining in the song. One day they may indeed be rescued but until that day comes, they know their Emperor surely watches over them.

These are but a few of the dangers and denizens to be encountered on *Mortis Thule*. Accounts tell of many others, such as the rapacious Voar xenos-infection, feral Kroot-beasts and their carnivorous handlers, piratical Eldar in gleaming barbed armour and dripping blades, and far more that dwell in the depths of the *Mortis Thule*. Each boarding reveals new occupants, eager to welcome those who dare visit their tomb of rock and metal.

MORTIS THULE ADVENTURE SEEDS

Honour Your Chapter: Though the Adeptus Astartes of the Deathwatch are bound by oaths and honour to the Vigil, they have ties much stronger to their home Chapters and Primarchs. Learning that their Battle-brothers have fallen to the *Mortis Thule* or that ancient secrets from their Chapter's history might be found there, or even worse that there are captive Space Marines inside, could drive a Deathwatch team to instigate their own mission. Perhaps they might act on their own, or with their commander's tacit permission. No true Son of Russ would hesitate when offered vengeance against kin-killers. No Dark Angel of the Inner Circle would be held back if there were rumours of a Fallen One on the space hulk. There could be no stopping a Storm Warden from descending on Mortis should a survivor of the Nemesis Incident be located aboard. For these reasons and many more, a Space Marine would risk all and his Battle-Brothers would stand ready to support him, for such is the call of honour for the Adeptus Astartes.

Escort Duty: The Deathwatch is on rare occasions called to act as escort for extremely important Imperial officials, often those who work closely with the Inquisition. Such personages have motivations deeper and more labyrinthine than most Space Marines could imagine, and it would not be beyond them to arrange for their transport to 'accidentally' fall prey to *Mortis Thule's* influence. Once there, the escort team could be persuaded to accompany the agent and his loyal retinue as they use this unique opportunity to investigate the *Mortis Thule*. Perhaps the Battle-Brothers might grow suspicious as the agent leads them almost precisely to long-rumoured artefact vaults or against xenos creatures he desired to take captive. They are duty bound to protect the agent, but at what point will duty clash too highly with the honour of the Deathwatch or their own survival?

The Decree of the Omega Vault: There is one source that allows no discussion, no question, and no hesitation: the Omega Vault. Whenever it reveals its intentions, the Deathwatch stands ready to act. There have been multiple occasions which have led to missions against Thule based on Vault openings, sometimes to retrieve weapons or ships lost on previous missions, sometimes even to rescue the occupants of stasis tubes from ages long ago. Some are to simply destroy a key component, or stop a xenos warband gathering in power inside the rock. The mission may vary, but in all cases the Vault has decreed they act, and no Deathwatch Space Marine would refuse such a demand.

III: THE ORPHEUS SALIENT



ORPHEUS SALIENT NPC:

ERIOCH-PATTERN FIRE WASP

Since the time of the Great Crusade, the Adeptus Astartes have used specialised combat drones to venture ahead of assault squads during boarding actions to help clear a path towards vital objectives. These drones, known as Fire Wasps, are sent in ahead of the main boarding force in order to trip mines and any other traps or surprises. Fire Wasps are extremely robust devices, if not especially skilled in the arts of combat. Most standard patterns of the Fire Wasp include an inbuilt flamer and searchlight luminator to aid in their mission.

In the Jericho Reach, Deathwatch Kill-teams have used Fire Wasps on a number of occasions, most often when confronted with a mission that takes place on a space hulk or for penetrating the defences of Tau spacecraft in the Canis Salient.

Weapons: Astartes Flamer (20m; S/-/-; 2d10+2 E; Pen 3; Clip 6; Rld 2Full; Flame), Micro-Breaching Augur (2d10+6 R; Pen 4; Tearing, Unwieldy).

Armour: Reinforced casing (All 9, includes Machine Trait)

Gear: Built-in micro-bead (for receiving instructions only), high-powered searchlight luminator, short-range void thruster (granting it the Flyer [6] Trait in space), 2 flamer reloads.

Requisition: A Deathwatch Kill-team may requisition a Fire Wasp for 30 Requisition Points, with a Renown level of Distinguished.

Erioch-Pattern Fire Wasp Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
25	25	35	⁽⁸⁾ 40	15	15	25	20	10

Movement: 4/8/12/24

Wounds: 40

Skills: Awareness (Per) +10, Dodge (Ag), Search (Per) +20, Security (Ag) +20, Scrutiny (Per) +10.

Talents: Astartes Weapon Training, Fearless.

Traits: Auto-Stabilised, Fire Drill, Hoverer (4), Machine (5), Unnatural Toughness (x2).





THE ACHEROS SALIENT



THE STIGMARTUS
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ACHEROS SALIENT



IV: THE ACHEROS SALIENT

CHAPTER IV: THE ACHEROS SALIENT

"The core of the Jericho Reach is a grinding maw which consumes heretic and faithful alike. I will tear victory from its jaws even if I must choke it with our numberless dead!"

—Lord General Magratha Orphel von Karlack

In the history of the Achilus Crusade, no warzone has consumed more resources or claimed more lives than the Acheros Salient. Within this theatre of battle, the forces of the Imperium strive for victory against slaving mutants, enigmatic xenos slavers, tainted psykers, the forces of Chaos, and the Hadex Anomaly—a region where space and time themselves conspire against the forces of Mankind. For the soldiers of the Imperial Guard, to serve in the Acheros Salient is to be deployed in hell. For the warriors of the Adeptus Astartes, the Acheros Salient is a battlefield where all they have been trained to hate and destroy thrives in mockery of the Emperor's will. For the Battle-Brothers of the Deathwatch, the Acheros Salient is a festering canker poised to rot out the heart of the Jericho Reach.



THE STIGMARTUS

"From the first wound you deal to the last wound you receive, all blood spilt belongs to Elak Sarda!"

—Captain Val Vendercas, of the Mataras 9th Lacerators

Of all the forces standing in opposition to the Acheros Salient, none are more belligerent or numerous than the degenerate armies of the Stigmartus. Composed of renegades, cultists, rogue psykers, mutants, and madmen, the Stigmartus represent the greatest single military threat to the success of the Salient. Despite their disparate makeup, the forces of the Stigmartus display a level of military organisation and tactical acumen rarely seen among the servants of Chaos.

HISTORY WRIT IN BLOOD

"The more understanding I have of the past, the more fear I have for the future."

—Tselomas Dorel, scribe to Inquisitor Adrielle Quist

The origin and history of the Stigmartus are both shrouded in mystery despite the best efforts of the Inquisition and Imperial Guard intelligence operatives. What little is known comes from the interrogation of captured Stigmartus officers. All that is known for certain is that the history of the Stigmartus begins on the wretched death world Khazant.

Khazant was a world ravaged by perpetual war long before the coming of the Achilus Crusade. What scant historical records survived the Age of Shadow indicate the hereditary nobility of Khazant began an irreversible slide into decadence shortly after the disappearance of Lord Sector Designate Masimat Helicos in a devastating Warp Storm in 416.M36. Without a central Imperial authority to enforce order, Khazant's noble houses were free to give in to their ambitions. Political assassinations led to blood feuds. Blood feuds led to civil war. In less than a century Khazant was a planet-wide warzone.

Khazant's Ecclesiarchy, the last weakening pillar of Imperial authority, shattered under the weight of noble hubris, splitting into innumerable factions each loyal to a different bloodline. The Creed was perverted to serve the needs of the nobility, each warlord claiming themselves inheritors of the God-Emperor's divine authority. In a few short generations the warlords were considered divine beings, supplanting the Master of Mankind as a focus for worship. By the advent of the Achilus Crusade, the God-Emperor was all but forgotten upon Khazant.

Millennia of war left Khazant a withered husk of a world: her mines abandoned, her fields barren, her people weak and broken. In the end, the victors were those few warlords who managed to secret away a modicum of Khazant's dwindling resources. The rest starved in their fortress keeps.

Faced with the realisation that Khazant could no longer support their ambitions, the remaining warlords banded together under an uneasy truce and turned their collective gaze outward. A fleet of voidships, their hulls long ago gutted to provide materials and technology for civil war, were hastily repaired. Taking advantage of Khazant's position along the

Araqiel Main, the warlords remade themselves into corsairs, raiding neighbouring systems and bringing new resources to their world.

By the advent of the Achilus Crusade, Khazant was a world to be reckoned with. Made wealthy by centuries of plunder, her population reinvigorated by slaves captured from across the Reach, her shipyards constructing powerful vessels of war, Khazant was a prize Lord Militant Achilus could not ignore. The Lord Militant claimed the world in 782.M41 after a hard won campaign. However, as Achilus moved to consolidate Imperial power in the region, the displaced warlords fled into the Charon Stars to lick their wounds.

Within five standard years, elements of the Khazantine warlord fleet returned, deploying the first regiments of the Stigmartus across the Crusade front. Taking advantage of the Lord Militant Achilus' untimely death, this highly organised cult army broke the Imperium's hold upon several worlds. The Cellebos Warzone was born.

STRUCTURE AND ORGANISATION

"They fight and die with one purpose: to fight and die. If our own forces possessed such single minded dedication, this Crusade would know victory within the year."

—Colonel Drach of the Landrian 202nd Light Infantry

On the battlefields of the Acheros Salient, the legions of the Stigmartus are unmistakable; mutants, humans, and psykers marching together, their flesh scarred by old wounds and the ritual brandings of their masters. Despite their seemingly random composition, units of the Stigmartus display a surprising level of battlefield co-ordination uncommon among the lost souls who fight under the banner of heresy. Their ordered ranks, tight formations, and ability carry out complex battlefield strategies comes as a shock to most Imperial military personnel, especially those levied from the Calixis Sector accustomed to the disorganised and riotous assaults of the Pilgrims of Hayte. Those Imperial commanders who doubt the organisational effectiveness of the Stigmartus do not live long enough to regret their mistake.

The key to Stigmartus military discipline lies within its cult-like structure. Indeed, the further up the chain of command one looks, the less the Stigmartus resembles a corrupted version of the Imperial Guard and the more it resembles a dark reflection of the Ecclesiarchy. Rank and file soldiers are indoctrinated to look upon their commanders as warrior-priests, who in turn worship their superiors as saints. As Stigmartus soldiers rise in rank and experience they are indoctrinated into the deeper mysteries of the warrior cult, their flesh branded in jagged scars of rank and devotion, their souls lost to a twisted creed that offers divinity through warfare. Every foe slain in battle is looked upon as a sacrifice, a blood offering sent up the chain of command to Elak Sarda, the cult-general whom the Stigmartus claim as their master and god.

The Stigmartus at War

Cult-General Elak Sarda has accomplished a feat that awes and outrages the Crusade's leadership. Without the backing of the Imperium, he has established an army that spreads across dozens of systems of the Reach. Through his force of will, he has managed to keep that army well supplied and mobile enough to engage the Crusade upon multiple fronts. Further, his cult is well equipped, in spite of the limited technology base of the systems in the sector.

Clearly, the dark powers of the Warp have aided his cause and contributed to the fanatic loyalty of his forces. Yet those entities are seldom known for their ability to effectively manage the supply and requisition required to maintain such a large army and campaign. Those responsible for such organisation have been traitors to the Imperium, but Sarda is believed to have come from an isolated, relatively primitive world. Similarly, though much of their equipment is likely provided by the hereteks of Samech, no other leader is known to have successfully procured their support. Throughout the history of the Imperium, there are few instances of a traitor army that has spread as far or been as well equipped as the Stigmartus. The unusual coordination and aggressive expansion represents an unanticipated challenge for the forces of the Acheros Salient.

The majority of the Stigmartus forces are maniacal deviants who have won their victories more through sheer numbers than through any tactical success. These troopers have extensive ritual scars and proudly display the iconography of the dark gods. In battle, they attack with the zeal, as they seem almost as driven to martyrdom as they are towards victory. These units favour a strategy of endless waves of humanity. When unaccompanied by other forces, they will seldom even make effective use of terrain. Their fanatical devotion to the heathen gods is apparently their only armour. Though these units far outnumber the Crusade's available forces, they are not limitless, and their tactics quickly deplete their vast supply of soldiers.

If these zealots were Sarda's only forces, the Crusade might have already met with success. In addition to warbands and daemonic allies, the Stigmartus also possess elite units. Some of these are soldiers equipped with gear provided directly from Samech, including effective armour, unusual weaponry, and devices that are entirely foreign to those used by the Imperial Guard. Others are well disciplined forces that have dedicated themselves to the service of specific Warp entities.

MARK OF THE STIGMARTUS

Upon initiation into the warrior cult, each Stigmartus is branded with a ritual scar, the symbolic wound from which the cult is named. As a Stigmartus advances in rank and initiation new scars join the first. Cult veterans are disfigured by scars that display rank, honours, notable kills, and survival on multiple battlefields. The most seasoned of Stigmartus warriors, the infamous Defaced, are said to have hides composed of nothing but scar tissue.

Though hardly as effective as Chaos Space Marines, these units bear dark blessings that they can strategically employ in the service of their dark gods. These specialists include units that are adept at infiltration, subversion, and even the dark arts. In two confirmed cases, Stigmartus infiltrators have even successfully assassinated planetary commanders.

The greatest concentration of Stigmartus forces are in the worlds of the Cellebos Warzone. There, the chaos forces dramatically outnumber the elements of the Achilus Crusade. It is only through their faith in the God-Emperor that the Crusade has persevered.

The Stigmartus are not native to the planets of the Cellebos Warzone. Rather, Sarda is believed to have come from Malehi, one of the Ghouls Stars. The fortress worlds of the dark gods located at the edges of the Hadex Anomaly are densely populated with potential recruits for the Stigmartus forces. In these environs, humans and mutants are tainted from birth. The hopeless scum are selectively bred to create the fanatical and capable warriors to feed the Sarda's armies.

It is also believed that some of these systems are subject to the time dilation that has been observed in this region. By taking advantage of this shift, Stigmartus forces may have years to breed and train additional forces while only days or weeks pass in the worlds outside of the Anomaly's influence. This enables the Stigmartus to effectively replace even the most dramatic of losses in an extremely short time frame.

RECRUITMENT

"Accept the brand and worship at the altar of war. Comprehend the brand and master the ways of war. Become the brand and be the heart of war."

—Excerpt from Stigmartus officer initiation ritual.

Lack of concrete intelligence regarding the recruitment and training of Stigmartus soldiers has led to rampant speculation and rumour-mongering within the Imperial Guard. Across the Cellebos Warzone, barracks and trenches are filled with horror stories of traumatic hypno-indoctrination rituals, mass daemonic possession, and factory-like induction centres that await Imperial soldiers unfortunate enough to be captured by the enemy. The fact the Stigmartus are not known for taking prisoners, something oft repeated by officers of the Commissariat, has done little to quell rumours or bolster morale.

The truth of the matter is simple. The Stigmartus fills its ranks in much the same way as the Imperial Guard, with a mixture of volunteers, conscripts, and officers gleaned from worlds beyond the Cellebos Warzone. Indeed, the rulers of the systems along the Araquel Main gladly offer up levies of their own subjects to the Stigmartus in a parody of the Imperial Tithe. In return for such levies the Stigmartus offer these petty barons and corrupted priest-kings protection from the encroaching Imperium.

CULT-GENERAL ELAK SARDA

"How can we hope to win this battle? Our enemy is War incarnate!"

—Final words of Lance Corporal Dunsan Elvar of the 3rd Terrax Guard.

Imperial propaganda portrays Elak Sarda as a heretic, madman, and pawn of the Ruinous Powers. The doctrine of the Stigmartus portrays the infamous Cult-General as nothing less than a living god. Unfortunately for the future of the Jericho Reach both views are proving accurate.

Despite being a charismatic leader and exceptional strategist, the Cult-General thinks nothing of sacrificing thousands of capable warriors in suicidal engagements for his amusement. An object of worship for billions and a self-proclaimed god, Sarda nevertheless refuses the adoration of those outside the Stigmartus warrior cult, leading brutal pogroms against tribes of would-be followers which routinely spring up across the Charon Stars. Though champion and overlord of the former warlords of Khazant, whose scions comprise the majority of Stigmartus officer-bishops, Sarda claims no familial ties to any known bloodline of the expanse, nor does he claim any planet as the world of his birth. Indeed, his origins are unknown, as if the Cult-General did not exist until his first assault upon Vanity in 788.M41.

Elak Sarda's appearance is well known among Crusade forces thanks to the innumerable statues and shrines the Cult-General leaves in his wake. A tall man with handsome, strikingly angular features, Sarda looks every inch the ideal military leader. One might even confuse the Cult-General for a stoic Imperial Guard commander were it not for the latticework of scars covering every millimetre of exposed skin. Stigmartus dogma claims the name and rank of every cult member is inscribed upon the flesh of the Cult-General, just as scars of rank and fealty mark the flesh of each Stigmartus. As his warriors fall in battle, their names upon the Cult-General's skin are said to bleed. As the Stigmartus know war without ending, so Elak Sarda strides the Cellebos Warzone, leaving an unbroken trail of blood to mark his passage.

STIGMARTUS INFANTRY

"Damnation is my sword, corruption my shield!"

—Common Stigmartus battle cry

Able to fight and willing to die, the common warrior of the Stigmartus is easily the equal of any soldier of the Imperial Guard. Thanks to some unknown bargain sworn between Elak Sarda and the Hereteks of Samech, Stigmartus infantry are armed with corrupted versions of standard Imperial weaponry. Indeed, the only things that separate the cult's infantry from the forces of the Crusade are their damned souls and marred flesh.



STIGMARTUS OFFICER-BISHOP

"I shall whip you and brand you and castigate your flesh until there is nothing left but scars, within and without! Only then will you know what it means to be Stigmatartus!"

—Commandant Faustaff Keel of the Bolgran Terrors

Equal parts general and priest, Officer-Bishops command the Stigmatartus hordes, initiate new recruits, and impart the tactics and doctrine of Elak Sarda. Composed almost entirely of former warlords of Khazant and their descendants, the blood of a thousand tyrants flows through their veins.

Stigmatartus Officer-Bishop (Elite) Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
40	45	37	40	39	35	45	45	40

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 30

Skills: Awareness (Per), Climb (S), Command (Fel) +20, Common Lore (War) (Int) +20, Dodge (Ag), Evaluate (Int), Forbidden Lore (Stigmatartus, Jericho Reach) (Int) +10, Intimidate (S) +10, Literacy (Int), Speak Language (High Gothic, Low Gothic, Unholy Tongue) (Int), Swim (S), Tactics (Int).

Talents: Basic Weapon Training (Las, SP), Melee Weapon Training (Chain, Power, Primitive), Pistol Training (Las, SP), Air of Authority, Unshakeable Faith.

Armour: Xenoleather Officer's Coat (Arms 3, Body 3, Legs 3).

Weapons: Samech Pattern Chainsword (1d10+6 R; Pen 4; Razor Sharp, Tearing), Compact Laspistol (15; S/—/—; 1d10+1 E; Clip 15; Reload Full; Reliable). Stigmatartus Officer's Lash (3m; 1d5+6 R; Pen 0; Flexible, Tearing, Primitive).

Gear: Data-slate, personal encrypted comm-link, ritual scarification implements.

Special Rules

Commander: The Stigmatartus Officer-Bishop can give take personal command of a Horde. If he does so, the Officer-Bishop may grant the Horde either the Fire Drill or Overwhelming Trait; this requires the Officer-Bishop to succeed at a **Challenging (+0) Command Test**. These Traits may change from round to round, based on the Officer-Bishop's needs. At the GM's discretion, the Officer-Bishop may also select from the following Horde Traits from **MARK OF THE XENOS**: Focused Fire, Rally, and Volley Fire.

Stigmatartus Infantry (Troops) Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
35	35	35	40	30	20	30	35	15

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 15

Skills: Awareness (Per), Climb (S), Common Lore (War) (Int), Dodge (Ag), Forbidden Lore (Stigmatartus) (Int), Speak Language (Low Gothic) (Int), Survival (Int), Swim (S).

Talents: Basic Weapon Training (Las, SP), Melee Weapon Training (Primitive), Pistol Training (Las, SP), Hatred (any one; Ecclesiarchy, Imperial Guard, Space Marines), Thrown Weapon Training (Universal).

Traits: Blood Soaked Tide (Horde), Disciplined (Horde), Fighting Withdrawal (Horde).

Armour: Flak Armour (All 4).

Weapons: Samech Pattern autogun (100m; S/3/—; 1d10+3 I; Pen 0; Clip 30; Reload Full), Stigmatartus Scourge (1m; 1d5+6 R; Pen 0; Tearing, Primitive), Frag Grenades (SBx3; S/—/—; 2d10 X; Pen 0; Blast 4).

Gear: Respirator, 3 autogun reloads, 3 frag grenades.

STIGMARTUS OGRYN BRUTE

The Stigmartus occasionally field units composed of massive Ogryns—enormous, simple-minded mutants that have been trained for nothing more than savage aggression. These Ogryn brutes often serve the Stigmartus as shock troops, spearheading assaults by soaking up firepower that would stagger or stop most other infantry.

Amongst the Stigmartus in the Acheros Salient, Ogryn Brutes are often used as part of a heavy weapons team—the Ogryns lug various heavy weapons such as autocannons and missile launchers into position and hold the weapon steady so that the Stigmartus Infantryman gunner can fire the weapon more accurately.

Stigmartus Ogryn Brute (Elite) Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
45	25	60 ⁽¹²⁾	50 ⁽¹⁰⁾	30	20	25	30	15

Movement: 4/8/16/24

Wounds: 65

Skills: Awareness (Per), Climb (S) +10, Dodge (Ag), Intimidate (S), Speak Language (Low Gothic) (Int), Survival (Int).

Talents: Berserk Charge, Crushing Blow, Die Hard, Fearless, Furious Assault, Hardy, Lightning Attack, Swift Attack.

Traits: Brutal Charge, Bulking Biceps, Fear 2 (Disturbing), Improved Natural Weapons, Natural Weapons (Huge fists), Unnatural Strength (×2), Unnatural Toughness (×2), Size (Hulking), Sturdy.

Armour: Riveted flak-board plates (All 4).

Weapons: Massive hooked cleaver (2d10+16 R; Pen 2; Concussive, Unwieldy), heavy stubber (100m; —/—/8; 1d10+5 I; Pen 3), or huge fists (1d10+14 I; Pen 0; Concussive).

Special Rules

Powerful Blows: Stigmartus Ogryn Brutes are huge masses of gene-bulked muscle and heavy-grav bone. All melee attacks from a Stigmartus Ogryn Brute gain the Concussive Quality (already added in) and the Stigmartus Ogryn gains the Auto-Stabilised Trait when wielding a ranged weapon.



SARDA'S UNDYING

Cult-General Sarda maintains a standing company of devoted personal guard. At all times, at least a squad of these special troopers accompany him. In several cases, these squads have also been observed operating independently from the heretical leader. The armoured chest plates and the fully-enclosed horned helms they wear make Sarda's Undying easily identifiable on the field of battle.

Many rumours circulate among the Imperial Guard troops concerning the Undying. These include tales that they are all mutants, that their tongues have been cut out to insure their silence, and that their dark oaths have granted them immortality. Deathwatch field reports indicate that at least the last of these rumours is inaccurate.

The Undying (Troops) Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
40	45	35	55	30	30	30	40	20

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 15

Skills: Awareness (Per), Climb (S), Dodge (Ag) +10, Command (Fel), Intimidate (S), Speak Language (Low Gothic, Unholy Tongue) (Int), Swim (S), Survival (Int).

Talents: Basic Weapon Training (Las, SP), Melee Weapon Training (Chain), Marksman, Mighty Shot.

Traits: Disciplined (Horde), Fire Drill (Horde).

Armour: Carapace Chestplate and Helm (Body 6, Head 4).

Weapons: Chain Axe (1d10+7 R; Tearing, Unwieldy), Samech-pattern Hellgun (110m; S/3/—; 1d10+6 E; Pen 7; Clip 40; Reload 3Full).

Gear: 3 reloads for hellgun, ritual fetishes.

Report: Warchilde Wreckage

ATT: Watch Captain Carlsworth;

++Priority Aureolin

Investigation of the lost Storm Warden Battle Barge has gone extremely poorly. We believe we completed transition into the system without attracting enemy attention. Our approach to the vessel also seemed to go smoothly. However, the vessel that once represented the full grandeur of the Imperium is in far worse condition than Crusade reports indicated.

The vessel is severely damaged. That portion of the battle report is accurate. In fact, Brother-Techmarine Xerxes has indicated that he believes the ship unsalvageable by even the full resources of the Adeptus Mechanicus. Unfortunately, the servants of the Dark Gods have different resources. We observed numerous signs of extensive reconstruction on the vessel. All of the construction was littered with blasphemous iconography.

Prior to completing our approach to the space hulk, our craft drew the attention of its repair teams. The resulting conflict exposed us to something even more disturbing. Our opponents wore armour that bore the defaced iconography of the Storm Wardens chapter. I do not know if creatures of the Warp inhabited the armour or if members of the Chapter have turned traitor.

I feel strongly that the chapter master must be notified. We have temporarily withdrawn from the system to affect repairs and provide this report before we attempt a second insertion.



THE DEFACED

"Which is greater? The wounding weapon, or the flesh which survives despite the wound?"

—Excerpted from the *Liber Poena*

Though all Stigmartus long for a glorious death in battle, some prove too capable to die. Veterans of uncounted battles and survivors of grievous injuries, the Defaced have given themselves fully to the path of the Stigmartus. Worshipped by lesser initiates as avatars of battle, the Defaced have lost human identity and appearance under layers of scar tissue and ritual brandings. Granted deadly gifts handed down by Elak Sarda through his Officer-Bishops, many wonder if anything human remains under the skin of the Defaced.

The Defaced (Elite) Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
35	35	35	40	30	20	30	35	15

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 20

Skills: Awareness (Per), Climb (S) +10, Common Lore (War) (Int), Forbidden Lore (Stigmartus) (Int) +10, Intimidate (S), Silent Move (Ag), Speak Language (Low Gothic, Unholy Tongue) (Int), Survival (Int) +10, Swim (S), Tracking (Int).

Talents: Basic Weapon Training (Las, SP), Fearless, Frenzy, Melee Weapon Training (Primitive), Hatred (any one: Ecclesiarchy, Imperial Guard, Space Marines), Heavy Weapon Training (Las, Melta).

Traits: Brutal Charge, Dark Sight.

Armour: Flak Armour (All 4).

Weapons: Samech Pattern Multi-melta (60m; S/-/-; 4d10+5 E; Pen 12; Clip 12; Reload 2 Full; Blast 1; Overheats) or Samech Pattern Lascannon (250m; S/-/-; 4d10+10 E; Pen 10; Clip 8; Reload 2 Full), Stigmartus Scourge (1m; 1d5+6 R; Pen 0; Tearing, Primitive), serrated mono-sword (1d10+3 R; Pen 2).

Gear: Respirator, 3 lascannon or multimelta reloads, microbead.

Special Rules

Scar-warriors: The Defaced are often surgically altered into killing machines by the Stigmartus. To represent this, the GM should select one Trait from the following list to apply to any group of Defaced (this can be to an individual or to a Horde if the GM wishes).

- Fear 2 (Frightening)
- Unnatural Strength (x2)
- Unnatural Toughness (x2)

THE CHARON STARS

"No foe is more pernicious when dug-in than the forces of the Archenemy."

—Commissar Holt

The Charon Stars, located near the Hadex Anomaly, are filled with life tainted by the Warp. Because of the Warp-breach's unpredictable motion, agents of the Ordo Malleus have been unable to determine just how far these contaminants may extend. While stars that have left its effect no longer glow with sickly red light, their worlds are hardly cleansed of its influence. Rather, these systems may bear the subtle markings of Chaos taint for millennia to come.

VESPASIA

The Cellebos Warzone has been deemed critical for the Acheros Salient and any attempts to expand beyond this battlefield have been put on hold until the situation in that zone stabilises. For this reason, the Imperium has yet to begin a formal push to recover the world of Vespasia even though the planet was scouted some time ago.

In spite of that fact, the Crusade has a vested interest in establishing Vespasia as a compliant world as soon as the resources become available to do so. This planet is a verdant place, friendly to mankind's colonisation, and home to a rich bounty that could greatly assist with the Crusade's resource difficulties. Much of the planet's surface is actively used for agriculture in addition to substantial aquaculture and a preponderance of wild game. Terran species that were introduced during the Jericho Sector's golden age remain plentiful, though they have diverged from the source stock.

Vespasia was never densely populated, and its time apart from the Imperium has not changed that. Its proximity to the Hadex Anomaly, however, has had a substantial effect. The natives have completely forsaken the Imperial Creed. The planet's vast agricultural resources are managed by slaves descended from Imperial citizens. A ruling class of mutants holds the population in check. The forces of the Stigmartus provide the system's defences and security, in exchange for a generous tithe of the planet's harvests.

These slaves live under the threat of starvation and constant degradation from their overlords. Because of the numerically superior underclass, agents of the Ecclesiarchy have begun an unauthorised initiative to infiltrate the slaves' culture. They hope to trigger a rebellion in the name of the God-Emperor. The risks of arming a culture that has not yet pledged its allegiance to the Imperium is substantial. So substantial, in fact, that the Ecclesiarchy agents have not attempted to garner the approval of the Crusade's command elements. If the attempt fails, the arms and training could be commandeered by the Stigmartus or could create an entrenched local government that would need to be overthrown later. Word of such a failure could lead to a further breakdown between the factions that make up the Crusade.

USING VESPASIA

Scenarios on Vespasia cannot be easily resolved with brute force. The Ecclesiarchy has created an awkward situation that is unlikely to be resolved in an effective manner. The situation could come to a head and begin deteriorating quickly. Deathwatch agents might need to take a direct hand, if only to prevent further strife within the forces of the Crusade. This might involve a rescue mission, a tactical strike, or the assassination of Ecclesiarchy agents to eliminate the evidence.

As these agents are operating without the support of the Crusade, they have had to make sacrifices that might otherwise be deemed unacceptable. Few of the natives have been subjected to any sort of genetic screening for mutation. They are currently operating without fleet elements, even though the Stigmartus have a small fleet patrolling the system. The training provided to the slaves is based upon Ecclesiarchy standards, rather than the more rigorous methods advocated by the Munitorum. These challenges may doom the effort to failure, particularly if Stigmartus forces can be reallocated to deal with the uprising.

There is minimal evidence of any xenos threat on Vespasia. A few marble-like arches have been noted in some of the deepest parts of the planet's wilderness. Their origins are unknown but likely predate human colonisation. No other ruins are mentioned in Imperial records. Many believe that if the taint of Chaos is cleansed, the system could be ripe for compliance.

RESGULUS

Watch Station Resgulus is the only sign of mankind's intrusion upon the surface of this dusty orb. The planet's atmosphere is dense with organic gases, clouds of ash, and high levels of radiation. The hostile environment may be the consequence of an ancient civilisation's demise or simply a consequence of its many active volcanoes. The current environs are far too hostile for mankind's intrusion, but atmospheric contamination suggests that it might be useful as a mining world.

The Watch Station was established in response to structures that were observed millennia ago when the system was first scouted. On various occasions, the harsh winds that scour the surface have uncovered odd structures from beneath the ashen deserts. Though they may be natural formations, their blocky structure and serpentine grooves suggest that they might be the remains of an ancient civilisation. Alternatively, these could be natural formations, with grooves carved out by the endless winds blowing against the natural rock structures.

The Achilus Crusade has not made any efforts to conquer or even scout Resgulus. The command structure has dismissed it as a barren wasteland, of little short-term value to the Imperium. At best, it is considered a stepping stone to reach worlds more valuable to the Imperium.

Kill-team observations of the rock formations are not consistent with any known xenos construction patterns. Some argue that the serpentine markings are too regular to be

anything but a sign of language. Others however suggest the odd rock structures are a by-product of the toxic atmosphere interacting with mineral ores present in the planet's strata.

The conundrum is that the rock structures seem to appear and decay quickly or spontaneously relocate. The planet's scouring winds may do more than simply reveal them from beneath the soil. The structures vanish from sensor records, only to reappear in other locations, sometimes centuries later. Sensors never detect movement, or even significant degradation from the windstorms. Rather, they simply identify the absence or presence of a structure.

One theory is that the structures' motion is due to the time warping effects of the Hadex Anomaly. This might be a lingering effect of past Warp contamination—the planet has been within its boundaries in the past. Alternative theories suggest that these rock structures are the creation of xenos technology or an indication of xenos structures beneath the planet's surface. Unfortunately, the sensors of Watch Station Resgulus have not identified any mechanical devices or signs of choral instability. The Watch Station remains active in hopes of identifying a cause that the Deathwatch could target for elimination.

MAGOG

The Magog system has been drawn into and exited from the Hadex Anomaly countless times in the millennia since the disturbance first appeared. These transitions have had a substantial effect upon its only inhabitable planet and those who dwell upon it. Once this was a stable Agri-world filled with citizens loyal to the God-Emperor and the Imperial Creed. Now, it is a breeding ground and a training centre for the forces of corruption that extend into the Jericho Reach.

The planet's environment and indigenous life all bear the taint of the Warp. Rivers that were once filled with water now flow with blood. Much of the plant life—including some that is harvested for food—is predatory and feeds upon those who tend it. The planet's surface ebbs and flows, as though the entire world draws breath. Landmasses—even mountain ranges—migrate on a whim and are often subsumed beneath the world's surface, only to emerge days or decades later in a different locale.

In addition to those surviving humans, the planet is also rife with creatures spawned from the Warp. These foul daemons closely interact with the tainted humans; breeding mutants and providing a seemingly endless supply of further soldiers for the forces of the dark gods. Their presence serves as a powerful motivation for the tainted humans as they pay their obeisance. The mortals are constantly driven to commit acts of debauchery and cruelty in their service.

In spite of these constant acts of wanton destruction, Magog remains a crucial asset to the forces of Chaos. For unknown reasons, the planet's environment has consistently remained capable of supporting life and abundant agriculture. Though the foodstuffs are hideously deformed, the fortress world's fields are constantly tilled and harvested by countless slaves. The mutated crops provide yields with an efficiency that far exceeds even many of the most bountiful planets of the Imperium.

This bounty of both food and manpower is likely the reason for the system's extensive defences, and very few of the craft sent to scout the system have returned from their missions. While Warp instability contributes to the high failure rate, the dark fleets reported by those that have returned are undoubtedly a factor as well. Reports have also indicated that there are substantial orbital emplacements, one of which has been tentatively identified as a Blackstone Fortress.

The Stigmartus actively recruit from Magog's population. There are numerous reports of traitor Space Marines active in the Magog system, or moving towards the system. The extent of their involvement is unclear, but they may be recruiting from the native population as well.

Magog's many uses clearly dictate that it must be a high priority target for the Achilus Crusade. However, until additional assets can be allocated it is virtually impenetrable. The Chaos forces must be drawn away from the system, or the Acheros Salient would need to receive a substantial increase in manpower and resources.

TABIUS RASA

The only habitable world of the Tabius Rasa system is a planet that bears the presence of mankind with grave reluctance. Its vast water oceans are high in phosphates and potassium salts, which require extensive filtration prior to consumption. The planet's weather is dramatic; likely due to its four moons, with surface winds frequently exceeding a 150 kilometres per hour. These storms constantly scour the surface, leaving worn rocks and short, reedy plant life.

The natives of Tabius Rasa are technologically primitive, but have established a stable society that seems free of Warp taint. Many of their communities are built in the canyons and foothills of mountains that can protect them from the wind. Others have moved to subterranean life, escaping the weather completely. Over the millennia, they have lost virtually all of the technology that carried their ancestors to the planet. By necessity, these survivors have developed agricultural techniques and water filtration systems that exploit the native resources.

The planet's mineral resources are skewed away from metallic substances, and none of the surface plants are harvestable for hardwoods. Bone, rock, and coral are used in place of metals. Sub-aquatic plants are harvested for dense reeds that the natives process into a hardwood substitute. They currently lack the technology and the resources to manufacture modern synthetic materials. These combined limitations are almost certainly key reasons for their primitive lifestyles.

Between the limited resources and the difficult weather, some consider it a miracle that the colony has survived. However, there may be darker reasons for its survival. The natives are often found accompanied by reptilian companions, which they call drahkens. These xenos creatures are a six-limbed, reptilian species that grow up to a meter in body length with a longer tail. The human colonists treat the drahkens with great deference, often carrying them on their shoulders, and in some circles treating them as peers. Some amongst the Ordo Malleus speculate that these reptilian life forms are actually some form of daemonic familiar.



Report: Drahkens of Tabius Rasa

ATT: Watch Captain Koulos; ++Priority Vermillion

As directed, my team has completed an insertion and begun analyses of the drahkens as they interact with the native human population. We have relied mostly upon stealth, though we have abducted several humans and xenos for questioning. All human abductees have been sedated and hypno-programmed to remove all memories of the incidents. The xenos have been eliminated, though their bodies were preserved for further analysis upon our return to the Watch Station.

Brother-Librarian Ishmael reports great success in probing the minds of the native humans. His preliminary findings suggest that everyone encountered seemed to radiate an unusual degree of contentment. He has had far less success with the xenos and now believes that they may be capable of reading and projecting emotions to humans. If this finding is supported, their empathy may be the reason for the peaceful nature of these humans.

Such a degree of contentment could be extremely troubling for the Crusade's efforts on this system, as well as dangerous for any humans under its effects. We believe further analysis is necessary at this time, so that any xenos plot may be further uncovered. There may be merit in proceeding with an immediate extermination of these xenos.



Report: The Pillars of Resgulus

ATT: Watch Captain Scipio; ++Priority Indigo



Our mission to analyse the native structures has gone poorly. We arrived at what we believe to be the location where the formations were observed, but they were absent upon our arrival. Geographical localisation is complicated by the atmospheric irregularities and the dunes of the ash deserts. Auspex and other sensing equipment encountered functional issues. Even our blessed armour began showing evidence of malfunction.

Scouting the region, we did identify comparable structures after a few days of travel on foot. These formations were extremely similar in appearance to those described in the previous report. However, due to repeated equipment failures, we were unable to secure any imagery. Neither Brother-Librarian Cole nor Techmarine Marleesh found any trace of xenos or warp taint in their examination of the structures. Radiation levels were slightly increased over background count, but this did not offer a clear explanation for their existence.

Structurally, several of the pillars did intersect, to create an uneven, roughly circular cave opening. The interior of the cave was filled only with the planet's ashen dust. The carvings were present on the inside walls of the opening, suggesting that they might not be due only to the atmospheric winds. Unfortunately, these were no more identifiable than those previously observed.

At this time, we can only recommend that observations of Resgulus are continued. These structures seem too ordered to be the products of a natural process.

Scipio's report is concise and clear as usual; issue an extermination order immediately.

P.W.

Tabius Rasa lacks a central government. Each community exists as an independent city-state, with its own organisation. Oddly, there are few indications of conflict between the various city-states, even though the planet is poor in resources. Reports have shown that some of these governments include the drahkens as citizens and peers. Imperial lore is only found among the population's ancient legends. They do not follow the Imperial Creed. Instead, religions vary substantially from city-state to city-state. In several instances, the mortal rulers of the cities are identified as living gods.

The origins of these xenos are unclear. Records of the system from the Jericho Sector era do not identify any sapient or even protosapient species. Warp contamination could have induced a metamorphosis in a native life form, but there are few signs of contamination among the human population. Alternatively, it could be that drahkens are not native to the Tabius Rasa system. If that is the case, they might be colonising the planet as well, though the absence of any indications of spaceflight fail to support this theory. In any case, the close interaction between a xenos species will, undoubtedly, cause issues when the Crusade establishes contact with the planet.

OPPOSITION FORCES

Numerous warbands have taken arms against the Achilles Crusade near the Hadex Anomaly. Their tactics are varied, but their actions are surprisingly well coordinated. It remains unclear if the tactical acumen is the by-product of a series of alliances, a daemonic cabal, or the work of a single individual.

Imperial forces are seeking to identify the leadership elements responsible for the resistance, and target them for elimination. Until this happens, the current stalemate is likely to continue. Difficulties in the other Salients preclude approaching the problem with direct and overwhelming force. While a holding action in the Cellebos Warzone can be maintained for some time, the strain this places on the Crusade's resources dictates that a new tactic may be put into play soon.

The Pyre

Chaos Space Marines wearing the insignias of the Pyre warband were first observed near the Eye of Terror in 131. M41. There are no confirmed records of encounters with the warband prior to this time. Munitorum analysts have not been able to determine if the Pyre splintered from another known warband, or if they were assembled from fragments of several different groups.

Since that time, units wearing modified version of Pyre wargear have been observed on several occasions. There are no indications that this warband has sworn fealty to any specific god of Chaos. Rather, they have been seen to coordinate their battles with servants of all the dark gods, which have included daemonic and cultist elements.

The Pyre warband is known to favour short-range combat, especially in urban environments. While capable in melee situations and extended range engagements, their devotion to flame weapons often dictates their tactics. They generally eschew assault and fire support elements. Rather, they focus on movement through cover until they can attack with eldritch fire.

The Pyre's forces have played prominent roles in several actions, particularly in the Vanity system. Oddly, though, no higher ranking members of this warband have been positively identified. Instead, these traitors have been seen in the company of Warp creatures and the Stigmartus. Also of note is that Pyre units have not been observed working directly with Chaos Space Marines of other warbands. Given the typically diverse spreads of units employed by the blasphemous forces, this separation is inexplicable.

The Achilles Crusade has faced several strike cruisers and a battle barge that bore the markings of the Pyre. These vessels were seen in the Vanity and Magog systems, along with company-sized deployments of Pyre forces. The number of craft suggests that there are at least several companies of the Traitor Space Marines active in the Reach, but the Crusade has not encountered any deployments of that size. This could mean that the Pyre's elements are spread throughout the Salient, are being held largely in reserve, or that they are sharing their vessels with other elements as evidenced by the known deployments.

The Word Bearers

As one of the Space Marine Legions that opposed the Emperor during the Horus Heresy, the Word Bearers embraced the worship of the dark gods. When the Emperor slew Horus, the Word Bearers retreated to the Eye of Terror. Over the millennia since, they have constantly studied and sacrificed under the tutelage of their Dark Apostles, who are in turn guided by their Primarch Lorgar. Their zeal follows a pantheon of all the Warp's hideous powers, which they worship as Chaos unaligned.

From the time of their founding, the Word Bearers have been characterized by their religious fervour. Before their conversion to the ways of Chaos, they established the worship of the God-Emperor. When the Emperor rebuked their worship, they found new gods and their adulation shifted. Ever since, the Legion has spread the writings of Lorgar through corruption, violence, and fear. Wherever they go, new blasphemies abound as churches are rededicated in the name of the dark gods.

In battle, the Word Bearers depend upon the power of their zeal and fervour as much as their tactical acumen. Hundreds of the corrupted Space Marines may march forward, bolters at the ready, as they chant an unholy catechism from the Book of Lorgar. Their advance is implacable, and although they may face overwhelming odds, they believe that their faith will preserve and provide for them.

The surviving members of the Word Bearers legion represent an enormous threat to the Imperium as a whole and the Jericho Reach specifically. Each Dark Apostle of Lorgar leads a host of Chaos Space Marines, with some rumoured to be even larger than an entire loyalist Chapter. At times, these

hosts can even work in concert, as they conquer new worlds in their lord's name. Two hosts are in the Reach, but others may also be present.

One of these two hosts has been identified by the presence of the Desolator Battleship *Dark Chorus* in the Magog system. This massive voidfaring craft represents a substantial threat to the Achilus Crusade. Currently, the Crusade has no craft in the vicinity that is its equal in firepower. The Imperial Navy has committed only a handful of battleships to the Crusade—these behemoths of the void are highly sought after in all warzones across the galaxy. Besides, the act of delivering such gargantuan craft is challenging, requiring careful piloting just to fit through the Warp Gate. Until such resources may be brought to bear, the fleet has attempted to avoid direct confrontation with the *Dark Chorus*.

The second Word Bearers host is active in the Mataras system. Confirmed reports indicate that Word Bearer forces have been involved in several battles on Mataras III. Additional Space Marine forces have been deployed to deal with the traitor legion.

ACHEROS SALIENT NPC:

DARK APOSTLE

The Dark Apostles of the Word Bearers fulfil a role similar to that of the Chaplain in a loyalist Space Marine chapter. Leading from the front lines, these champions of their dark faith set an example for their compatriots. Between battles, they also tend to the warband's spiritual needs as they spread the word of their Primarch. Dark Apostles lack the psychic talents of a daemonic sorcerer or the overwhelming strength of a greater Daemon. They replace these talents with their steadfast devotion to the powers of Chaos. These staunch opponents are masters at inspiring their allies and shaking the confidence of their opponents.

Dark Apostle (Master) Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
65	55	⁽¹⁰⁾ 58	⁽¹⁰⁾ 55	50	50	55	65	60

Movement: 6/12/18/36

Wounds: 40

Skills: Awareness (Per) +10, Ciphers (Chapter Runes) (Int), Charm (Fel) +10, Command (Fel) +20, Common Lore (Adeptus Astartes, Imperium, War) (Int) +20, Deceive (Fel) +20, Dodge (Ag) +20, Drive (Ground Vehicles, Skimmer) (Ag), Forbidden Lore (Daemonology, Heresy, Traitor Legions) (Int) +10, Interrogation (Fel) +10, Intimidate (S) +20, Literacy (Int) +20, Scholastic Lore (Occult) (Int) +20, Scrutiny (Per) +10, Search (Per), Silent Move (Ag), Speak Language (Low Gothic, High Gothic, Unholy Tongue) (Int) +10, Survival (Int), Tactics (Int) +10, Tracking (Int).

Talents: Air of Authority, Ambidextrous, Astartes Weapon Training, Bolter Drill, Die Hard, Fearless, Hatred (Loyalist Space Marines), Heightened Senses (Sight, Sound), Into the Jaws of Hell, Iron Discipline, Jaded, Killing Strike, Lightning Attack, Master Orator, Quick Draw, Rapid Reload, Two-Weapon Wielder (Melee, Ballistic), Swift Attack, True Grit.

Traits: Dark Sight, Size (Hulking), Touched by the Fates (3), Unnatural Strength (x2), Unnatural Toughness (x2).

Armour: Astartes Power Armour (Head 8, Arms 8, Body 10, Legs 8).

Weapons: Astartes Bolt Pistol (30m; S/3/—; 2d10+5 X; Pen 5; Clip 12; Rld Full, Tearing) Accursed Crozius† (1d10+16 E, Pen 7, Balanced, Power Field).

†*The Dark Apostle gains the Hatred Talent against any foe he is engaged with in Melee when wielding an Accursed Crozius. Any opponents the wielder is engaged with in melee may not take the Defensive Stance action against him.*

Gear: 2 bolt pistol reloads, unholy charms.

Special Rules

Accursed Crozius: Dark Apostles are protected by the daemonic power of their accursed crozius; this acts as a Force Field (see page 166 in the Deathwatch Rulebook) with a rating of 50 that overloads on a 01-10. When an accursed crozius overloads, the field remains active, but the daemon within inflicts 1d5 Damage to the Dark Apostle, ignoring Toughness Bonus, field saves (including the one granted from the crozius itself!), and Armour.

Cant of Lorgar: The Dark Apostle spends a Half Action to chant an unholy catechism from the book of Lorgar, inspiring the surrounding heretics with the blasphemous words. If the Dark Apostle succeeds at a **Challenging (+0) Fellowship Test**, all allies within ten metres are inspired by his religious fervour and gain a +10 bonus to all WS and BS Tests for the remainder of the encounter.



THE HADEx ANOMALY

"There is a wound in the void!"

—Dien Xquin, Astropath Transcendent of the *Limitless Grasp*

The core of the Jericho Reach is dominated by an enigmatic warp phenomenon that defies conventional classification. Bathing countless worlds in a sickly red glow, this nebulous tear in space represents far more than a navigational hazard or obstruction to astropathic communication. It is a cancer upon the fabric of time and space, and entire star systems have been lost to its baleful influence. To the astronomers who study it, and the Navigators who fear it, it is known as the Hadex Anomaly.

Like a monstrous heart palpitating in the void, the influence of the Hadex Anomaly expands and recedes arrhythmically, absorbing and disgorging entire solar systems over the course of decades. Worlds bathed in the crimson glow of the Anomaly become saturated with its corrupting essence, while stars languish under its stygian radiance. Such stars become clotted red orbs, shedding a carmine luminescence mimicking that of the Anomaly itself.

The erratic behaviour of the Anomaly has caused many scholars to believe that it may, in fact, have a mind and sentience of its own. There is a ring of ships surrounding the

Anomaly, ghost vessels that have become locked within a tide of choral disturbances—frozen forever within a flow of time. It is conjectured that the Hadex Anomaly is the source of a flow of time spewing forth into the galaxy from another dimension, although any efforts to fully catalogue or study the effects of the Anomaly have ended in utter disaster.

More than the amassed forces of the Stigmartus, the xenos fleets, or the warbands of the Traitor Legions, the Hadex Anomaly represents a seemingly insurmountable obstacle standing in the way of the Acheros Salient. How can the forces of Mankind know victory when their enemy is space itself?

RECORDED HISTORY

"We do not see its light. Rather, we perceive a reflection of an ultimate darkness predating the universe."

—From the anonymously published pamphlet *Rutilus Inritus*

The origin of the Hadex Anomaly is shrouded in mysteries as impenetrable as the Anomaly itself. Apocryphal accounts link the Anomaly to the blood rites practised by the corrupted lords of Verronus, a decadent hive world thought destroyed during the Anomaly's violent birth. Astrologers claim the Anomaly is the result of an inauspicious planetary—or possibly galactic—alignment, a confluence of forces that ripped the void asunder. Darkest of all explanations are those espoused by warp dabblers across the Jericho Reach who claim the Hadex Anomaly is only a prelude to a future calamity set to lay waste to the entire Jericho Reach.

What little the forces of the Achilus Crusade know of the Hadex Anomaly comes from the journals of Lord Captain Emanuel Hadex, one of the few Rogue Traders to venture into the Jericho Reach during the Age of Shadow. Born into a moderately successful Dynasty operating in the vicinity of Charadon, Emanuel fled the realm of his birth during the invasion of the first Arch-Arsonist. Seeking a new territory to exploit, Emanuel took advantage of a break in the Warp storms surrounding the lost Jericho Sector to venture into the worlds beyond. When Emanuel's flagship, the *Aletis*, translated from the Warp, the Lord Captain was awestruck by a sight he described as "like a rose suspended in the firmament!" In his hubris, the Lord Captain named his discovery the Hadex Nebula.

Soon after the Anomaly's discovery, the journal of Lord-Captain Emanuel Hadex begins to reflect the emerging madness of its author. Day-to-day accounts of shipboard life give way to imagined conversations between the Rogue Trader and the red hole bearing his name. Hadex claimed that the celestial phenomena responded to his thoughts and somehow began communicating with him in his dreams.

However, as the fleet drew closer it became clear to Emanuel's crew that the Hadex Nebula was something to be avoided and feared. The journals of Emanuel Hadex and his officers record countless preternatural phenomenon now commonly associated with the Anomaly—odd "jumps" in time, entire days missing from a ship's log-recorder, and signals received before they had even been sent from other ships in the fleet. Still, the Lord Captain pressed on, driving his fleet ever closer to the Anomaly's heart.



A STAIN UPON SPACE AND TIME

Of all the properties ascribed to the Hadex Anomaly, its most perplexing feature is its visibility. When the Hadex Anomaly first manifested in 656.M40 it was immediately visible across the Ultima Segmentum, its appearance recorded by observatories and scout stations as distant as Nocturne. The fact that the light cast by the Anomaly was instantly visible across the so vast an area, in flagrant defiance to the laws of the physical universe, has not gone unnoticed by the Magos Physics of the Cult Mechanicus.

The flow of time is inconsistent within the purview of the Anomaly. On a world suffused in the Anomaly's glow, the length of day and night is in constant flux. Shadows cast betray hints of future events while the voices of the past are forever at the edge of hearing. Voidships undertaking brief Warp jumps emerge from the Immaterium months after they departed or days before they left. Astropathic communication is all but impossible as fragments of messages never sent infiltrate telepathic sendings.

Navigators fare worst of all. The Hadex Anomaly's infectious brilliance overwhelms the light of the Astronomican, rendering all but the most keen-eyed Navigators unable to plot accurate courses along the Acheros Salient.

The Lord-Captain's negligence, combined with the steady erosion of morale caused by time distortions and Warp phantoms, weakened the discipline and courage of the crew. When the *Hippeastrum*, a decommissioned Lunar-class Cruiser under the command of one Lieutenant Argord Pym, attempted to turn back from the foolhardy journey, the Lord-Captain ordered the macrobatteries of his flagship turned against the fleeing vessel. The lieutenants in command of the remainder of the Hadex fleet, torn between loyalty to a maddened Lord-Captain and a desire to flee to safety while there was still a chance, mutinied.

The Oberon-class Battleship *Messier Ascendant* discovered the derelict *Aletris* in 779.M41. Found drifting on the outer edge of a vast circle of similarly adrift and abandoned vessels orbiting the Anomaly, her crew's final moments preserved in a vacuum-frozen tableaux of violence, the *Aletris* was nevertheless intact. Lord-Captain Emanuel Hadex was found barricaded within the bridge, seated upon his command throne, the red flicker of the Hadex Anomaly reflected in his frozen eyes.

Lord Militant Tetrarchus has issued an edict setting the Hadex Anomaly off-limits to all but the most highly-authorised vessels (which naturally include all Inquisition and Deathwatch ships), and its presence is considered a celestial hazard of the utmost danger. A few foolhardy souls (and a Rogue Trader or two) have tried their luck in salvaging or reclaiming some of the vessels in the stasis ring surrounding the Hadex Anomaly, but none of those expeditions has so far returned.

THE WRECK OF THE LIMITLESS GRASP

"Be thankful the God-Emperor wills you die but once in His service! Beware those who serve any other, for they shall die a thousand times in the name of their master, and yet shall not know victory!"

—Julius Scipio, Deathwatch Librarian and Loremaster of the Kabiri Archives

The parsecs surrounding the Hadex Anomaly are haunted by a voidship that is far more real than the stuff of voidfarer legend. It is an ill-omened ship with a cursed crew, shunned by all who detect its faint but distinct energy signature at the limits of long range augur sweeps. It is the *Limitless Grasp*, and it alone is the key to understanding the origins of the Hadex Anomaly.

The Imperial Navy first encountered the *Limitless Grasp* in 781.M41. Of the battle group involved, only the frigate *Sebastian's Gauntlet* survived the surge of Warp phenomena now known to follow any manifestation of the *Limitless Grasp*. The auspex logs and officer's testimony regarding the incident recount events that have played out numerous times in the history of the Crusade. Their encounter, and those that followed, are nearly identical.

An elegant merchant voidship, its hull a masterwork of lustrous silver and gleaming brass, translates from the Warp into open void. After a moment's silence, the vessel's vox channels open, broadcasting on all frequencies. The ship identifies itself as the *Limitless Grasp*, a free trader under the command of Chartist Captain Olympia Thyatira, followed immediately by a formal request to enter orbit around Verronus, a planet conspicuously absent from charts of the Jericho Reach. After another period of silence a woman's voice requests audience with "his pharaonic eminence, the Sanguine Oligarch of Verronus." Again, silence, followed by a burst of vox-chatter as the crew of the *Limitless Grasp* bear witness to a strange phenomenon consuming a planet only they can see. The engines of the *Limitless Grasp* flare to life, the ship banking hard as if to escape some onrushing horror. The Hadex Anomaly becomes agitated, flooding the void with red light. Distress signals and agonised screams flood all vox channels as the *Limitless Grasp* is reduced to shreds of titanium alloy and ceramite by devastating tidal forces. Any voidship unfortunate enough to remain in the vicinity is assailed by similar gravitic phenomenon. When this period of turbulence ceases, nothing remains but the void.

Weeks may pass, or months, or years, before the *Limitless Grasp* appears again. It is only a matter of time before her crew die screaming at the void once more, their deaths repeated and relived countless times, any witnesses to their tragic end unlikely to survive the encounter.

The wreck of the *Limitless Grasp* is but one of many phantom voidships haunting the Anomaly. Countless other vessels caught in temporal ebbs drift between past dooms and future calamities. Some claim this is the fate of all voidships that risk an engagement with the *Grasp*. Other fear the phantom ships are casualties of an apocalyptic battle yet to be fought. None dare investigate these mysteries too closely. To do so, they warn, is to join the phantoms of the void.



The Fate of the Hadex Fleet

According to the logs of Lord-Captain Emanuel Hadex and his lieutenants, the Hadex fleet consisted of five sturdy voidships of varying class and purpose. The fleet managed to escape the Anomaly bearing their Lord-Captain's name only to have each vessel claimed by a tragic fate.

The Hippeastrum

This Lunar-class Cruiser was reported lost in a resurgent Warp Storm shortly after the mutiny that ousted Emanuel Hadex. In 809.M41 a battle scarred Lunar Class of ancient design began preying upon Imperial Navy supply caravans supporting the planetary defence force garrisons of the Eleusis shrine world. While this craft has yet to be conclusively identified as the *Hippeastrum*, degenerate crew, captured in a recent boarding action over Aurum, have identified their commander as "the Decimated Argord Pym."

Weeping Amaryllis

A colony ship baring serfs, vassals, and oath bound drudges loyal to the Hadex Dynasty, this lumbering Jericho-class voidship was abandoned to a pack of xenos raiders near the world of Credence. Surviving logs report the remainder of the Hadex Fleet crippled the straining engines of the *Weeping Amaryllis*, leaving it as easy prey for the raiders and allowing the rest of the fleet time to escape. While the fate of the *Amaryllis* itself is unknown, it is believed the slave cult of the *Carmines Lamentation* has its origins upon the unfortunate vessel.

Lilium of Charadon

The Hadex Fleet lost contact with the scout frigate *Lilium of Charadon* as the nimble craft sought a stable route through a Warp Storm battering the trailing systems of the Jericho Reach. In 779.M41 a ship baring the *Lilium of Charadon's* markings drifted into the Ormasim system. Three Deathwatch Battle-Brothers, veterans of the Kaggeran Pogrom, boarded the derelict to investigate. No sooner had they boarded than the ship's Warp engines surged to life, carrying the *Lilium* into the Empyrean. The mysterious return and disappearance of the *Lilium* coincides with an opening of the Omega Vault. The leaden doors swung wide revealing a single drop of blood hanging in a suspensor field. The blood and the gene-print identifying its origin are currently under seal by order of Watch Commander Mordigael.

The Dracaena

The fate of the *Dracaena*, a voidship serving as the Hadex Dynasty's mobile mining platform and ore smelter, is unknown to the masters of the Achilus Crusade. However, a Deathwatch Kill-team, recently returned from a failed attempt to re-establish contact with Watch Fortress Midael, reported an odd discovery upon a rogue moon adrift at the edges of the Hadex Anomaly. Distributed evenly over the moon's surface, covering an area of some eight-square leagues, are the components of a dismantled mining ship laid out in meticulous order like cogs on a watchmaker's worktable. More disturbing are the remains of some 15,000 crewmen arranged in neat rows, their organs beside them and configured like a surgeon's anatomical chart. The dead flesh shows no signs of decomposition and is moist to the touch.

The Aletris

Unknown to the rank and file of the Crusade, the *Aletris* still plies the void. Commandeered by Lord-Militant Achilus shortly after its discovery, the *Aletris* was purged, refitted, and pressed into service as a blockade-runner. Re-christened *Dirk of Alphos* to disguise her true origins, the ship bears a dark reputation. Crew report hearing snatches of foul poetry carried on the stale air, and Navigators claim the ship feels the pull of the Anomaly. Those who serve upon the *Dirk of Alphos* and possess some hint as to its true origin live in fear of the day the vessel slips from her Navigator's control and plunges headlong into the Hadex Anomaly.

THE LAMENTATION WAVE

In the *Limitless Grasp*'s final moments the vessel's chief Astropath, one Dien Xquin, transmits a single message. This cry of awe and horror echoes throughout the Empyrean. Those Astropaths unfortunate enough to encounter this psychic missive are overwhelmed as they experience the final agonised thoughts of their dying counterpart. An unfortunate few Astropaths in service to the Achilles Crusade have perished as a result of intercepting the Lamentation Wave. Some die in a moment of apoplexy as Dien's final thoughts surge through their minds. Other fall upon Psykana mercy blades, taking their lives rather than risk intercepting the Wave again during a future manifestation of the *Limitless Grasp*. More unfortunate Astropaths are driven to madness. Their minds lost to the bemoaning cry of Dien Xquin, these psykers spend the remainder of their lives sequestered in hidden compounds of the Inquisition, their incarceration broken only by periods of intense questioning. Through the interrogation of these psykers the Inquisition hopes to gain some understanding of the true origins of the Hadex Anomaly.

PSYKERS AND THE ANOMALY

The radiance of the Hadex Anomaly corrupts psychic power as surely as it distorts the order of space and time. Psykers find their unnatural abilities riskier to use, their manipulations of empyrean energy more likely to attract reprisal from the Warp.

Time Distortions: Whenever a Psyker (Librarians included) rolls on **Table 6-1: Psychic Phenomenon** (see page 187 in the **DEATHWATCH** Rulebook) while bathed in the glow of the Hadex Anomaly, add 1d10 to the result. Additionally, all rolls on **Table 6-2: Perils of the Warp** resulting in 38 or less trigger Chronological Incontinence, representing the Anomaly corroding time around the Psyker.

Resisting the Lamentation Wave: All Psykers possessing the Telepathy discipline are at risk of intercepting the Lamentation Wave. Whenever a manifestation of the *Limitless Grasp* occurs within a Psyker's Astrotelepathy range he must make an immediate **Challenging (+0) Willpower Test**. Failure means suffering 1d10 Insanity Points. A result of 96+ triggers the loss of 1d10 Wounds due to internal haemorrhaging.

KOKABIEL'S DROP

"My right eye offended me, so I plucked it out. My left eye deceived me, so I cast it into the void. My Third Eye remains. With it I see an immaculate light greater than the faltering Astronomican!"

—Kokabiel Grigoris, rogue Navigator and Ipsissimus of the Cyclopean Congregation

More so than any Chaos Corsair, Stigmartus battle cruiser, or Warp-borne leviathan, the officers and voidsmen of the Acheros Salient Navy fear the Warp-borne peril of Kokabiel's Drop. Branching from the Araquel Main between the Vanity and Blood Trinity systems, the Drop is far more than a navigational hazard. It is a vortex leading to the churning heart of the Hadex Anomaly and a haven for a degenerate cult of rogue Navigators who have turned their sight from the blessed Astronomican.

EXPLORATION AND ILLUMINATION

"The fear of the unknown is a shield. It protects the hearts of the faithful from a greater fear. I speak of the fear of discovery!"

—Preacher Bastian of the Mortessian 14th Highlanders

In 789.M41, Lord Militant Tetrarchus charged the highly decorated Commodore Bronislave Tenermaritus with the task of charting a stable Warp route between the Cellebos Warzone and Samech, allowing Crusade forces to make a direct strike against the planet of Heretek, crippling the manufactories and shipyards supplying the Stigmartus war effort. Taking as his guide one Kokabiel Grigoris, a relatively young but gifted Navigator following his House's long tradition of service to the Imperial Navy, the Commodore set out upon his flagship the Avenger-class Grand Cruiser *Burden of Vigilance*.

Despite the best efforts of the *Burden's* commander, Navigator, and crew, the Warp beyond the Cellebos Warzone proved nearly impossible to chart. Warp eddies

LEXICANIUM ARATRON AND THE LAMENTATION WATCH

Since the discovery of the *Limitless Grasp*, the Librarians of Watch Fortress Erioch have monitored the Lamentation Wave, documenting each manifestation and recording whatever information can be gleaned from the minds of the unfortunate Astropaths chosen to assist with the task. Designated the Lamentation Watch, the task currently falls on the shoulders of Lexicanium Aratron of the Marines Errant Chapter. Known to isolate himself within his personal chapel for weeks at a time during bouts of ardent meditation, Lexicanium Aratron tirelessly correlates over one thousand years of psychometric data regarding the time, location, and intensity of each occurrence of Lamentation Wave. Now, after over a decade study, Aratron claims a pattern is emerging. According to a report recently filed with Watch Commander Mordigael, Lexicanium Aratron believes he has enough data to predict the exact time and place of the *Limitless Grasp*'s next appearance. Aratron now seeks a company of Battle-Brothers to await the next coming of the Grasp and, if possible, board the vessel. In this way Aratron hopes to witness the birth of the Hadex Anomaly first hand. Watch Commander Mordigael has yet to authorise such a mission.

Many doubt the wisdom of Lexicanium Aratron's plan, and several among the Deathwatch doubt Aratron's sanity. It is rumoured Aratron opened his mind to the Lamentation Wave in order to study the phenomenon first hand. If so, a seed of corruption carried by the Wave now roots within his mind. The Chamber of Vigilance tolerates Lexicanium Aratron's eccentricities out of respect for his service to the Deathwatch. However, there are those within the Chamber preparing to move against Aratron should rumours of his corruption prove true, preferring to deal with the matter internally, lest the Ordo Hereticus choose to investigate Deathwatch affairs.

terminated into immaterial shoals, aetheric currents flowed back upon themselves, and the bilious emissions of the Hadex Anomaly obscured the sight of Kokabiel and his subordinate Navigators.

After months of fruitless exploration the *Burden of Vigilance* fell prey to the Haruspex, a pack of xenos marauders believed to originate within the Slinnar Drift. Commodore Tenermaritus perished in the ensuing battle, atomised during a valiant boarding action against the Haruspex Life-seeker. The Commodore's sacrifice routed the xenos fleet, granting the *Burden* enough time to flee through a recently discovered Warp passage veering dangerously close to the Hadex Anomaly. The *Burden's* final message, intercepted by the Astropathic listening post on Pyrrathas, claimed a great discovery waited at the end of the route.

In the years following the disappearance of the *Burden of Vigilance*, the site of its last battle gained a sinister reputation. Voidships passing through the area drifted far off course. The sendings of all but the most powerful Astropaths faded into the void. A rare few vessels vanished outright. Superstitious voidsmen dubbed this region of Warpspace 'the Drop'.

A BURDEN RETURNED

"Rush headlong into oblivion. Only then can you see what waits beyond."

—Altus Nox of the Word Bearers Traitor Legion

In 793.M41 a mysterious vessel of Imperial design began preying on voidships passing through the Drop. *Lucia's Gauntlet*, one of the few voidships to escape such an attack, identified the vessel as the *Burden of Vigilance*, now re-christened the *Burden of Revelation* and captained by Kokabiel Grigoris.

Quickly recognising the threat presented by the rogue Navigator, the Acheros Salient Navy stepped up patrols in the Drop. Regrettably, this move served only to provide Kokabiel with more prey. Of the flotilla dispatched from Calist, a third fell to the *Burden of Revelation's* guns. A half dozen vanished beyond the Drop in a futile search for Kokabiel's sanctuary. Of the remaining vessels, only three are accounted for, arriving at Khazant over a decade later after limping through the Warp without Navigators.

THE TARIFF

Grigoris claims the Drop and all space beyond as his domain, requiring tribute from those passing through. Voidships unfortunate enough to run afoul of the *Burden of Revelation* must pay the toll or face reprisal. The exact nature of this toll depends upon Kokabiel's whims and the needs of his vessel. Fuel, provisions, and crew are the most common price for safe passage. On other occasions Kokabiel demands a teratonne of bilge water, spent macrocannon shells, or some other voidship by-product of little apparent use.

Lord Captains who refuse to pay the tariff face Kokabiel's vengeance. Most are fired upon outright, their voidships raided by mad acolytes of the Cyclopean Congregation. Warships capable of defending against hit-and-run attacks

are stalked for days, hounded by the *Burden of Revelation* as it flits into and out of the Warp long just enough to unleash volleys of lance fire. A lamentable few are given the illusion of escape. Left untouched by a seemingly resigned Kokabiel, these vessels soon find themselves off course, lost in the Drop and drifting ever closer to the core of the Hadex Anomaly.

By special order of Lord Militant Tetrarchus, all commanders of the Acheros Salient Navy are prohibited from acquiescing to Kokabiel's demands. Those who fail to abide by this order face a traitor's execution. Naval commanders are left with a difficult choice; brave Kokabiel's Drop and risk an encounter with the master of the Cyclopean Congregation, or bypass the Drop entirely and add weeks to the length of a voyage.

KOKABIEL GRIGORIS

"His gaze keen, unblinking, and burns like a collapsing star."

—Gadivilius Brom, Navigator Primaris of the *Swift Reprisal*

Kokabiel is a scion of House Grigoris, a Navigator bloodline whose service in the Imperial Navy stretches back to the Age of Apostasy. Though his household is renowned for producing Navigators of distinction, Kokabiel's brief commission is shamefully unremarkable. The discovery of the Drop marks the end Kokabiel's obscurity, as well as his loyalty to the Crusade.

Once considered handsome by Navigator standards, Kokabiel's few pleasing features are lost to pallid skin, elongated bones, and a perpetual grin both sardonic and beatific. However, Kokabiel's most striking features are his eyes, or lack thereof.

At the moment of his first revelation Kokabiel plucked out his eyes, sacrificing mundane sight for the visions imparted in the Hadex Anomaly. Now only his Third Eye remains. Kokabiel's Warp Eye is forever open, shedding a purulent red glow that casts no shadow. This eye is a thing of cosmic terror. Some claim it is a window into the Anomaly. Others claim it contains a fragment of the Anomaly itself. Still others speculate that Kokabiel's blighted eye is a microcosm, a fleshy orb containing the Hadex Anomaly in miniature. The truth is known only to Kokabiel and his most trusted followers.

Strangely, though Kokabiel is familiar with the Jericho-Maw Warp Gate, having passed through it with the majority of his household at the onset of the Achilles Crusade, he is content to keep the Gate's secret to himself. Whether Kokabiel holds his tongue out of some remaining vestige of honour or plans to use his knowledge as a bargaining chip in the future remains to be seen.

The Fate of House Grigoris

Kokabiel's heresy brought shame and scrutiny upon House Grigoris. With the household's susceptibility to corruption called into question, Lord Militant Tetrarchus ordered all of its members recalled from active duty and confined to the Grigoris's temporary estate on Carmyn, pending a full investigation by the Ordo Malleus. As of 817.M41 all but three members House Grigoris are accounted for.

THE UNCONVERTED

Not every Navigator brought before Kokabiel Grigoris is a willing convert. Navigators abducted in raids, captured in boarding actions, or traded to the Cyclopean Congregation by desperate crew, are loath to risk damnation at the foot of a self-proclaimed prophet. Those who reject Kokabiel's offer of enlightenment and initiation into the Congregation suffer a fate few planetbound humans understand. With a savage twist of his talon-like fingers, Kokabiel rends the apostate's Third Eye, plucking the sensitive organ from the victim's forehead.

Deprived of their Warp sight and rendered useless in the eyes of the Navis Nobilite, Kokabiel turns these unfortunates free. Some are dropped into Imperial territory, mutilated reminders of Kokabiel's private Crusade. Others are ransomed back to their households. The worst of these wander bilge decks of the *Burden of Revelation*, their pitiful cries reverberating throughout the ancient bulkheads.

Penemue Grigoris: Vanished in the Charon Stars shortly after Tetrarchus's recall order. Intercepted Astropathic communiqués suggest she planned to seek out Kokabiel and return him to the Emperor's light.

Azazel Grigoris: Still serving aboard the *Might of Terra*, an Apocalypse class battleship long trapped behind enemy lines in the wake of Hive Fleet Dagon.

Araqiel Grigoris: The status of the Grigoris Novator is currently unknown. Taken into protective custody—some say abducted—by an agent of the Ordo Xenos, Araqiel's disappearance weakened the already faltering position of his house. Puritans within the Ordo Malleus loudly accuse Radical elements of the Ordo Xenos of intentionally sabotaging an ongoing investigation.

THE CYCLOPEAN CONGREGATION

A self-proclaimed prophet, Kokabiel Grigoris presides over a mystery cult of degenerate Navigators and decadent voidsmen known as the Cyclopean Congregation. Named for Kokabiel and his inner circle of renegade Navigators, all of whom are blind save for their Third Eye, the Congregation cult promises illumination through communion with the Hadex Anomaly. Practicing complex rites of initiation, the cult's upper echelons are open only to full-blooded Navigators. Only those with the Warp Eye, preaches Kokabiel, can appreciate the Anomaly for what it truly is.

According to his own blasphemous lore, Kokabiel's Drop is more than a convoluted region of the Immaterium. It is the entrance to a stable Warp route spiralling into the heart of the Hadex Anomaly, a place where the meanings of space and time are inverted. The fallen Navigator leads his Cyclopean Congregation on blasphemous pilgrimages along this route, each journey a profane recreation of the *Burden of Vigilance's* first passage through the Anomaly. During these voyages, acolytes ritually blind themselves, sacrificing an eye for each level of initiation attained within the cult.

The lowest tiers of the Congregation are a collection of

outcast voidsmen. Largely ignorant of the true nature of the cult, many of these void-born fanatics lost their humanity to madness and mutation long before pledging fealty to the Kokabiel. Wandering corridors and groping along bulkheads, the most devoted acolytes eagerly trade their sight for deeper initiation.

Most revered outside Kokabiel's inner circle are the Typhlotics, bearers of the dormant Navigator gene. Culled from renegade houses and the extended families of raided Navigator households, these priests of the Congregation command the voidsmen flock and act as intermediaries between the cult's inner and outer circles. Having sacrificed both eyes already, Typhlotics go a step further, carving jagged spirals into their foreheads. Symbolising both the coiling route of Kokabiel's Drop and the swirling energies contained in their prophet's Third Eye, these scars mark the high priests of the Congregation.

The inner circle of the Cyclopean Congregation consists exclusively of Navigators personally initiated by Kokabiel at the nucleus of the Hadex Anomaly. The Congregation's oracles and hierophants, these prodigal scions of the Navis Nobilite, are the unquestioned masters of the cult. Spending most of their time in quiet contemplation, the Cyclopean Oracles speak only to disseminate prophecy and issue orders to the Typhlotic clergy. The Cyclopean Oracles possess the greatest secret of the Congregation. Using the Hadex Anomaly as a guide in place of the Astronomican, they navigate the Congregational Fleet safely and nearly instantaneously across the Jericho Reach.



PROMISE OF ILLUMINATION

Kokabiel foretells a coming age of chaos and despair, a time when the Astronomican will fail, leaving the Navis Nobilite scabbling in the abyssal dark. The Nobilite's only salvation, Kokabiel preaches, comes in the form of the Hadex Anomaly, a new and vital light in the Warp. Those who comprehend the mysteries of the Anomaly and use its light to guide their passage through the Warp will be the masters of the coming age. Kokabiel envisions a time when the influence of the Anomaly encompasses the galaxy entire, every Segmentum awash in its bloody glow.

THE CONGREGATIONAL FLEET

A development unknown to the masters of the Achilus Crusade, Kokabiel Grigoris commands a growing fleet of voidships. Dubbed the Congregational Fleet, this flotilla of ramshackle craft is composed of ships lost to the Anomaly

over the past millennium. Patiently gathered and retrofitted by Cyclopean Congregation, the fleet is currently moored among the remains of a shattered moon. Repaired with archeotechnology cannibalised from derelicts considered beyond all hope of redemption, these ships are being prepared for war.

Dark Adversaries and Strange Allies

Kokabiel Grigoris and the Cyclopean Congregation do not exist in isolation. Grigoris's machinations are entangled with the disparate factions at war in the Reach, creating a complex web of alliances and rivalries worthy of the most experienced Eldar manipulator.

House Der'cel

Pronounced Excommunicate Traitoris for its involvement in the Sepphoris Secession, this renegade house is a recent arrival to the Reach. Intercepted by representatives of the Congregation near Argoth, the entirety of House Der'cel converted to the Cyclopean Congregation in a single night. The Der'cel highliner *Via Infractus* is currently moored at an unknown location within the Charon Stars. The *Via Infractus* is currently the home of a massive breeding program, the birthplace of a new generation of Navigators raised from inception in the Cyclopean fold.

Samech

The Cyclopean Congregation is on uneasy footing with the hereteks of Samech. Once tentative trading partners, relations soured after Kokabiel purchased cloning technology to expedite the Congregation's first breeding program. The technology proved faulty, producing inchoate masses of palpitating tissue useless to the cult's long term goals. Though Kokabiel swore revenge and bombarded multiple heretek orbital stations at the edge of the Samech system, he has yet to deal a crushing blow against the heretek Magus responsible for crafting the faulty accelerated maturation chambers.

The Stigmartus

Unbeknownst to Lord Militant Tetrarchus, the *Burden of Revelation* preys upon Stigmartus warships as readily as Imperial vessels. Though Officer-Bishops are not outright forbidden from bargaining with Kokabiel for safe passage through

To my Master, Epistolary Axineton,



As per your instructions, I have combed through the deep archives for every scrap of data relating to the fabled Testament of Ra's Tali. Your instincts were correct. The Testament is no myth. Though the original vox recording is no longer extant, I was able to locate a partial transcription and accompanying documents detailing its history.

When the Hadex Anomaly first erupted into being in 656.M40 a full third of the Astropathic choir of Watch Fortress Erioch collapsed into paroxysms of weeping, blood flowing from their useless eyes like widow's tears. The majority of these unfortunate psykers died from exhaustion and blood loss within the hour. However, one Choir Psaltis Ra's Tali clung to life for several days. Between sobbing fits, Ra's blathered like a mad poet. An anonymous Librarian recorded Ra's Tali's rant onto a data-slate, and it was from this recording that the Testament of Ra's Tali was transcribed.

I cannot speak to the usefulness of the fragmentary transcription I recovered. Interpretation of prophecy and visions are beyond me. However, I can speak to the authenticity of the documents. Master Axineton, it is with a mixture of trepidation and relief that I present to you my findings. The past several months have proved taxing, and my long isolation sequestered within the deep archives drove me close to madness. However, my suffering is insignificant compared to your duty to the sacred Watch. I take solace in the mind-wipe that I know awaits me upon the delivery of my findings. Ignorance is the greatest mercy visited upon those of my station.

Your obedient servant,

Bonded Archivist Sebastopol Drell

the Drop, Elak Sarda takes a dim view of subordinates willing to acquiesce to the rogue Navigator's demands. The Cult-General's pride prevents him from entering diplomatic relations with the leader of a rival cult, and his military actions against Kokabiel continually meet with failure.

The Word Bearers

The Deathwatch Rapid Strike Vessel *Final Mercy* recently witnessed a meeting between the *Burden of Revelation* and the Word Bearers Battle Barge *Inexorable Ruination* deep in the Charon Stars. Both ships vanished into the Immaterium after discovery. Investigation of the area revealed the remains of a third ship of xenos origin.

DAEMON WORLDS OF THE HADEX ANOMALY

When the Hadex Anomaly first formed, it swallowed whole any world that was sitting in its birthing cradle. The raw, unfocused power of Chaos destroyed most of those planets caught in the terrible throes of the Anomaly's eruption. Those that were not destroyed were quickly corrupted, twisted into a foul parody of what they once were. These planets became the thing that haunts the nightmares of many an Inquisitor—Daemon Worlds. Presented below are a few examples of Daemon Worlds that can be found within the Hadex Anomaly. Many more exist, but these are the ones known for sure to the Crusade.



BULWARK

Once a proud Fortress World, guarding the original Sector capital of Verronus, Bulwark has been claimed by the worshippers of Khorne. Unlike Venkrous, the Warp itself did not mutate the planet; instead all of the atrocities that were committed in the years following the appearance of the Anomaly were perpetrated by the citizens of Bulwark. Once, mighty bastions of adamantium and steel stood firm against the enemies of the Imperium. Now, these same structures have become charnel houses, the inhabitants constantly offering up sacrifices to the Blood God. Where Aquilas once stood proud over the buildings of the Munitורים, now sit Flesh Hounds of Khorne, perched and waiting for the chance to satiate their eternal hunger with the blood of those that offend their master. Skulls, both human and daemon, decorate every outcropping. Walls are lined with spikes, and the aqueducts pump a never-ending torrent of blood into the seas.

While these crimes are despicable, the greatest atrocity was saved for the Grand Temple of the God-Emperor. The beautiful stained glass windows, once multi-coloured and

depicting scenes of the Emperor's glory, now are stained only with the blood of those few priests who kept true to their faith in Bulwark's darkest hour. The skulls of the priesthood were taken from their bodies and placed in a mound in front of the altar. The altar itself, previously depicting a scene of Sebastian Thor being touched by the hand of the Emperor, has been twisted to show the Saint slaying the Emperor with an axe. Behind the altar now sits a throne of bronze, stained red with the blood of those used to appease their patron, and upon it sits the lord of this planet, the Daemon Prince Krakiota.

With a Juggernaut of Khorne to either side, Krakiota hears the pleas and supplications of his followers. Those that he deems to be worthy are offered the ultimate reward; their life's blood is taken from them and poured into a goblet made from the skull of the planetary Governor. This goblet is then blessed and offered directly to the Blood God himself, in hopes that he will bring victory and bloodshed to his warrior worshippers.

CORANIN

When the Hadex Anomaly appeared in reality, the Changer of Ways claimed the feral world of Coranin as its own. The changes it wrought were subtle at first. Trees would sway when there was no wind, roads no longer had the same endpoint, and other such small differences. The superstitious tribesmen of the planet turned to their mystics and soothsayers for answers, but the only responses they got were to accept the changes as a sign from god. Over a period of years, children born to the tribes were mutated. Some would have an extra limb, others would merely have eyelids that closed from the sides. In an effort to appease their god who protected them from the angry red scar in the sky, the people of Coranin venerated these changed ones and made them the leaders of the tribe. It was not until two full generations had passed did the tribes finally receive an obvious sign from their god.

When an avatar of Tzeentch revealed itself to the people Coranin, it did so with a flair for the dramatic. Shrubbery grew into a maze that followed the seemingly random steps of the daemon. The leaves on every tree that the daemon passed fell from their branches and were replaced with perfect replicas made from unholy warpfire. Rivers switched the direction that they flowed every time they were crossed. It wasn't until the daemon reached the largest tribal settlement on the planet that the people truly understood what their god was capable of. The daemon looked upon its worshippers and pointed to a small boy. This boy had escaped the corrupting touch of the Warp and was physically sound and unmarred. The boy strode up to the daemon and knelt before it. The daemon placed a single claw-like hand upon the boy's head and said a few words in an unpronounceable language. With a flash of violet fire, the boy was changed from a perfect specimen of a human to a perfect specimen of a Horror of Tzeentch. From that day forward, the people of Coranin heaped offerings and prayers onto the avatar of their new master, Tzeentch.

DURELL

The Hive World of Durell was not the most pious of cities before the coming of the Anomaly, and once Slaanesh got its sinewy fingers into the Spire Nobles, it was impossible for anyone to stop what was coming. When the Anomaly first manifested, the first thing that was affected was Hive Primus, the seat of planetary government. The hive was transformed from a magnificent structure of stone and steel into one of flesh. Those that were unlucky enough to have habitation quarters on the outer edges found themselves being drawn into the walls. Their bodies formed the mortar that would hold this new structure together. Their mouths were placed facing inwards, so that all could hear the moans of ecstasy and cries of agony that Slaanesh could bring to those that it favoured. The upper spires became dens of decadence and excess. The middle hive is a gathering place where all can worship Slaanesh in any manner they choose. The hive itself became a Grand Temple to Slaanesh.

VENKROUS

Once a lush and beautiful Agri-world, Venkrous was the primary producer of most large grains for the Jericho Sector. Now twisted and warped by the rotting touch of Nurgle, Venkrous produces plants that are used to create vile poisons and hallucinogenic drugs. Wanting to create a planet more to his liking, the Plague Father pushed the land masses together until they created three continents where once there were nine. The next step that he took was to move the clouds out of the way so that all could look upon the glory of this creation. The clouds were moved towards the poles and turned a shade of pink so as not to distract the eye from the crowning achievement. The seas themselves, once a beautiful shade of blue, now run green with pus. Any wildlife that survived the change found itself mutated into strange new forms that spread the unholy plague to every corner of the planet.

The human population of the planet was hit hardest of all. Those that staunchly refused Grandfather Nurgle's pestilent embrace were the lucky ones. They were merely executed, while those that quickly turned their worship to the Great Diseased One found themselves rewarded with a form of leprosy. Their limbs would quickly atrophy and die off over a period of seven days, but on the eighth day, the limbs that were lost would begin to grow back. The cycle repeats for eight months out of the year, but in the ninth month, the regeneration does not stop at simply regrowing the lost limbs. During that month, the limbs become bloated and grotesque mockeries of what they once were, until the last day of the month when they mercifully explode, spreading the plague amongst any who have not been gifted with it.

THE FALLEN FORGE WORLD OF SAMECH

"You call dare call us heretics? You can see nothing, your view too narrow to perceive the true glories of technology in all its myriad ways. Where was your Ommissiah when our sector was cut off and left for dead? In his absence we have learned there is more than the dictates of the corpse-god. We innovate while you copy. We discover while you entrench. We learn from all while you refuse to cogitate outside your petty enclosures. I would pity you, if you had any capacity to appreciate the emotion. In time you may yet realize your pathetic miscalculation, but by then we will be as gods ourselves."

—Dark Magos Celui Spehn, Master of the Platinum Forges

During the Age of Shadows, when Warp storms cut Jericho off from an Imperium preoccupied with more pressing concerns, world after world fell to darkness and disorder in a slow descent that marked the once proud sector's collapse into decay. For many planets, the fall was a slow one, a mere footnote for later Imperial scholars to document as the Sector became a lawless Reach. However, for one planet there is an occurrence that the Adeptus Mechanicus will let none forget, when what was once a firm bastion of the Cult Mechanicus treacherously fired upon a formally recognised Explorator fleet. For followers of the Machine God, this simple act is a declaration of utter rebellion for Samech, and enough for them to forever seek its destruction.

The truth was far worse, for the Ommissiah's light had been slowly dimming on the Forge world for some centuries before the infamous event. When the Hadex Anomaly consumed the world in warp energies many years later, the forges were ready to seek out the Ruinous Powers to further their own aims, as well as alien races and archeotech sources previously prohibited by Mars. Samech now stands as the main source of armaments used against the Imperial forces in Acheros, creating profane combinations of authorized Imperial technologies, unconsecrated archeotech, unholy creations of Chaos, and even the inhuman workings of the xenos. These abominations represent the real nature of Samech—a world where nothing is forbidden when it will garner influence and stature, of brokers willing to deal with anyone or anything as long as payment is made, of agents ever searching for undiscovered technologies to exploit. There is no morality other than the ruthless quest for power and survival in the war torn Reach. To the Adeptus Mechanicus, Samech is a dark mirror of their own holy Forge worlds, one they dare not contemplate too closely. For the Deathwatch they are a formidable enemy, wielding arcane and technological wonders unseen by mankind. As long as Samech stands, the outlook for success in Acheros is as dim as the smoke-blackened skies of the planet itself.



IV: THE ACHEROS SALIENT

THE FALL

With the coming of the Age of Shadows, darkness was cast across Jericho and no world was spared. As with most Imperial sectors, the planets were heavily interdependent on each other and as passage became more perilous each world began to fall into disorder. Lessening contact with other worlds bred discontent and uncertainty. For Samech, a firm outpost of the Machine God, led by the most devout of Tech-Priests, uncertainty was a cancerous seed as powerful as any direct assault from the dark powers. While other worlds fell through the long decades, Samech remained steadfast in their service to the Ommissiah and His Imperium, but slowly the Quorum of Magi began to question this course of action. Their system was under frequent attacks from raiders, both human and xenos, eager to pillage their works. And where was the Imperium to defend them? Their forges required raw materials even as their weak flesh still required organic nutrients. Where were the allied worlds they relied on for trade? It was logical to conclude that Samech could only survive through self-sufficiency.

Synthetic vat-pastes were developed to sustain the servitors and their masters. The planet itself was plundered for whatever materials it could provide. The forges were redirected into fabricating massive macrobattery emplacements and orbital defence stations to protect the planet, as well as voidcraft and mighty war machines to repel enemy vessels at a distance. All avenues for new weaponry were explored, no matter the progress of consecration level or lack of approval from far distant Mars. No more would Samech be easy prey to a sector lost to barbarism. Attacks were ever increasing, and more and more the Magi viewed any not of Samech to be against Samech. Ships entering the system were routinely fired upon. Those astropathic communications that still continued were ignored, as they could be attempts to lull the defences before attack. Samech endured where other worlds fell, and whatever means it took to do so, there was justification enough in that fact.

The Explorator Fleet that approached Samech on that fateful day in 325.M40 had no way of knowing this, only that they were grateful to have reached safe haven after the Warp storms nearly tore their ships apart. Samech's defence network viewed them only as another in a series of raiders, albeit more clever than most in their duplication of ancient Mechanicus authorisation cant-codes. A trap was sprung, luring the damaged ships into what appeared to be repair stations. It was only as they approached too close to retreat that the docking tubes were revealed as linear mass driver barrels, glassine fixtures glowing not as viewports but as defence laser lenses. The fleet was eradicated, but not before it could hurl a desperate cry into the Warp telling of the treachery. It took many years for word to filter back to the Imperium, but the result was as inexorable as gravity—Samech was declared Apostate in Maxima.

Samech itself knew only that a possible attack fleet had been destroyed. That it seemed to be of Martian origin was irrelevant; the Quorum by this time viewed Samech as independent of those who did not care enough to aid their own. If Mars and the Imperium had turned their back, then Samech would guide itself. With Jericho falling ever deeper

into disorder, Samech forces began raiding other planets themselves, for in the midst of such anarchy, such had to be the way of things. The planet's security seemed to be growing until another event occurred that was to change Samech evermore, one that they could never have foreseen. For when Hadex erupted like a volcanic explosion of baleful Warp energies, Samech itself was cast into an abyssal space where the Empyrean spilled into reality unchecked.

For the Tech-Priests, it was hellish, often literally. To see irrefutable evidence of forces that could not be quantified or even controlled, only carefully bargained with in deals for states worse than simple death, was the final clack of a cogwheel turning Samech away from its original purpose. Now forever melded with the aether, it did what it had done best through the past centuries—it adapted, and it survived. It was not without vigorous debate, culminating with a series of nearly devastating civil wars. However, no parties dared harm the carefully maintained forges dominating the surface and deep into the crust, and this kept Samech from falling into decay like so many other worlds. The outcome saw a new ruling system, led by the faction best able to prove itself superior to the others in technological command, and Samech overcame its insular paranoia. Vessels learned to navigate the unstable space now surrounding the planet, and conducted expeditions wherever there were new technologies to be had or markets where their own marvels could be traded for raw materials and new slaves to work the forges. Ever more frequently they searched for ancient archeotech or arcane lore to help their own factions establish dominance over rivals. No source was too extreme, and Samech agents established ties with xenos races across Jericho, many of which the Imperium still has not encountered. Their own system was not neglected, as the entire area was embedded with defences unparalleled across the sector, with Warp-based mines strewn across the surrounding Empyrean shoals. Most importantly, pacts with dark gods granted the Magi and their factions the power to control their new environment in exchange for supplying the Chaos warhosts with weaponry and engines of war. It was the beginning of Samech's new role in Jericho, and the tech-priests are arrogantly proud that an Imperium that had forsaken them is now terrified of their existence.

SIMULOPTERA

A colony of the of nanoscopic robots called simulopectera has remarkable adaptive and regenerative properties. Scholars theorize that simulopectera may have been an experiment in forbidden medical technology before Samech's immersion in the Hadex Anomaly. Whatever their original purpose, these machines took on an enigmatic intelligence through prolonged immersion in the Warp.

Simulopectera hives subsist on organic refuse, consuming the dead and the living without differentiation. A colony can produce a visually indistinguishable replica of anything

THE IRRADIAL FORGE

More details and information about Samech can be found in the adventure supplement **THE EMPEROR PROTECTS**.

it comes in contact with, and more importantly, anything in the memory of creatures that it consumes. Simuloptera are incapable of producing organic speech, but can control vox signals to emulate any voice patterns in their memory.

This ability—combined with their obscurity—makes simuloptera a coveted tool of espionage and assassination. However, the machines' motives are poorly understood, and bargaining with a hive can be even more difficult than locating one on their native Samech. The most effective enticement appears to be the opportunity to absorb memory patterns of new creatures and technology. Rumours suggest sacrificial offerings of navigators and well-travelled void explorers meet with the most frequent success. Some theorists use this to infer an interest in Warp currents and interstellar data, but simuloptera show a strong aversion to exploration and travel. While a colony may leave Samech temporarily as part of an unscrupulous pact, they always seem drawn to return once their purpose is fulfilled.

Simuloptera Hive Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
40	45	50	70	50	40	50	50	25

Movement: 5/10/15/30†

Wounds: 50†

Skills: Awareness (Per), Contortionist (Ag), Deceive (Fel) +20, Silent Move (Ag) +10, Tech-Use (Int) +20.

Talents: Combat Master, Concealed Cavity, Fearless, Independent Targeting, Melee Weapon Training (Universal), Ranged Weapon Training (Universal).

Traits: Auto-Stabilised, Machine (2), Malleable††, Mimic (synthesized only), Mute, Regeneration (15)†, Tech Fusion†††, Unnatural Senses (30 metres).

Armour: Machine (2)

Weapons: As fused or equipped

Gear: As fused or equipped

†Move varies with the size of the form taken. Wounds and Regeneration potency vary proportionately with the mass of the hive. Profile given is for a colony with an approximate mass of 200 kg in a humanoid form.

††**Malleable:** A simuloptera colony can take on the appearance of creatures and objects hundreds of times larger (or smaller) than its actual mass, by changing its density. The colony's shape determines some of its physical properties.

Add +10 to any two Characteristics in this profile. Choose one Unnatural Characteristic or the Multiple Arms Trait. These bonuses may be re-assigned to different characteristics whenever the colony changes shape.

†††**Tech Fusion:** The colony cannot form powered or ballistic weaponry, but it may temporarily incorporate and control any technological device that would normally be a part of its current form.

A hive with a mass of 200 kg can mimic the appearance of a Leman Russ tank, but its mass and Wounds do not change. It may appear to be armed with a battle cannon, but the hive must fuse with a real battle cannon in order to fire the weapon.

THE WAY OF THE IRON PIT

Any appraisal of Samech would immediately reveal its origin as a Forge world. Every planet and planetoid in the system hosts extensive mining operations, with massive machines extracting ores and minerals to feed the forges. Mass freighters connect them all to Samech itself, a world enclosed in a perpetual blanket of dark grey clouds. Below the clouds is the source: stack after stack of vertical pipes rising even to the lower cloud decks and billowing thick smoke into the acrid air. No sign of the actual surface can be seen, for all is covered with layered factories, burning, creating, forging night and day (though there are few who can tell the two apart given the atmosphere). Robed figures wander without wasteful delay in their tasks, exposed cloth allowing glimpses of artful mechadendrites or metallic limbs.

Closer examination reveals more of the real nature of Samech. Xenos vessels flit about the system, trading openly without retribution. Vast slave forces work the cruel machinery, crushed to ruined pulp should they fall. Obvious mutants walk the iron lanes connecting the complexes, undisturbed by biologists-proctors seeking righteous purity. Automated multi-limbed mechanisms stalk across the girders connecting forge-spires, with no Tech-Overseer guiding their actions. And unhidden, clear to even a casual glance: the Ruinous Powers.

Runes and glyphs of unholy meaning litter walls, declaring patronage to dark gods. Even the Tech-

Priests carry these Marks upon their branded flesh, their allegiance to the Machine God burned away from their synapses.

The forges themselves burn with the terrible smells of burning blood and scorched flesh, fed by souls as well as promethium and steel. The blessed cogwheel is gone; instead there are leering metal skulls set in a circlet of spiked teeth.

Possibly worst for any loyal servant of the Omnisiah though would be the sense of disorder. There is no proper, logical structure to the world. Forge-cities rise in random fashion, lurching towards the skies and deep into the planetary crust at the whim of their lord.

Factories lie in ruins elsewhere, collapsed from internecine combat that would be unheard of on a true colony of Mars. For Samech is more than a simple fallen Forge world; it is a planet in constant tension between dozens of rival forges, each fighting, scheming, and struggling for dominance. Only the forge that



can intimidate, bribe, and irrefutably demonstrate its mastery of all technology is fit to rule Samech and its Magos proclaim himself Furnace Lord. Such rule extends only so long as another forge does not topple it through their own exhibitions of more powerful weaponry, alliances with xenos and Chaos warhosts, or access to lost archeotech.

At any given time there are perhaps a handful of forges that count themselves as dominant powers, each perhaps leading factions of numerous minor furnaces. The standings of the forges are not set in iron though, and will rise and fall with the fortunes of their forge-lords. New exclusive rights for the discoveries made by xenos scavengers, armaments arrangements to Chaos warlords, revelations of new technological breakthroughs—all of these could raise a lowly district to planetary power. Alternately, the failure of a new Warp drive configuration or the loss of a slave pen due to revolt could lower a forge-lord to casting stubber shells to survive. Each forge-district is constantly striving to better themselves at the expense of others; none rise so fast as when they push everyone else down under them. Most of the forges have at least in some portion made dealings with the Ruinous Powers, supplying them with needed armaments and armours and gaining power at the expense of their souls (or ideally the souls of their slaves). Sabotage and spying are constant, and a forge is often only as prosperous as their own security forces are effective.

The forges are as varied as the myriads of raw materials they burn, chew, and remake into the weapons and vehicles for which Samech has become infamous. Some, such as Hexal, in many ways preserve their ancient ways of slow study and careful refinement, with their extensive (and closely guarded) collection of rare tech-patterns allowing them to retain valuable markets. While it in no way espouses retreating to the close-mindedness of the Adeptus Mechanicus, their Tech-Priests still see the value of deliberation and caution. Their merchandise is always of the highest quality, such that many of their customers also supply tithed warriors to help defend the district and ensure regular delivery of their supplies.

The majority though feel the opposite, frantic to extend their technological reach wherever it might lead in their pursuit of power. Forge Dimeris has constructed heresies that walk and perhaps even think like men. Delos Thuvial's district has produced prismatic engines that glow with unnatural lights and derive power through drained life energies. The Irradial Forge seems to have mastered infusing soul with machine to create daemonic engines of fury and steel. Even more reckless in their quest for knowledge is the Cambered Bridge, where hereteks study the interactions of the tenuous membrane that bounds reality to the Empyrean. Their replications of Warp eruptions, the better to master the Sea of Souls, have destroyed several small asteroids and portions of one moon. Most have extensive Explorator Fleets roaming Jericho for new xenos species to exploit, archeotech to loot, and civilisations to enslave, frequently clashing with Deathwatch teams acting to counter their aims and Rogue Traders seeking to do exactly the same but in the Emperor's Name.

There is a smattering of small factories controlled by their own workers, the serfs and slaves having perhaps overthrown their masters, or else the Tech-Priest functionaries decided it was more logical that their Magos-lords not interfere with

their operations. As long as the contracts are filled there is little opposition, though such forges are always at risk from conquest by the more legitimate powers. The Underforge of Kith is literally underground, stealing resources and siphoning power where they can to keep their furnaces burning. They deal with all, no matter the established contracts, and are the bane of the other forges. Their factories regularly destroyed, they roam the ancient infrastructure that descends deep into the planet, rebuilding from forgotten old forges and mining operations.

All are subservient (at least in word) to the Furnace Lord. It is his forge that rules Samech, but it is a rule that requires constant proof of command and the readiness to use it. He knows each of his vassal-forges would each eagerly replace him given the chance. Each forge-lord swims through the currents of power seeping throughout the factory-planet like a bloodshark, seeking weakness in the others, each Magos always ready to abandon old alliances should new ones prove more rewarding. The Furnace Lord stokes their rivalries, stirring their animosities together while directing their energies against the hated Imperium and its craven, weak servants of dead Mars. Such is the way of Samech, and such is its success that its colours of blood crimson and charcoal grey are found across the Salient, from frenzied combat servitors to deadly armaments to massive war machines.



AGENTS OF THE FURNACE LORD

The Furnace Lord keeps his heavily augmented head above his rivals by ensuring his personal agents are the first to uncover new technologies for the power of his forge. These agents scour the Salient in their infamous spider-ships, questing even into the Black Reef or the devoured worlds far rimward of the Drift in search of technological riches they can exploit. Each agent is a powerful and unique representative of their lord, intelligent, crafty, and armed with the looted weaponry of a hundred worlds and backed with powerful retinues of combat servitors. Like their master, each fights to put themselves paramount in their lord's eye, with the goal of being granted their own forge-rule one day. Along with agents of other furnaces, they are a constant reminder of the reach that Samech has across the Salient. Wherever the Imperium explores, either the crimson ships have either already been there or will approach soon.

Explorator-Magos O'nico Benezek

Benezek has been in direct service to the Furnace Lord for nearly two decades now, and is one of the premier Explorators in the Salient. She is highly intelligent, smart enough to have survived three purges of furnace agents and still climb upwards in status. Heavily augmented when she was inducted, her xenos robes disguise her four insect-like brass legs and the series of Mechadendrites that can emerge from her dorsal vents. Her voice is a rich contralto unlike the harsh mechanical pattern normally found in her peers, perhaps a deliberate alteration to gain her advantage in negotiations.

While not an exceptional fighter, she has held her own against numerous Imperial attacks. She views herself as a professional though and does not take these assaults personally, preferring to outwit than fight where possible. Sealed Inquisitorial records seem to indicate instances where she has even sided with Imperial forces against especially repellent enemies such as Tyranid infestations, both parties extending their truce until each had quit the battlefield.

Benezek can make an interesting opponent for a Deathwatch team accustomed to undisguised enemies. She will often be a step ahead of them in a search, and might even tease them along should she think their firepower can be directed to her advantage at later time. While she would have no issue with seeing them dead, if it does not directly profit her own aims then she is content they live for another day. Personally she finds most Space Marines quite uninteresting in their steadfast loyalty, but there are several Inquisitors that she feels are but a small step away from joining her in a much more rewarding service to the Iron Pit.

Magos Benezek Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
36	44	37	⁽⁶⁾ 43	39	51	49	51	40

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 30

Skills: Awareness (Per) +10, Barter (Fel) +10, Charm (Fel), Command (Fel) (+20), Ciphers (Int), Common Lore (Imperium, Jericho) (Int), Deceive (Fel) +20, Evaluate (Int) +20, Forbidden Lore (Archaotech, Xenos, Warp) (Int), Intimidate (S), Literacy (Int), Logic (Int) +10, Search (Per) +20, Scholastic Lore (Archaic) (Int), Scrutiny (Per) +10, Speak Language (High Gothic, Low Gothic, Machine Cant, Dark Tongues) (Int), Tech-Use (Int) +20, Trade (Archaeologist) (Int) +10.

Talents: Autosanguine, Binary Chatter, Basic Weapon Training (Exotic, Las, SP), Electrical Succour, Electro Graft Use, Enemy (Adeptus Mechanicus), Jaded, Mechadendrite Use (Utility), Melee Weapon Training (Primitive, Power), Mimic, Nerves of Steel, Pistol Training (Bolt, Exotic, Las, SP), Strong Minded, The Flesh is Weak (2).

Traits: Dark Sight, Mechanicus Implants, Multiple Arms, Touched by the Fates (2).

Armour: Blur-Cloth (Counts as All 6, Total 8 including The Flesh is Weak), Archeotech Gem (counts as Iron Halo).

Weapons: Hydra's Bite† (1d10+9 E; Pen 10; Felling [1], Flexible, Power Field, Tearing), Benezek's custom hellpistol (70m; S/3/4; 1d10+7 E; Pen 7; Clip 20; Rld Full; Accurate, Reliable, Tearing).

Gear: Auspex, comm-link, 2 melta bombs, 3 photon flash grenades, respirator, utility mechadendrite, 3 hellpistol reloads. She is usually accompanied by a retinue of 3 Battle Servitors and 3 Monotask Servitors.

Cybernetics: Augur Array, Bionic Arm, Bionic Heart, Bionic Locomotion, Bionic Respiratory System, MIU (all Exceptional quality)—due to her cybernetics, Benezek's Toughness Bonus is equal to 6 in all locations.

† **The Hydra's Bite:** This steel whip is Benezek's trademark weapon. It has multiple lashes each ending with fractal barbs and sheathed in a power field strong enough to rip open power armour.

GM's Note: Benezek has travelled across Jericho, uncovering archeotech and dealing with xenos of a myriad species. Her personal armoury is greater than that of many Inquisitors, and as such the GM should feel free to grant her different items of a unique and exotic nature each time she makes an appearance. Her only constant weapon should be her signature armament, the Hydra's Bite.



SAMECH ADVENTURE SEEDS

Imperator!

Scavengers on a remote world have been salvaging the remains of a long distant battle when their seismic probes bring a mountain crumbling down over most of their excavations. Unearthed is a true miracle though—the front armour of the mightiest of the Omnissiah's incarnations to walk, an Imperator Titan, at least 50 meters in height. Word of such a discovery cannot remain sequestered, with rival groups from across the Reach eager to claim it as their own. The Adeptus Mechanicus would sacrifice entire worlds to recover such a holy relic, and are ready to launch a Crusade of their own in such an attempt. Multiple forge-lords from Samech are also intensely eager; such a prize would surely allow any of them to become the new Furnace Lord and grant Samech access to the vaunted weaponry of an Imperator.

The Deathwatch's mission will be treacherous, with the Battle-Brothers forced to fight their way into the catacombs within the Titan and escort the Collegia Titanica personnel needed to activate the still flickering embers of the slumbering Machine Spirit. Other members of the Kill-team must guard the Tech-Priests as they attempt to ignite the massive plasma reactor at the heart of the Imperator. They must fend off constant attacks from the corrupted Tech-Assassins unleashed against them by the Samech Forge-Priests, as well as other techno-daemonic constructs spawned into the combat to allow the heretics to claim this prize. In space above the planet, massed naval fleets contest the skies to keep additional forces from landing or firing on the Titan. Will the Deathwatch succeed in time, or will the Imperator be lost to ruin or worse to the forges of the Iron Pit?

The Guns of Samech

A cargo vessel is destroyed on the outskirts of the Cellebos Warzone, just after exiting the Warp, the first of a number of mysterious losses with no clear cause. Other ships in the Salient have reported nearby explosions, and on one Agri-world a devastating meteor impact left metallic debris in the crater. Finally a pattern emerges—all of the targets are connected in a line that traces out an ominous pattern. At one end is the mighty fortress world of Karlack, the main supply hub of the Crusade. And at the other is Samech.

It is clear that somehow the Iron Pit is involved in these attacks. Unnamed Imperial spies died by the dozens to gather data, and the brilliant mind of Inquisitor Heliotrope Alban put the pieces together. Years ago Tech-Priest Zeron Boht had erupted in a tirade of acidic cants, renouncing the constraints of the strictures of the Adeptus Mechanicus. His sacrilegious propositions of projecting portal openings across the Warp itself were classed as heresy, and no more was thought of him (literally). However, long range scans through the Warp haze of the farthest dwarf planet in the Samech system showed a vast array of metallic filigree that matched the schematic runes that Boht had attempted before expulsion. More worrisome, there was a huge installation on the frozen world, composed of a battery of stolen Imperial Nova Cannons. Somehow the hereteks of Samech had discovered a way to use these Nova

Cannons to strike targets hundred of light years away with chilling accuracy. And clearly after these initial test firings, they would commence a bombardment of Karlack that would reduce the bastion world to molten rubble.

The installation is too well defended for a massed assault, leaving only the Deathwatch with the concentrated power needed to destroy it. They must bypass the intensive security surrounding the system to land on the planet's icy surface, and from there make their way into the partly buried installation and destroy it however they can. Ideally, they will also seek to destroy the portal generator synched in an artificially suspended low orbit. They are also assigned to deal with Boht and any of his other works—such a dangerous mind must be forever closed lest he spawn even worse creations. The mission will require stealth and precise planning, but should they fail then Karlack and the Crusade will fall as well soon after.

To the Highest Bidder...

There is a massive influx of archeotech in the Reach. The sellers are carefully hidden and their goods are genuine, even the least a priceless relic of ancient humanity. Factions across Jericho want to know who they are and where they are getting the items, and are realizing that if these are the wares they are willing to part with, what are they keeping for themselves?

Deathwatch teams have been assigned to quash the trade, confiscating or in extreme cases destroying these powerful devices before they can be used against the Crusade. They also will face their rivals in this quest, for the Iron Pit has sent its own agents to ferret out the source. Battles between all three groups occur, each more devastating as clues lead them ever closer to the original sellers. For the Deathwatch and the Imperium, there are signs that this is no mere illegal arms trader to be routinely eliminated. For Samech, it is clear that whoever is behind this trade is growing ever more powerful and will become a threatening competitor.

However, the seller is no xenos cartel such as the Transpired Circle or vanquished warlord eager to regain power. A lost colony world far to Spinward has barely survived the crashing of a mammoth ship brimming with ancient technology. Selling off the dross is allowing them to buy mercenary support and fortify their own world into a new power in the Reach. When the Deathwatch arrives at the planet to put down this insurrection they will encounter technological heresies of the basest kind: unholy mechanical golems, devastating forbidden weaponry, impenetrable force-screens that hurt the eye with unnatural colours, all this and more. Of course Samech is also there. Neither side can overcome the other two, but perhaps two can overcome one? The Battle-Brothers may reach an accord with the forge agents as neither welcomes this new power and its destruction is in both their interests. The agents are not without their own sense of honour, but the Space Marines will have to be wary as to how the acolytes of the Iron Pit define the term...

DAEMON PRINCE MEPHIDAST THE PLAGUEREAPER

"I was content to spread my Father's Blessings across these stars with rust and decay, but you now grow into many and try my patience. You did not spawn here and I insist on learning from where your trails led. There must be even more of you there, and they too need to embrace my art."

—Intercepted Vox Transmission during the Third Battle for the Amaros. Recording now under Inquisitorial Seal.

Deep in the Hadex Anomaly, he squats on a litter of rotted bones held together by decaying sinew, the foul chair creaking with his massive bulk. His chosen Moulders support this palanquin with effort, their dead eyes dripping yellow liquids but never revealing the strain. Plague toads croak in delight with their master, dragging their bloated bodies in slimy trails. Multitudes of Nurglings energetically dance in his name until collapsing, continually replaced as more grow out of the pools of filth surrounding his throne. Plague Marines stand ready to defend him, their souls bartered away millennia ago in his service. The great hall is filled with the scent of rot and the sounds of his worshippers crying their admiration and devotion. His entire daemon world drifts through the Anomaly at his whim. He is the carrion master of the art of decay, and once he was content.

But of recent years he has become first curious, then irritated, and now obsessed. His True Name is a secret none have uncovered and lived, but he is called, cursed, and worshipped as Mephidast the Plaguereaver, Daemon Prince of Necrosia and Artisan of the Thousand Thousand Plagues. He is the Carrier of the Sacred Tides, his mighty warhost of untold frenzied cultists, legions of pestilence daemons, and even the awesome might of Chaos Space Marines. In his name entire worlds have slowly fallen to putrifaction, all part of his grand design. There are new forces in his domain however, those who would undo the long centuries of his careful

art. His golden view of beautiful decay spreading across this quiet region like a stain growing on an unblemished cloth, his glorious opus to be etched across the sector, is now opposed. More and more he is convinced they are opponents to his canvas, and more and more discovering their secrets possesses even his already damned soul.

ETERNAL HATE

Mephidast has earned a particular enmity with the Inquisition; agents of the Ordo Malleus have battled him on a number of occasions, and the Daemon Prince has nearly always been forced to retreat from such confrontations. He burns for revenge against the Inquisitors and their allies, and thus he has a special interest in threatening the efforts of Deathwatch Kill-teams in the Cellebos Warzone.

There is a special data-vault set aside at Watch Fortress Erioch filled with reports, rumours, and forbidden lore about the Daemon Princes of the Hadex Anomaly, and amongst them, Mephidast is one of the most infamous. His plaguesword has reaped a bloody tally of Battle-Brothers since his appearance in the region.



A BOY BECOMES A MONSTER, A MONSTER BECOMES A DAEMON

The legends say he was born of mortal flesh centuries ago on a vessel seeking refuge from the calamitous eruptions engulfing Verronus. Ominous flickerings in the Gellar Field heralded his birth, but otherwise his was a benign childhood spent amongst the agrarian folk where his familial tribes settled to. As he grew so did reports too foul to ignore of mutilated carcasses, and blighted crops. He claimed to be practising as a medicae, but these excuses met with hostility, and after he poisoned a local gathering festival, he was finally locked away in the depths of a primitive dungeon. It was here that he found what he truly desired—an appreciative patron.

Endless time passed as his soul stared inwards and grew rancid as his cell. He had only himself to amuse, and began to scrawl diagrams on the walls from his imagination, drawing on thoughts not totally of his own. Shapes of unnatural angles and runic glyphs of profane languages were traced out in the unclean liquids and filth around him, blood and bile and other substances marking patterns that seemed just outside his comprehension. His body grew gaunt and tough as skin turned to leather, his hair falling away in strawlike threads, yet his devotion somehow began nourishing his unhealthy body. Over time, the influence of his corruptive nature rotted away the bars of his cell into decrepit rust. He was free to contaminate and blight the land at will, and he set to doing so gleefully.

In a day, the first victims fell ill. In a week, the dead piled up in the streets, local medicae unable to deal with the illness. His patron was satisfied, and made him more gifts so that he could carry Nurgle's blessings across the Reach. He renamed himself Mephidast the Plaguereaver after this first successful display of power, and left the now dead planet for greater places to bestow Nurgle's gifts.

He had no need for conquest; spreading the influence of Nurgle was his goal. He nurtured infestations of ravenous insects and created scores of plague zombies within huddled hive-masses. He even lured a particularly critical Ministorum preacher to his doom in a taunting ambush, where his flesh was made unclean and rendered down into new blight grenades. His followers grew into a massive warhost and his goals became even more ambitious, now also striking out against any who would gainsay his patron god. It was his victory deep within Hadex over an entire legion of Khornate blood-adepts, their armour decaying away as their flesh weakened and muscles grew infirm, that saw his final elevation. The tide of decay fell across the enemy in unstoppable waves, dissolving them to putrescent skeletal remains. He claimed the planet as his own; this victory gaining his ascension to Daemonhood. His body became bloated with Nurgle's blessings, surging in scale and power. Even the Plague Marines in his retinue fell to their knees in worship.

Now immortal, Mephidast focused on plans that might take decades to unfold, each act growing more intricate and subtle but still with wondrously noxious effects. He has grand plans for the Reach, and the Crusade has begun to interfere with them. He is clever and patient, but his temperament is growing shorter as the time spent quenching this invasion reduces the time for his true goals.

MEPHIDAST THE PLAGUEREAYER, DAEMON PRINCE OF NURGLE

Mephidast the Plaguereaver Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
47	50	⁽¹²⁾ 65	⁽¹⁶⁾ 87	32	52	44	71	66

Movement: 5/10/15/30

Wounds: 149

Skills: Awareness (Per) +10, Daemonology (Int), Deceive (Fel), Forbidden Lore (Daemons, Psykers, Warp) (Int), Intimidate (S) +20, Speak Language (High Gothic, Low Gothic, Unholy Tongue) (Int), Scrutiny (Per) +20, Trade (Chymist) (Int) +20.

Talents: Bulging Biceps, Combat Master, Crippling Strike, Crushing Blow, Die Hard, Disturbing Voice, Enemy (Imperial agents, Followers of Tzeentch), Basic Weapon Training (Primitive), Favoured by the Warp, Hatred (Loyalist Space Marines, Imperial Guard, Sisters of Battle, the Inquisition), Hammer Blow, Heightened Senses (All), Iron Discipline, Litany of Hate, Resistance (Psychic Powers), True Grit.

Traits: Daemonic (TB 16), Dark Sight, Fear 4 (Terrifying), From Beyond, Improved Natural Weapons, Natural Weapons (Tooth and Nail), Size (Enormous), Sturdy, Unnatural Strength (x2), The Stuff of Nightmares, Touched by the Fates (3).

Armour: Armour of Chaos (All 11).

Weapons: Tooth and Nail (1d10+12 R, Toxic), Plague Longsword (2d10+20 R, Toxic, Unbalanced, Warp Weapon).

Special Rules

Blessing of Chaos: Mephidast is protected by pacts he has made with the Ruinous Powers. This acts as a Force Field (see page 166 in the **DEATHWATCH** Rulebook) with a strength of 35 that does not overload.

Cloud of Flies: All those within 5 metres take a -10 penalty to Weapon Skill and Ballistic Skill Tests as choking clouds of buzzing, biting flies attack every exposed inch of flesh.

The Art of Decay: Mephidast possesses a Psy Rating of 7 and the following Psychic Powers: Augury, Compel, Dominate, Divination, Inspire, Nurgle's Rot, and Stream of Corruption (see page 97).

Note: Mephidast is usually accompanied by warriors of the Sacred Tides. These can be represented by Renegade Militia, Chaos Heretics, and Chaos Space Marines all bearing the Mark of Nurgle, as well as elite Plague Marines where desired.

NURGLE'S ROT

Action: Half Action

Opposed: No

Range: 5 metres + Psy Rating radius

Sustained: Yes

Description: The grandest and most infamous of Nurgle's contagions, Nurgle's Rot is known by many names and has appeared on countless worlds, leaving entire populations desolated by this terrible daemonic pathogen. Nurgle-devoted Sorcerers take on all manner of diseases, serving as host to the creations of the Lord of Plagues. From this seething mass of decay and entropy, these devotees of pestilence summon forth the psychic echo of this paragon of plagues, inflicting it upon those nearby.

The infectious gift of Nurgle is cast outwards to embrace all who stray too near to the Sorcerer. Creatures within range of the Sorcerer while this power remains in effect suffer 1d10 + Psy Rating damage, with the Toxic Quality. The damage from this power ignores Armour unless it is environmentally sealed.

While this power remains in effect, the air within the power's range is filled with a thick, acrid fog and swarms of massive bloated flies. Any creature within range that is not devoted to Nurgle suffers a -5 penalty to Intelligence, Perception and Fellowship Tests as the foul vapour and buzzing flies hinder their concentration and drive them to distraction. This effect is in addition to any normal Psychic Phenomena.



STREAM OF CORRUPTION

Action: Half Action

Opposed: No

Range: 5 metres x Psy Rating

Sustained: No

Description: Reaching deep into the corruption within his soul, the sorcerer unleashes a stream of bilious filth that leaves devastation in its wake. The sorcerer produces a torrent of foul energy in a 30 degree cone out to the power's range, similar to a weapon with the Flame Quality. Creatures caught within the spray may oppose the Focus Power Test with an Agility Test. Any creature that does not successfully avoid the power's effects suffers 2d10+Psy Rating Energy damage with the Felling (2), Toxic, and Warp Weapon Qualities.

MEPHIDAST ADVENTURE SEEDS

Tidal Wave

Mephidast has put into place a grand plan, designed to create an even larger Hadex Anomaly across the entire width of Acheros. He will unleash specially tailored plagues on a series of worlds with specific maladies; the tainted souls each produces will be channelled by his minions into psychic dirges to amplify the effects on the following world. If done in a specific order and timed to coincide with predicted Warp storms, then on the seventh world there will be a plague of such purity that it will be nigh unstoppable. The entire populace will fall in a single day, with every soul forcibly consecrated to Nurgle's grace in a single sacrifice greater than ever seen before. The overwhelming offering would burst into a Warp gate tens of times larger than Hadex, and surely be the pestilent Daemon Prince's crowning achievement.

The Deathwatch may only be brought into this matter after several planets have been blighted, and realize perhaps too late the true nature of these plagues. It will take investigation work, very likely in conjunction with Inquisition agents, to discern the pattern of deaths and what they truly represent. They must attempt to disrupt the minions as they prepare the profane rites needed to properly channel the deaths, amidst the virulent diseases running rampant across each planet. The witches will be well defended with scores of Plague Marines and daemons standing guard over their tabernacle-foci. It will be a race against time either to stop the ceremonies, prevent the necessary number of deaths, or in some way contain the contagions before the Salient is plunged into a daemonic vortex.

The Anchor

While Mephidast's daemonic minions can exist forever on his own world and move freely through Hadex, they are limited when acting elsewhere. For them to be pulled back into the loving embrace of the Emyrean just when they are about to carry out his latest effort is disappointing. So when word reached his ear that there might be a device on a dead planet deep beyond the Slinnar Drift which could stabilize an area as if massive amounts of psychic energies were being deployed, he knew it must be his. The Sacred Tides are deployed to uncover the archeotech from the ancient ruins, easily brushing aside the Explorator detachment excavating the area.

The Imperium is frantic to ensure this does not happen. Adeptus Mechanicus priests hasten to study the mechanism, Inquisitors and their acolytes stand ready to see it destroyed before it can fall into the daemon prince's grasp, and Ministorum priests are eager to use it to aid in banishing daemons. The Deathwatch will accompany this mixed group against the Tides, and must face not only the diseased warhost (possibly led by Mephidast himself) but the ever-present infighting of rival Throne agents, all of whom have their own agendas for the item. It is also not unlikely that some of the agents are Assassins sent to ensure only the correct group is allowed to recover the artefact. In such a mission, watching your back may be just as important as watching the enemy in front of you.

Unholy Waters

An army fights on its stomach, and Mephidast has decided this stomach should grow bloated with famine. By eradicating the more productive Agri-worlds supporting the Imperial forces in Acheros, these forces will require greater outside supplies, and these supplies must also come from the same place as these immigrant armies. Greater shipments means more shipping, and thus there is a greater chance his smuggled minions can finally trace them back to their homes, where he is eager to spread his gifted touch upon such a blank and unspoiled setting. Ah, the plagues he would make on these new worlds...



The crop failures are started by strike teams spreading a virulent liquid strain into cloud-seeding mechanisms, irrigation systems, and even directly dispersed into the skies via icy bombardment. Survivors of the attacks as well as the nature of the devastations offer some clues as to the instigators, but nothing is suspected beyond standard raids of the Ruinous Powers. Local planetary defence forces are unable to beat back the attacks and Imperial Guard forces are unequipped for the task or unavailable due to commitments to the Crusade. What was a minor logistics problem swiftly becomes a major strategic issue. Only large scale Inquisitorial investigations tie these attacks together, and only the rapid might of the Deathwatch can act fast and decisively enough to stop the blights, and possibly learn enough that they may be contained and exterminated. At the same time, the Battle-Brothers may be called in to cleanse Mephidast's agents from Imperial vessels, lest they gain access through the Warp gate and into Koronus.

Daemonic Incursion

Mephidast's plans to cause ruin and destruction in the Cellebos Warzone are proceeding too slowly. Impatient, the Daemon Prince makes a pact with agents of the other Ruinous Powers, gathering under his banner Bloodletters of Khorne, Daemonettes of Slaanesh, and Horrors of Tzeentch. With this daemonic force, Mephidast intends to invade a key planet in the Acheros Salient, far behind the front lines, plunging dozens of worlds into disarray and devastation as their supply lines are cut off.

Mephidast's influence, however, is foretold by the opening of the Omega Vault, revealing cryptic messages of a "black river of plague and decay" unfolding at a specific place and time. Inquisitor Carmillus declares this discovery worthy of the Deathwatch's attention, and a Strike Cruiser carrying multiple Kill-teams is dispatched to the region to intervene before the warp incursion escalates to engulf the world in terror.

Upon arrival, however, the Deathwatch encounters another secret force; the Daemon Hunters of the Grey Knights Chapter. Warily, the two groups agree to work together against Mephidast's legions of daemons—a nearly-unique situation where these two elite forces are present in the same place and time.

The daemons boil forth from the warp incursion in a tide of slaughter, and the Grey Knights' position is nearly overrun. The Deathwatch must choose either to rescue the valiant Daemon Hunters or to take the opportunity to destroy Mephidast when the Daemon Prince makes an appearance to gloat.



THE CANIS SALIENT



LORD COMMANDER
EBONGRAVE

•
THE MAIN ADVANCE

•
THE VELK'HAN
SEPT

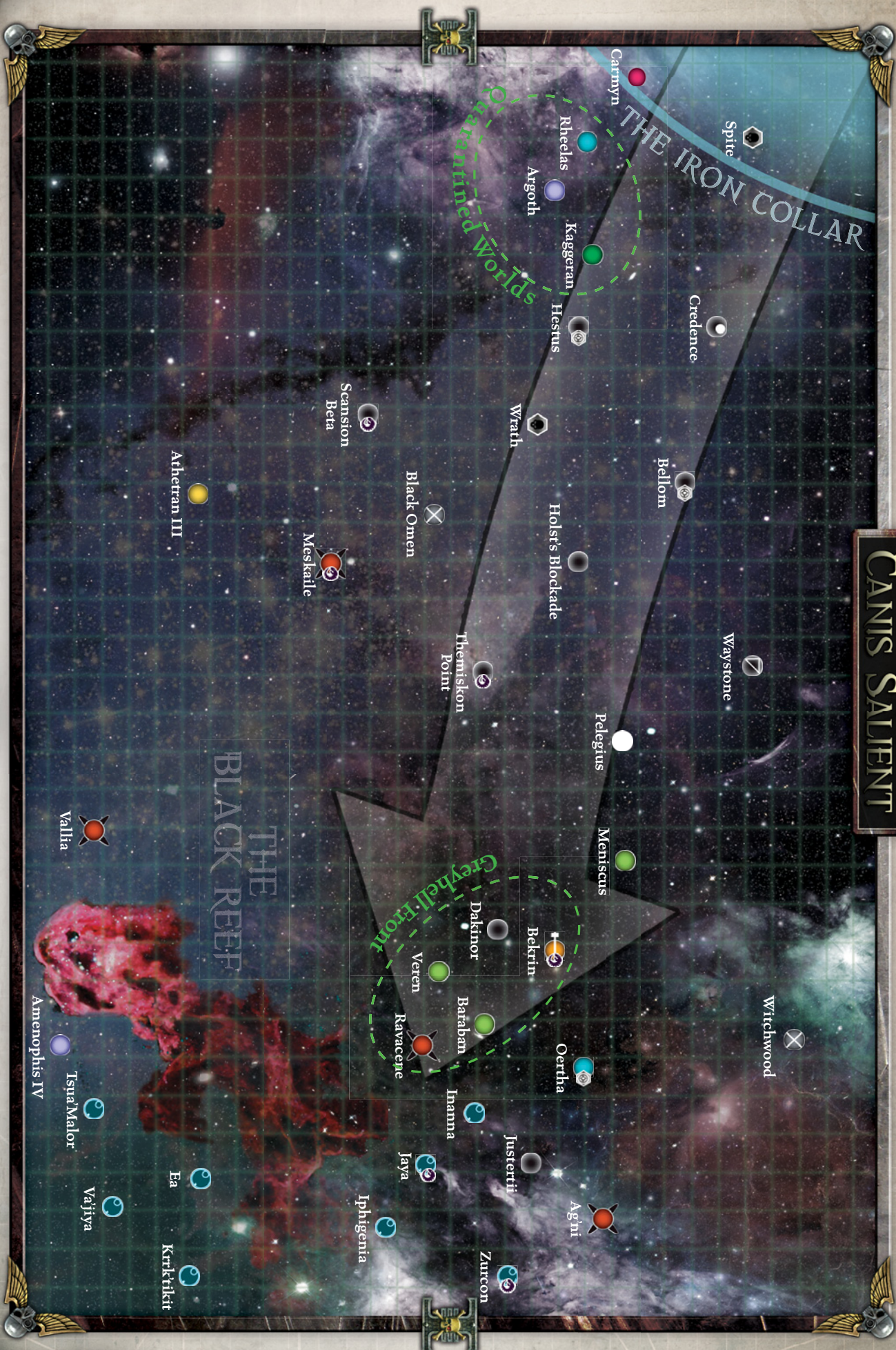
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RELATIONS WITH
THE TAU

•
FOR THE GREATER
GOOD

•
THE BLACK REEF



CANIS SALIENT



V: THE CANIS SALIENT

CHAPTER V: THE CANIS SALIENT

'Victory on the front line is insufficient. We must win the battle for the soul. Only when the soul of Mankind is conquered in the name of the God-Emperor will we be able to claim total victory.'

—Lord Commander Ebongrave, to Arch-Confessor Quadicus

The Canis Salient has borne witness to the most gruelling of battles since the earliest days of the Crusade, and scores of generals have made their names on its battlefields, often at the price of countless of their warriors' lives. The first years of the Crusade saw dozens of worlds in the region brought back into the light of the Emperor, reclaimed from anarchy and recidivism or liberated from the clutches of vile xenos.

Under Lord Militant Achilus, the alien Tau were the focus of the Crusade's efforts, his long term strategy to drive the Tau from the Jericho Reach and potentially push onwards to threaten their alien empire. Up until the time of Achilus' death, the region now codified the Canis Salient was the main warzone in the Crusade, huge army groups and massed fleets intent upon reclaiming those worlds the Tau had usurped. Achilus was frustrated in his efforts

by the unanticipated level of 'native' resistance to the Crusade, and he was forced to divert forces from the main advance to pacify once-loyal worlds that should, by all rights, have greeted him as a saviour and added their efforts to the Crusade. With the servants of the Ruinous Powers fomenting war and anarchy in the heart of the Reach, Achilus was unable to bring the full weight of his fleet to bear on the Tau stronghold worlds, and the war degenerated into a fruitless, bloody meat grinder.

With the death of Lord Militant Achilus and the appointment of his successor Tetrarchus, everything changed. The coterie of aging generals who had served under the former Lord Militant were sidelined by Tetrarchus, and Lord Commander Ebongrave elevated to lead the newly reorganised push. With the appointment of the new Lord Militant, the character of the wars raging across the Salient changed. Tetrarchus had decided that before the Tau could be driven into the void beyond the Reach, the taint of Chaos and rebellion festering at its heart must first be cleansed. The Canis Salient changed from the tip of the spear to what was essentially a holding action with the mission of keeping the Tau from claiming any more worlds, while the main bulk of the Imperium's forces waged war against the servants of Chaos on the central Salient.

With Tetrarchus focusing the Crusade's efforts on the Acheros Salient, Lord Commander Ebongrave set about consolidating control over those worlds already claimed and on containing the Tau in the region that became known as the Greyhell Front. With the exception of a group of quarantined systems at the trailing end of the Salient, the majority of the worlds between Spite and Vigil came firmly under Ebongrave's ruthless control. Garrison forces were massively bolstered in an effort to impose



an iron grip upon the populations of these systems, the intention to ensure that none would fall short in their support of the war effort. The other reason for such a brutal regime was to guard against the influence of Tau agents, who were adept at identifying those elements in a world's population that would not accept the rule of the Imperium, and encouraging them to rebel.

The Fortress World of Spite, part of the impenetrable Iron Collar of fortified worlds guarding the Well of Night, was built up still further and sired an offspring in the form of Wrath, which within the span of a decade became as mighty and impregnable a bastion world as its progenitor. With Spite the seat of military command across the entire Salient, Wrath became the site from which the Imperium imposed its vicelike grip over the peoples of the Salient's worlds, ensuring that none would slip from the Pax Imperium ever again.

The worlds of the Canis Salient largely pacified, Ebongrave focused all of his efforts on the worlds within the Greyhell Front, feeding regiment after regiment into the wars there in an effort to draw the Tau into a war of attrition they could not possibly win. If the Imperium can be said to enjoy one major advantage over the majority of its myriad enemies, it is manpower. This is especially true against the Tau, a species occupying a comparatively small stellar cluster, while the Imperium can draw on the populations of a million worlds and more. The Tau used every technological advantage they could bring to bear in the battles of the Greyhell Front, but ultimately learned to fight fire with fire; drawing on the human populations of the worlds they had captured to fight for them, for the Greater Good of the Tau Empire. Realising they would ultimately lose a battle of numbers, the Tau mustered vast proxy armies to fight for them, human soldiers loyal to their collectivist doctrines. With both sides committing ever more resources into the maelstrom of the Greyhell Front, pressure grew until the fate of the entire Canis Salient hung in the balance.

And then, Hive Fleet Dagon struck the Jericho Reach. While the bulk of the Tyranid incursion was focused on the rimward marches of the Jericho Reach, especially along the Orpheus Salient, several systems in the Canis Salient came under attack at the same time. As the questing tendrils of the Hive Fleet closed on the spinward worlds of the Canis Salient, formerly unheard of factions within those populations thought to be entirely under the Imperium's heel rose up, declaring themselves not for the alien Tau, but for the approaching "Great Devourer." While Ebongrave's occupation forces had been on guard for signs of Tau-sponsored insurrection, an entirely different threat had been growing beneath their very eyes. First Oertha, then Bekrin, then Themiskon Point came under Tyranid assault, while uprisings exploded on a dozen other planets.

Ebongrave's garrison forces were configured not as armies of planetary defence, but as armies of occupation and subjugation. They had numbers, but they lacked heavy equipment, and not anticipating planetary invasion, few worlds along the Salient had heavy ground-to-orbit defence installations. The uprisings were largely suppressed, for the xeno-cults were well led, but ill equipped. The invasions however were impossible to forestall, and while there were local successes, mostly thanks to the Deathwatch, the Tyranids had little difficulty establishing a foothold on several of the once-secure worlds of the Canis Salient.

Despite the Tyranid incursions, the high command of the Canis Salient has thus far refused to divert significant forces from the cauldron of the Greyhell Front. Garrison forces have been fed piecemeal into bitter defensive actions against millions-strong hordes of slaving alien monstrosities, bolstered by hastily raised and forcibly press ganged militia units. Ebongrave has ordered the gulags of Wrath and other worlds on the front stripped of prisoners accused of sympathising with the Tau for indenture into newly raised Penal Legions. Countless thousands of Penal Legionnaires equipped with nothing more than crudely mass-produced autoguns have been deployed in suicidal holding actions against the invading Tyranids, and desertion rates are astronomically high.

With the worlds of the Canis Salient desperately fighting to hold the Tyranids at bay, the army groups of the Greyhell Front continue to prosecute the war against the Tau. Yet these aliens have not escaped the attentions of the Tyranids, with several of the worlds claimed by the Velk'Han Sept suffering the attentions of the Hive Fleet. Both sides continue to feed massed armies into the Greyhell Front, whilst casting a wary eye towards the spinward voids, fearful of what horrors may yet descend from the depths of interstellar space to consume all that lies in its path. Even faced with the apocalypse presaged by the arrival of Hive Fleet Dagon, the Imperium and the Tau remain locked in the deadly embrace of total war.

LORD COMMANDER SEBIASCOR EBONGRAVE

"There was never a genius who did not know the touch of madness."

—Saint Khallon, Ruminations on Martyrdom

Sebiascor Ebongrave began his career in the Imperial Guard as a cornet (or standard bearer) in the celebrated Dhkasin Hussars, a cavalry regiment raised from the noble classes of the world of Dhkas in the Scarus Sector. The young subaltern distinguished himself early in his service, bearing his troop's standard into battle in the glorious Charge of the Ardent Martyrs, and defending it against a horde of Orks when his mount was slain beneath him. Having been decorated for his actions by the Queen of Dhkas herself, Ebongrave used his newfound fame and the wealth it brought him to purchase a commission as regimental colonel, and led his unit in a series of actions that won him yet more battle honours.

But Ebongrave was not prepared to stop at the rank of colonel, instead coveting high military office. With each successive victory he earned, Ebongrave climbed his way further and further up the chain of command. Having left the Dhkasin Hussars he could no longer rely on fame, nepotism or his personal fortune to purchase higher commissions, and so Ebongrave launched himself into an intensive round of politicking. By means both fair and foul, Ebongrave worked his way from Lord Colonel of Army Group Tempest to High Marshal of the Tharsis Nebula Pacification. Finally, it was Ebongrave's sterling service as Chief of Staff to the doomed Lord Militant Bernadotte during the last days of the Fall of Ishtaar that brought him to the notice of the High Lords of Terra themselves. Three years later, Ebongrave was appointed a subordinate commander and adviser to Lord Militant Achilus.

But Ebongrave soon found that serving under Warmaster Achilus was not the appointment he had hoped it would be. He was but one amongst a cadre of scores of advisors, each of whom guarded their own position to the exclusion of all else. Frustrated by the realities of Achilus' court, Ebongrave engineered his appointment to a front line position and won a score of victories across a dozen worlds.

Having spent the best part of a decade serving in the general staff, Ebongrave relished the chance to return to the front line, taking to the field and participating directly in several of the battles he commanded. At the Third Battle of the Argent Bastion, Ebongrave led the cavalry charge that broke the back of the rebel defence of Mneme IV and opened the way for the relief of the third moon of Wrath. By the time of Achilus' death, Ebongrave was riding a wave of personal glory, but had apparently reached the upper limit of command thanks to the closed-off nature of Achilus' circle of advisers.

When Achilus was lost, the former Warmaster's inner circle was scattered by the new incumbent, Lord Militant Tetrarchus. Ebongrave was immediately recalled from the frontline and restored to the high office he so craved, becoming one of Tetrarchus' most trusted advisors. When Tetrarchus conceived his plan to rejuvenate the Crusade by committing along three Salients, Ebongrave petitioned Tetrarchus for the honour of leading the main advance towards the Hadex Anomaly, perceiving this as the deed that would earn him such glory that he would one day take command of the entire Crusade.

Some whisper that it was Ebongrave's hubris in coveting command of the Acheros Salient that caused Tetrarchus to appoint him to lead one of the two lesser Salients. Perhaps Tetrarchus sought to contain Ebongrave's ambitions whilst taking full advantage of his prodigious abilities, perceiving in the Lord Commander a potential rival best kept on a short leash. Whatever the truth, Ebongrave was given command of the Canis Salient. He fully intended to prove himself the better of the three Lord Commanders, and the xenos-pyres of the Greyhell Front would bear witness to his glory.

Then Hive Fleet Dagon smashed into the spinward systems, and Ebongrave's ambitions were devoured along with a score of human worlds. Forced to fight two enemies at once, Ebongrave has become increasingly paranoid and unwilling to heed the counsel of his advisers. He sees the work of Tau infiltrators everywhere he casts his gaze, and has gone so far as quarantine three entire star systems that he suspects to be in league with the enemy. Ebongrave even imagines agents of the Tau in his own staff, and has initiated several high level purges in an effort to flush out those who would have truck with the Tau and their collectivist ways.

Lord Commander Ebongrave has become increasingly insular, secreting himself in his personal bunker several miles beneath the surface of Fortress Spite. All but the boldest of his command cadre are too cowed to seek an audience with him, and so bad news regarding the progress of the war is often kept from him lest the messenger be blamed and executed on the spot. On several occasions, emissaries of the Deathwatch or the Inquisition have entered into an audience with Lord Commander Ebongrave, only to come away deeply concerned for the man's state of mind. Some fear that one day soon Ebongrave will accuse the wrong person of collaboration with the enemy, and then, not even a Lord Commander's



rank and status will save him from censure. Until that time, Lord Commander Ebongrave will continue to brood in the shadowed depths of his bunker, plotting the downfall of his hated foes no matter the cost in blood and treasure.

TETRARCHUS AND EBONGRAVE

The relationship between Lord Militant Tetrarchus and his subordinate commander started off well, with the Warmaster recognising the abilities of the Lord Commander and rewarding him with high rank. Yet, in truth the appointment was a double-edged sword and while the two men present the appearance of mutual respect, they are in fact engaged in a bitter rivalry. Tetrarchus sees in Ebongrave a capable and ambitious underling, one whose skills are too great to be ignored, but who may one day covet his own position. Ebongrave sees in Tetrarchus a commander every bit as skilled as he, yet who presents an obstacle to still higher office. This situation has got worse with the coming of Hive Fleet Dagon, for Ebongrave continues to prosecute the war against the Tau when many are coming to believe it is the Tyranids against whom the Crusade should launch its strength. While Ebongrave will not hear of concession or compromise, many of Tetrarchus' most trusted advisers are coming to believe that some arrangement should be made with the Tau, at least until the threat of the Hive Fleet is contained. To date, Tetrarchus has sanctioned only limited, and entirely deniable contact, which Ebongrave remains ignorant of even though it continues on the marches of his own domains.

THE MADNESS OF LORD COMMANDER EBONGRAVE

"The purges shall continue until their loyalty is total. While just one of them doubts, they are nothing but a nest of traitors."

—Lord Commander Ebongrave prior to his second purging of the Canis Salient General Staff

The Canis Salient is a vast swathe of Imperium-occupied space over which Lord Commander Ebongrave casts his eye with ever-increasing bitterness and desperation. Across the Salient, several primary themes have come to dominate—those of Ebongrave's brutal and paranoid (but necessary) repression, Tau infiltration, the Tyranid invasion, and the activities of the Deathwatch. The core worlds of the Salient are ruled with a vice-like grip, while total war tears the Greyhell Front apart. The agents of the Tau attempt to penetrate ever deeper, as the leading edges of Hive Fleet Dagon threaten to overwhelm all.

THE EYES OF WRATH

While Ebongrave rules over the battles of the Canis Salient from his command bunker beneath Fortress Spite, internal security issues are the purview of a range of bodies occupying the bastions of the Fortress World of Wrath. The so-called "Eyes of Wrath" (as the populace terms the myriad divisions of enforcers, purgation details, and purity patrols) see everywhere, from the scented arbours of Carmyn to the musty catacombs beneath Bekrin. It is said that the average subject has but to walk from his barracks to his place of work to be observed by upwards of a thousand spy-drones. Many believe that potent psykers are used to scry the dreams of the populace as they slumber after a long work shift, sifting through the nightmares for the slightest hint of sedition or treachery. Few would be surprised to learn that such rumours are true, but in truth they are the least of the concerns that a subject suspected of treachery should be troubled with.

Those accused of sedition or any one of a thousand different forms of treachery are taken away to one of the many gulags to be found on every world under Lord Commander Ebongrave's control. The fortunate are then consigned to service in one of the newly raised Penal Legions, to suffer a quick death at the hands of the Tyranids. Those less fortunate are dragged screaming to an excoriation chamber, to confess whatever sins they have committed and, in an effort to avert the dreadful attentions of their interrogators, many they have not.

As all-seeing as the Eyes of Wrath are, the paranoid Lord Commander Ebongrave would be horrified to learn that they have in fact been compromised by an outside agency. Fortunately for the Imperium, that agency is not the Tau (not yet at least), but the servants of the Ordo Xenos, and through them, the Deathwatch. Unknown to Ebongrave, the Inquisition has long utilised the Eyes of Wrath as a means of gathering information on both the populace and those enemies who would seek to infiltrate it. To date, dozens of Tau agents have been intercepted by the Ordo Xenos or neutralised by Deathwatch Kill-teams long before the authorities have become aware of them. Better Lord Commander Ebongrave

AN AUDIENCE WITH LORD COMMANDER EBONGRAVE

While the vast majority of the millions of warriors fighting the Emperor's cause in the warzones of the Jericho Reach will never see, let alone meet, a senior commander, the Battle-Brothers are in such a position that they may well come into contact with leaders as Lord Commander Ebongrave. This might come about because the Deathwatch has an urgent message or warning that must be delivered in person, or because the Kill-team is accompanying a senior Inquisitor as guards, advisors or executioners. It might even be that the Lord Commander himself has requested an audience with the Deathwatch, and the PCs have been dispatched as envoys.

Such an audience should only ever be conducted inside Ebongrave's command bunker far beneath Fortress Spite, and as he should never be put in any danger his profile is not given.

Should the Player Characters find themselves in contact with Lord Commander Ebongrave, the GM should take the opportunity to communicate the full extent of his paranoia. He should be unpredictable and unstable, veering wildly between extremes of temperament in a manner that most Space Marines would find very hard to understand. While most of Lord Commander Ebongrave's personality can be communicated by way of roleplaying, the PCs may also need to interact by way of Skill use, in particular Command and Intimidate but also Charm and Deceive, depending on whether they or Ebongrave are initiating the checks. Ordinarily, such tests would be modified by a Disposition level (see page 276 of the Deathwatch rule book). In Lord Commander Ebongrave's case, his Disposition is likely to change radically from one moment to the next, and so it can be determined randomly each time an Interaction skill is used, as follows.

D10 roll	Difficulty Modifier	Disposition Level (Charm/Command/Deceive/Intimidate)
1-2	Easy +30	Infatuated/Fanatical/Gullible/Terrified
3	Routine +20	Affectionate/Devoted/Trusting/Frightened
4	Ordinary +10	Favourable/Loyal/Accepting/Startled
5	Challenging +0	Indifferent
6	Difficult -10	Disdainful/Resentful/Suspicious/Brave
7	Hard -20	Contemptuous/Disloyal/Sceptical/Courageous
8-10	Very Hard -30	Disgusted/Mutinous/Disbelieving/Foolhardy

remains ignorant of the infiltration of the Eyes of Wrath, for were he to discover it, he would no doubt descend to yet greater depths of paranoia and bitterness.

HARBINGERS OF THE GREATER GOOD

Despite the ubiquitous prying of the Eyes of Wrath, many of the worlds of the Canis Salient are rife with Tau agents and sympathisers. The Tau themselves rarely set foot upon such worlds, for to do so is simply too dangerous, though individual envoys might occasionally meet with human contacts on outlying worlds in human occupied systems. Instead, the Tau rely on an extensive network of human agents to work for them, spreading the message of the Greater Good to every corner of the Salient, recruiting ever greater numbers of sympathisers and enacting covert missions in the name of their Tau masters.

The majority of those human agents who work towards the Greater Good have never met a member of the Tau species. Rather, they are recruited by spy-masters who themselves may have had little or no contact with the aliens. These agents are to be found in every labour-hall, ordnance yard and agri-dome in the Salient, ever watchful for signs that the yoke of the Imperium's authority is growing too heavy for the workers to bear. When the opportunity arises, such agents whisper of another path, a way of life in which the worker can enjoy the fruits of his own labours as one amongst an empire working towards the same goal. Such

a collectivist creed is entirely alien to the average Imperial subject, yet many of the peoples of the Reach do not regard themselves as Imperials. Many populations see themselves as brutally oppressed, conquered by an Imperium that has failed to deliver them from the anarchy of the Age of Shadow. Instead of deliverance, the Imperium has brought subjugation in the name of abject servitude to Achilus Crusade, a war the enslaved had little or no knowledge of or shared interest in. Tau agents whisper of the way of the Tau, slowly revealing an alternative to the way of the Imperium.

Tau agents are always extremely careful to separate the notion of loyalty to the Imperium from that of faith in the Emperor, at the outset at least. For many, the Emperor is a distant patron to whom the people of the Jericho Reach cleaved even when the Imperium abandoned them. The recruiters preach that the Imperium is no longer the realm that the Emperor intended it to be when he walked amongst his subjects thousands of years ago. The mighty edifice of the Imperium, the Tau agents preach, has long since crumbled to dust, its remnants held together by nothing more than brutal oppression. Thus the dispossessed of the Canis Salient are taught that worship of the Emperor as a creator-deity is entirely compatible with rejection of what the Imperium has become. For most of those turned to the way of the Tau, this is the extent of their heresy. Others who walk further along the path of the Greater Good may eventually come to reject the Emperor entirely, subsuming themselves completely within the way of the Tau Empire.



PORTENTS OF THE GREAT DEVOURER

With the coming of Hive Fleet Dagon to the Jericho Reach, another covert foe revealed itself within the Canis Salient. There are those within the multitudes of the oppressed who do not turn to the collectivist doctrines of the Tau for succour against the brutality of the Imperium, but to another source entirely. Small sects of xenos worshippers have emerged upon several worlds of the Canis Salient, some revealing themselves at the very moment the advance elements of the Hive Fleet appeared in the Reach as if answering some unheard siren call.

The source of these groups appears to vary, and they are often as opposed to one another as they are to the Imperium. Some are thought to be the result of genetic manipulation, individual humans somehow infected by Tyranid vanguard organisms and made to serve the Hive Mind. Others appear to have had no contact with any form of Tyranid, but instead represent twisted doomsday cults determined to throw themselves upon the mercy of the Great Devourer, a fate they would prefer to continued servitude to the Imperium. Other cults have been revealed as conspiracies enacted by third parties—most often the servants of the Ruinous Powers but in at least one instance through the deeds of radical factions within the Inquisition.

A tripartite battle for the hearts and minds of the populations of the Canis Reach is now raging, often unseen but sometimes openly. While the Imperium, via the Eyes of Wrath seeks to tighten its grip through rigid, uncompromising control, the other two factions utilise entirely different methods. The Tau work by way of promises of a better life under their collectivist regime. The vanguards of the Tyranids utilise another means—subconscious manipulation at the genetic level, a force which can overturn even a lifetime of loyal service with a single implant touch.

DEATHWATCH OPERATIONS

The Deathwatch maintain a number of Watch Stations in the area now claimed by the Canis Salient, and several more exist outside of the Salient that nonetheless watch the general region. Watch Stations Hestus and Bellom, both of which have existed since long before the coming of the Achilles Crusade, are located deep within the Salient. Yet the systems they are located within are forbidden to all but those with the very highest authority. Furthermore, Watch Stations Skapula and Andronicus, both of which are some distance beyond Ebongrave's domains, watch the spinward voids beyond the worlds claimed by the Tau.

Deathwatch operations within the Canis Salient are almost entirely covert in nature, for Ebongrave is a jealous commander who has become increasingly distrustful of any force not under his direct command. When joint operations do occur, they are most often fought alongside conventional Space Marine forces, who themselves exist outside of Ebongrave's direct chain of command. It is comparatively rare for the Deathwatch to participate in full-scale joint operations alongside Ebongrave's forces, for he often makes demands of the Watch Captains that they simply cannot fulfil.

SEEING THROUGH THE EYES OF WRATH

A Deathwatch Techmarine PC can utilise Ebongrave's Eyes of Wrath, communing with the Machine Spirits of the vast network of spy-lenses, vox-thieves and data-sentinels to further their own mission. To do so, the Kill-team must be operating on one of the worlds within the Canis Salient that is under Ebongrave's control, and either inside, or within vox-range of a facility the GM deems to be suitable for accessing the Eyes of Wrath. Such facilities include defence bastions, administration centres, ordnance storage depots and many other types, and the GM should use his discretion when determining if any given location has an access point the Techmarine can utilise.

To access the Eyes of Wrath the Techmarine should make a Hard (–20) Tech-Use Test. The usefulness of the information gleaned depends on the Degree of Success by which the test is passed, as presented below.

The test should be modified by circumstance, and the GM may require several to be taken over a number of turns. If the Techmarine is accessing the node via a vox-link, the test should be increased to Very Hard (–30). If the agents of Lord Commander Ebongrave have reason to suspect a rival faction of attempting to access the Eyes of Wrath through a particular node then further penalties can be placed on the test, or the GM could require the PC and NPC to make Opposed Tests.

Degrees of Success	Result
1	The Techmarine is able to access the local nodes, gaining spy-logs of all individuals that work or pass through the immediate locale.
2	The Techmarine finds details of all individuals within a district of a city, or within a region if he is searching within a sparsely populated area.
3 or more	The Techmarine gains access to the entire planetary network, and can see through any spy-lens and access any archival data core.

A situation has grown within the Canis Salient in that the Deathwatch must often go about their missions as secretly as any of the Imperium's enemies. Missions are launched against Tau infiltration-cells and xenophile cults as well as other threats, without the knowledge or approval of Ebongrave's command structure. Furthermore, such missions are often enacted in such a way as to exclude or deceive Ebongrave, often using intelligence sourced from the compromised Eyes of Wrath. It is little wonder then that the Lord Commander of the Canis Salient is descending into paranoia and madness, for he perceives the hands of his enemies even amongst the elite of the champions of Humanity.

THE MAIN ADVANCE

"He who claims victory claims right. Those who are left have no rightful claim to anything."

—Lord Commander Ebongrave to an aide at the Fourth Conclave of Wrath

The main advance of the Canis Salient runs in a line between the Fortress Worlds of Spite in the Iron Collar, and Hex on the verges of the Greyhell Front, following the course of the Arethusa Flux Warp conduit. The worlds between these two mighty bastion systems are largely under Ebongrave's heel, though Tau-inspired insurrection, Tyranid incursion, and localised rebellion mean that the Imperium's control is far from absolute and no world is entirely untouched by war. Nevertheless, Ebongrave's forces rule these worlds with a vicelike grip, squeezing them of every resource that can be turned towards the ongoing war against the Velk'Han Sept. Life for the average subject within the Canis Salient is brutal and often short, with forced labour the only toil most will ever know. Those unwilling to accept their fate may turn towards the Tau, but in so doing condemn themselves to a painful death at the hands of Ebongrave's ruthless enforcers. Those who so much as slacken the pace of their toil are dragged screaming from their workstations and shipped off to one of Ebongrave's many gulags, and soon after assigned to one of the Penal Legions raised to defend against the creeping menace of Hive Fleet Dagon.



Like the warzones of the other two Salients, the most strategically important worlds in the Canis Salient are those that lie along the axis of its major Warp routes. The worlds occupying these vital nodes may not be of any great significance themselves, but their positions along those routes make it vital they remain under the Imperium's control. Thus, the most important systems in the main axis of the Canis Salient are Spite, Bellom and Themiskon Point, simply because of their locations. Many other worlds are to be found in the Salient however, and each has its part to play in the ceaseless war against the enemy.

BELLOM

The Bellom system was once one of the most prosperous trading hubs in the old Jericho Sector, its fortunes built upon the flow of luxury goods passing along a spur of the Hyades Ebb Warp route that led directly towards the old sector capital of Verronus. That passage no longer exists, for with the rise of the Warp storms that heralded the Age of Apostasy, the route became unstable and then collapsed entirely. At some point during the Jericho Sector's Age of Shadow, the raw stuff of the Warp spewed out of the old passage to Verronus, and engulfed the glittering spires of Bellom, cutting it off from all outside contact for many hundreds of years. When the Warp storms eventually subsided, the passage to Verronus was gone, as was every living thing on the surface of Bellom.

The only survivors of the Warp storm that engulfed the system were the Deathwatch Battle-Brothers present onboard Watch Station Bellom, which orbits in the system's outer reaches. When the Warp storms came, the crew of the Watch Station raised its gellar field and used their sus-an implants to enter a deep state of suspended animation in which they slept through the centuries until the storms lifted and they could resume their vigil. Just what the station stands sentinel against is unknown, not even to the Chamber of Vigilance, but the fact of its existence is reason enough to maintain it.

Of late, a number of efforts have been launched to reopen the old Bellom-Verronus Warp passage in the hope of establishing a new front by which the servants of Chaos infesting the central regions of the Reach can be assaulted. To date, even the most skilled of Navigators has failed to locate any such passage, and several of their number have perished in the attempt. Nonetheless, Tetrarchus has ordered the effort to continue, for now at least.

CARMYN

Carmyn is classed by the astro-cartographers of the Administratum as a Pleasure World, a classification that can have many different applications. In the case of Carmyn, the world has gained its designation because it is utilised by the high command of the entire Achilus Crusade as a retreat from the horrors of war and the stresses of high-level command. It is only the most highly privileged of Tetrarchus' staff that are even aware of the world's existence however, and aside from the entire corps of serviles assigned to wait on the officers' every need, no common soldier knows of the place.

The surface of Carmyn is as close to paradise as any world in the Jericho Reach, with unspoiled forests, pristine oceans teeming with life and glorious mountain ranges soaring kilometres into the azure skies. Imperial presence is limited to a number of small retreat settlements, each consisting of perfectly landscaped harbours. The thousands of staff who wait upon the generals and marshals who use these facilities are quartered in vast underground barracks, so that their presence does not ruin the perfect vistas.

Unbeknown to the Imperium however, a Slaaneshi cult has taken hold in the lowest reaches of the menials' quarters, and is slowly working its way through the ranks. At some point, its vile doctrines will threaten the very highest levels of the Crusade's command echelons. Should this happen, the Imperium's entire enterprise in the Jericho Reach could well be brought to its knees in a single stroke.

MESKAILE

The Death World of Meskaile forms the third in a trio of planets to the trailing edge of the Canis Salient that have come under attack by vanguard elements of Hive Fleet Dagon. As with Themiskon Point and Scansion Beta, Crusade high command cannot ascertain the reason for the Tyranids' interest in the world, but have been forced to upgrade its strategic rating in response.

Unlike the other two worlds of the triangle, Meskaile is not a Dead World. It is instead the polar opposite, a planet teeming with life, and all of it carnivorous, bloodthirsty and entirely inimical to intrusion by any form of outsider.

The Tyranids' presence on Meskaile was first reported by the Deathwatch, who were there in response to a scrap of information rendered on ancient parchment from the depths of the Omega Vault. Whether it was the Tyranids or some other threat that the vault intended the Deathwatch to combat was never discovered, for the Kill-team was forced to extract in the face of overwhelming opposition from both the denizens of Meskaile and the newly arrived Tyranids.

Meskaile is now the site of a huge war, one being fought between the invading Tyranids and the carnivorous flora and fauna of the Death World itself. When this fact was first reported to the Crusade's high command, it was hoped that the Tyranids would expend their energies fighting a pointless war to capture the world, but that does not appear to be what is happening. Instead, the Tyranids are undergoing a process of frenzied and sustained hyper-evolution as they battle the denizens of Meskaile, each successive generation getting ever more lethal and developing a prodigious immunity to the numerous poisons utilised by the world's species. The servants of the Ordo Xenos are now concerned as to what form of Tyranid may emerge when their conquest of Meskaile is complete, and several voices have called for exterminatus to be enacted before such monstrosities can escape the crucible of their creation.



SCANSION BETA

One of the many Dead Worlds that haunt the Jericho Reach, Scansion Beta marks the trailing terminus of the Lampades Spur Warp route. In the early stages of the Achilus Crusade, Scansion Beta was largely ignored by Imperial forces, for its location was not in itself strategically relevant to the flow of armies and resources through the region. That changed however when a Deathwatch Kill-team discovered a Tau deep-penetration cadre scouting a number of locations in the world's northern polar zones. The cadre was defeated and the Kill-team withdrawn, yet the Tau launched several more missions to explore the world, for no reason the Crusade's Tacticae echelons can discern. Tetrarchus was wary of a trap, concerned that the Tau's interest in the dead world might be a diversion intended to mask enemy activities elsewhere and draw the Crusade's forces away. Nonetheless, Scansion Beta's strategic rating was upgraded and Imperial Navy patrols there increased.

It was one such patrol that discovered the presence of the Tyranids on Scansion Beta, and it appears that a large number of vanguard organisms are intent upon scouting the exact same region that the Tau forces were exploring. Furthermore, Adeptus Mechanicus xenos-genitors believe that the Lictors and other creatures present on Scansion Beta are an offshoot of those swarming across Themiskon Point. As no known stable Warp route exists between the two worlds, it is not known how the Tyranids crossed the void in such a short time, for without a stable, plotted passage even the most skilled of the Imperium's Navigators would have taken far, far longer to complete the journey.

With the Tyranids evincing such an interest in Scansion Beta, Crusade high command has deemed it wise to increase its strategic rating still further. Lord Commander Ebongrave has yet to divert significant forces to oppose the Tyranid presence there, instead focusing his resources against his nemesis, the Tau. At some point soon however, the Lord Commander may be required to rethink his plans, especially if the Tyranid contagion starts to creep along the Lampades Spur towards the worlds of the Iron Collar.

THEMISKON POINT

The servants of the Adeptus Mechanicus believe that Themiskon Point once harboured a rich and diverse ecosystem, for the substrata of its surface are rich in organic fuels. For eons, Themiskon Point must have been host to planet-wide forests, yet today, no trace of life remains on the planet. As far as most records indicate, this has been the case since the earliest days of the Imperium's presence in the Jericho Reach, though a few scattered writings suggest that the transformation to its present state took place at around the time of the Great Crusade. Other crumbling archives suggest that the world was host to an advanced alien civilisation which destroyed itself in the face of human conquest, submitting to the fires of planetary devastation rather than allowing a single human to set foot upon their world.

A mystery at least as great as the world's past is to be found in its present, for the world has come under the dominion of a host of Tyranid vanguard organisms. Countless Lictors stalk the bleak, cratered surface, as if seeking a prey they know must surely exist but they cannot locate. Several theories have been put forward to explain this phenomenon, including the notion that some trace of the original masters of Themiskon Point might still exist, perhaps waiting out the millennia far below the surface of their world until the day when Mankind recedes and they can reclaim and reseed their once paradisiacal world.

The forces of the Imperium rarely have cause to enter the inner reaches of the Themiskon system, for although it lies at the terminus of a well established stable Warp conduit, there are no worlds of any importance to the Imperium beyond it. To date, the Imperium has yet to commit to cleansing the world of the Tyranid presence, but the Chamber of Vigilance has debated the matter on three separate occasions and a reconnaissance mission is likely to be launched in the near future.

WRATH

The Fortress World of Wrath lies at the navigable extent of the Aegle Confluence, a branch of the Arethusa Flux Warp route that has seen countless battles against the Tau and others over the course of the Achilus Crusade. Wrath was earmarked as a potential Fortress World early in the Crusade, due to its location just off of the main Warp route through the region as well as its life-supporting atmosphere. A bitter campaign was fought to suppress the native population, a technologically regressed but highly warlike people who held up Warmaster Achilus' armies for several years before they were finally defeated. The remnants of that population now serve under the yoke of Ebongrave, and their world has been transformed into the administrative centre of the Canis Salient.

Wrath is a grey, cold, and windswept world, lacking large continental masses but featuring countless thousands of islands grouped together into a continuous chain that encircles the entire planet about its equator. The thousand or so largest islands are each host to a rearing edifice belonging to the many agencies of the Imperium's control over the conquered worlds of the Canis Salient. Because the region is still a war zone and far from fully pacified, even the most innocuous of administrative bodies is headquartered within a

mighty fortress armed with fearsomely powerful ground-to-orbit defence batteries. Each of these bastions is covered with spy-lenses and antennae, part of the so-called Eyes of Wrath. No worker who toils within or around Wrath's bastions ever strays outside of the gaze of the dark spy-cams.

Unknown to the ruling military council of Wrath, the world is host to a number of Inquisitorial holdings, most of them masquerading as minor Adeptus Administratum sub-bureaus. Via these covert nodes, the Inquisition, and by extension the Deathwatch, maintain a close vigil over the governing powers of the Canis Salient, as much concerned with uncovering treachery within the Imperium's own ranks as it is with uncovering the activities of its many enemies.



THE VELK'HAN SEPT

"The Imperium wields might without mercy and influence without temperance. Only by following the way of the Greater Good will they ever learn the error of their ways and know order, wisdom and unity."

—Aun'O Tsualal

The Velk'Han Sept is a cluster of worlds that have fallen entirely to the forces of the Tau, their human populations turned from the Pax Imperium to the collectivist doctrine that is the Greater Good. Just how compliant the humans are in this process depends on the world in question, for some resisted the coming of the Tau and fought for many years, while others threw down their arms at the first contact with a Water Caste envoy.

The Tau's effort to insinuate themselves within the Jericho Reach is an unusual one, for it marks a departure from established patterns of expansion and conquest. The Tau Empire has thus far expanded its holdings in concerted, species-wide efforts, the forces of a number of Septs spreading outwards to bring a new 'sphere' of space within the Tau's influence and establish still more Septs within it. The Velk'Han Sept was established outside of this pattern, representing not an empire-wide Crusade into surrounding space, but a single, concerted strike across the void towards a very specific, discrete region. The Jericho Reach is quite some distance from the dense stellar cluster occupied by the Tau Empire, and so it represented an impressive feat of voidsmanship for the Tau to even reach it, and a daring display of military skill to capture as many worlds as they did in such a short time.

The Tau's interest in a region so far from their own domains was one of the main factors that caused the High Lords of Terra to pronounce the Achilus Crusade. In the aftermath of the abortive Damocles Gulf Crusade, the Tau not only retook the worlds they had lost to the Imperium, but exploited the momentum of their counter-advance to take hold of many human systems. Given the calamitous events that unfolded during the Battle of Macragge, few were overly concerned for the fate of a handful of frontier systems. Others however still brooded on the events of the Damocles Gulf Crusade, and were fearful of the Tau poisoning more sectors with their vile philosophies. It was these men, such as Confessor Gurney of the Ecclesiarchy, who warned of the perniciousness of the Tau and the danger of them being allowed to expand into worlds far beyond their empire. With the Jericho Reach accessible once more thanks to the opening of the Warp gate, many great and powerful men swore that never again would the Tau or any other species be allowed to pluck away human worlds while the Imperium's gaze was turned elsewhere. What happened in the aftermath of the Damocles Gulf Crusade would not be repeated, it was promised. The Tau would not only be swept from the newly accessible Jericho Reach, but driven back to their empire by a vengeful Imperial Crusade that would not stop until a new front had been opened up against the Tau Empire itself. Fortunately for the Tau, they were sufficiently established in their new Sept to resist the initial advances of the Achilus Crusade, and the other belligerents active in the region diverted the Imperium's attentions away from committing overwhelming forces against the Sept. Now, the Tau are engaged in an effort to eject the Imperium from the Greyhell Front. When this occurs, millions of sympathisers on the worlds of the Canis Salient will rise up against their oppressors and the Tau will push the Imperium all the way back along the Salient and cast it into the depths of the Well of Night.



CANIS SALIENT NPC:

WATER CASTE ENVOY

Tau of the Water Caste serve the Tau Empire in many ways, most often as traders, merchants, ambassadors, or diplomats. The Water Caste often interact with other races when such is required, and is not the purview of the military-natured Fire Caste.

The Water Caste are physically tall and slender compared to other Tau, and often dress in rich robes and headgear. Many Rogue Traders, Planetary Governors, and other Imperial commanders have discovered that the Tau Water Caste possess a smooth manner and a quick, ingratiating tongue that has often gained the Tau an advantage in any negotiation.

The Deathwatch has had few dealings with these Tau, but consider them a threat to the Crusade thanks to the Water Caste's facility for convincing debate (a prime tool for subversion).

Water Caste Envoy Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
20	20	25	30	35	30	35	25	40

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 15

Skills: Awareness (Per) +10, Charm (Fel) +20, Common Lore (Imperium, War) (Int) +10, Deceive (Fel) +20, Evaluate (Per) +10, Intimidate (S) +10, Logic (Int) +10, Scrutiny (Per) +10, Speak Language (Low Gothic, High Gothic, Kroot, Tau), Trade (Trader) (Fel) +20.

Talents: Light Sleeper, Master Orator, Polyglot, Talented (Charm)

Weapons: Pulse Pistol (30m; S/2/—; 2d10+3 E; Pen 4; Clip 16; Rld Half)

Armour: None.

Gear: Xeno-crafted robes, xeno-crafted micro-bead, 2 Pulse Pistol reloads, 1d5 xeno-crafted charms and trinkets, polyglot hedron*.

*This Tau device adds a +10 bonus to Interaction Skill Tests by helpfully selecting the best possible combination of syntax and grammar for verbal communication.

Special Rules

Barter and Trade: Tau of the Water Caste can use Trade (Trader) to determine how successfully they can arrange exchanges of goods and services. The use of this skill is identical to Barter (found in Dark Heresy) and Commerce (found in Rogue Trader). In addition, whenever successfully using Trade (Trader), Barter, or Commerce Skill Tests, Water Caste Tau gain one bonus degree of Success.

CANIS SALIENT NPC:

HEAVY GUN DRONE

The Tau Empire makes extensive use of machine-intelligences known as drones. All drones consist of an advanced processor unit that—individually—has only a basic intelligence on par with that of a small animal. These intelligences always seem to be programmed for self-preservation, and are likely to flee rather than face certain destruction. Drones are commonly configured to accept regular orders from a Tau controller, but drones are also capable of being networked together into teams, which significantly increases the intelligence and processing speed of all networked drones. These drone teams also have a higher capability for independent action.

Some of the largest drones yet identified are the Heavy Gun Drones, far more massive than the standard Gun Drone and capable of carrying multiple heavy weapons to lend direct fire support to Fire Warrior Cadres.

Heavy Gun Drone Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel
20	25	35	⁽⁸⁾ 40	40	15	25	20	10

Movement: —

Wounds: 20

Skills: Acrobatics (Ag), Awareness (Per), Dodge (Ag).

Talents: Exotic Weapon Training (Burst Cannon, Markerlight) (may only use integrated weapon systems).

Traits: Auto-Stabilised, Fire Drill, Flyer 12, Machine (5), Unnatural Toughness (x2).

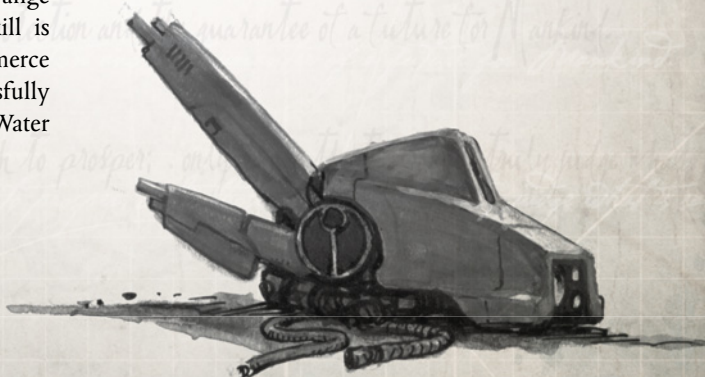
Weapons: Twin-linked Burst Cannon (60m; —/—/10; 2d10+2 E; Pen 4; Clip —; Rld—; Mounted, Twin-Linked).

Armour: All 5 (includes Machine Trait)

Gear: Built-in micro-bead (for receiving instructions only).

Special Rules

Networked Machine Intelligence: For every Heavy Gun Drone in the networked team, the BS, Int and Per characteristics are increased by +2. This is recalculated immediately should any be destroyed. When in a Horde, these bonuses are equal to the Horde's magnitude (to a maximum of +30).



THE WAY OF WAR

"We make war because we must; they make war because they know no other existence."

—Shas'O M'yen

The Velk'Han Sept exists outside of the mainstream of the Tau Empire, and is in many ways a semi autonomous, self-sufficient colony. When the undertaking was first mooted in the Tau's ruling Council of the Highest there was a degree of opposition to the venture, with the most senior of the Earth Caste arguing that maintaining and supporting a new sept so far outside of the empire's conventional spheres would put a huge drain on resources and require significant assets to be diverted from other fronts. The debate was ultimately carried by a combination of Fire Caste belligerence and Water Caste ambition. The warrior caste argued that only by aggressive expansion into new regions of the galaxy would the human and other empires see both the might, and the right of the Tau way. The caste of envoys and traders saw the benefits of contact with so many worlds not ruled by the Imperium, declaring that this new region would be brought within the Greater Good for the benefit of all. What the Imperium had abandoned, the allied castes promised, the Tau would claim for their own, and in a stroke uncounted billions of loyal servants would be brought within the unified Tau Empire.

Despite the bold words, all knew that the establishment of the new sept would be a bold undertaking, and once agreed, the Council of the Highest focused all of its attentions on the effort. A mighty war fleet was mustered, consisting of forces drawn from all of the existing septs and all of the castes. This fleet was instructed to cross the voids and establish a bridgehead on the coreward marches of the Jericho Reach, where it would consolidate and establish itself as a self-sufficient entity. While the other septs would still contribute towards the ongoing war effort, the Velk'Han Sept was expected to be able to raise its own forces within as short a time as possible, so as not to place a drain on the Empire.

The first few years of the undertaking went more or less entirely in the favour of the Tau, with the fleet well able to coerce those human worlds that refused to join the Tau into doing so. Tsua'Malor was established as the sept's principle world, and soon two-dozen systems had fallen under its control. Tau expeditionary forces ranged far and wide, probing towards the heart of the Reach and bringing the truth of the Greater Good to ever more worlds. Even when outlying, newly contacted worlds refused to join the empire, the Water Caste envoys worked hard to sow the seeds of the Tau's doctrine within the hearts and minds of the peoples of the Reach, ready to be reaped at some point in the future as the sept expanded.

Sadly for the Tau, that next phase of expansion never occurred, for the Imperium discovered the Warp gate at the heart of the Well of Night and launched the Achilus Crusade to expel the Tau from the Jericho Reach. Imperial forces flooded through the gate in a vengeful storm, descending on the worlds claimed by the Tau and those they had established relations with and purging any who had truck with the alien empire. In those first, desperate days the only thing that

saved the sept from complete collapse was the actions of the Imperium against the peoples of its former realm. Almost every human world the Crusade came upon refused to submit to its rule, and the Imperium was forced to fight a war of reconquest against its own peoples before it could turn its full attentions towards the Tau.

Velk'Han used this brief period of respite to undertake a massive program of arms manufacture and recruitment, and was bolstered by additional forces despatched from the distant Tau Empire. The newly constituted forces pushed forwards once more, plunging into the warzone the Imperium calls the Greyhell Front. And then, Hive Fleet Dagon appeared.

The Tau had only limited experience fighting the Tyranids, and were fortunate indeed to avoid the worst of the ravenous aliens' attentions. In the short term, the Tau have benefited from the arrival of Hive Fleet Dagon, though their worlds are far from untouched. Tau spies report that Tyranid forces are putting increasing pressure on the worlds of the Canis Salient, and soon Lord Commander Ebongrave will be forced to withdraw forces committed against the Tau in order to defend his own worlds. The Tau see in this turn of events as a repeat of the closing of the Defence of the Damocles Gulf, in which an Imperial Crusade was forced to withdraw from its over-extended assault on the Tau Empire in order to commit every available resource to opposing Hive Fleet Behemoth.



Suffer Not the Xenos...
The Imperium Triumphs!

By the order of Lord General Castus Iacton:

Appreciation of enemy units, (gross operational, strategic tertiary), and nominal theatre chain of command

+++31st Intelligence Cohort (Black Zone Liaison detachment, meta-probe data extraction interdict by command of Ordo Redactor cell 363/). Addendum to previous communication.+++

+++Code Delta-Seven Inquisitional Intercept+++

While the operatives of this cohort have been unable to ascertain the exact number of worlds currently suffering under the yoke of alien domination, we believe the Tau are currently fielding in excess of eighty (80) Fire Caste Commands, one hundred twenty (120) Air Caste Commands, three hundred fifty (350) Earth Caste Commands and thirty five (35) Water Caste Commands.

Additional resources have been committed to gathering intelligence on the Tau command and control body known as “the transcendence.” though to date no operatives have returned from the field. The exact make up of these Commands (Uash’O)–level bodies varies depending on its mission, but in the case of the Fire Caste units we would estimate a minimum of between twelve and twenty Cadres to be present.

Some observed sub-command level formations (Battle (Kavaal)) include:

- Joint Fire/Water Caste Suppression Mission, Zurcon (including three veteran Residency Protection Cadres)
- Earth Caste Recoding Initiative, Jaya (with seven attached Fire Caste Second Line Contingency Cadres)
- Water Caste Indigenous Inhabitants Contact Initiative, Va’jiya (with eighty three First Line Fire Caste Cadres co-aligned for crisis Force Protection measures)
- Joint Fire/Earth Caste Planetary Exploitation Task Group, Ag’Ni
- Earth Caste Astro/Biosphere Research and Suppression Initiative (with twenty two Fire Caste Cadres converting to Rapid Reaction phase of Arms Cycle)
- Earth Caste Resource Re-deployment Force, Innana
- Air Caste Total Exclusion Implementation Fleet, Ea (further details unknown)
- Air Caste Interdiction Fleet, Amenophis (with twenty Fire Caste Cadres assigned as Marine Boarding Task Forces)



TAU SPACE TRAVEL

"With each voyage we undertake, each species we contact, each world we settle, we see the absolute necessity of our mission."

—Por'O Volescur

The Tau Empire's expansion has been dictated by the constraints of the methods its star ships use to cross the vast gulfs of space separating the stars. The Tau do not make use of Navigators in the sense that humanity does, and neither do they utilise any of the esoteric or outright sorcerous methods that allow other races to navigate the Warp. It has been posited by the Imperium's xenobiologists that the Tau have very little perception of the Warp, a fact that may serve to protect them against the predations of the denizens of the Emyrean but that also blinds them to the power it offers. In order to cross interstellar space, the Tau utilise a purely technological solution that allows their vessels to make short jumps, effectively 'skimming' the surface of the Warp without immersing themselves in its seething depths. It appears that entering only the shallows of the Sea of Souls allows the Tau to guide their ships by conventional means, and protects them from the perils that beset other species.

The downside of the Tau's method of interstellar travel is that longer jumps are impossible, making it far slower than other methods. To date, this has not been a major issue for the empire's expansion, because the stellar cluster which it occupies is so dense that each sept is only a short jump away from the next.

The Tau learned of the Jericho Reach in a similar manner to the way in which they first discovered interstellar travel. They came to learn these secrets through reverse engineering the wreckage of an alien vessel discovered on a moon of their home planet. The Jericho Reach was discovered in a very similar and equally serendipitous manner. On the world of Landfall at the very edge of the Tau Empire, Earth Caste explorers discovered an ancient tablet crafted by the hands of some long fallen alien civilisation. Upon examination by the greatest minds amongst the Tau, the tablet was determined to represent a star chart, plotting a fast and safe route through the Warp to a distant region of space. The discovery was made all the more fortuitous by the fact that using conventional Warp drives the passage would have been impossible, assailed as it was by raging Warp storms. But the Tau's gravitic-effect drives allowed them to anchor themselves on the emanations of the distant Black Reef, and although the passage was not an easy one, most of the force sent to scout the passage made it through safely.

Armed with their knowledge of the passage between Landfall and the Black Reef, the Tau can move forces between the two regions far faster than would otherwise be possible. The star chart is perhaps one of the closest guarded secrets of the Velk'Han Sept, and Earth Caste explorers from the Sept are busily engaged seeking similar artefacts with which to fuel the dynamic expansion of their species. Small Tau expeditionary forces comb the Jericho Reach in search of such secrets, a fact that the Imperium has yet to become fully aware of.

AG'NI

The Tau discovered Ag'ni very soon after they arrived in the Jericho Reach, long range sensor scans suggesting the world would prove ideal for early settlement. In fact, the world appeared so ideally suited for colonisation that a Water Caste contact cadre was assembled in order to bring the word of the Greater Good to whatever natives lived there. The Tau envoys were greatly surprised to discover that the world was entirely untouched by intelligent life, though its continents and island chains teemed with plant and animal life.

It was only when the first of the Water Caste envoys removed the helmet of his sealed environmental suit and took a deep breath of the seemingly pristine air that the Tau discovered why no higher life forms had settled Ag'Ni. The instant the envoy breathed the air, his system was flooded with airborne microbes so voracious that he was dead before his body hit the ground. Within seconds, his horrified companions bore witness to his body being broken down before their very eyes by the most aggressive microbial life forms the Tau had ever encountered.

Contact doctrine dictated that the surviving members of the envoy team should be quarantined on Ag'Ni, and supplies were dropped to them from orbit. Yet, within a day the remainder of the team was dead, the microbes having breached their suits and overrun their systems.

The leadership of the Velk'Han Sept has since declared that Ag'Ni should be purged of all life so that it can be re-seeded by Earth Caste geo-engineering cadres. This process is still underway, and the planet has come to be used as a weapons testing ground by the Fire Caste, who have been given free reign to test the most destructive of devices without fear of unleashing unwanted levels of destruction. Every form of weapons technology has been tested on Ag'Ni, from planetary defoliant to ionospheric inversion. Mass yield pulse plasma warheads have levelled entire mountain ranges and the detonation of a seismic discontinuity charge brought about the creation of an entire chain of super-volcanoes at the world's southern pole.

Despite the destruction wrought upon Ag'Ni, the voracious microbial predators continue to exist. In fact, even in regions subjected to high levels of radiation the microbes persist, re-colonising the blasted wastes within days. The proud Fire Caste has begun to take the eradication of the microbes as a matter of honour, and the world has taken on the character of a warzone in which a bitter campaign is being fought against a totally invisible enemy. The Earth Caste geo-engineering cadres have been side-lined by the Fire Caste and there appears to be no end in sight to what has long since escalated into a bitter war of conquest against an enemy that, it appears, cannot be beaten by even the most unconventional means.

AMENOPHIS IV

The fourth world of the Amenophis system has been blockaded by the Tau for some time, for its native human inhabitants have been declared beyond redemption by the Greater Good and all contact with them has been forbidden. Furthermore, the Tau fear that should the human population of Amenophis IV discover the existence of the Imperium it may attempt to join the wars of the Greyhell Front. The Tau believe (quite wrongly) that should the Imperium discover the human society on the world, it will welcome its lost kin into the fold and utilise their strength against the Tau.

The population of Amenophis IV have been declared beyond the Greater Good because they are entirely under the control of some form of machine intelligence, which they worship as a creator-deity. The people of Amenophis IV long ago discovered a fragment of lost Standard Template Construct technology and having utilised its knowledge to build an advanced meta-cogitation array, immediately fell under its control. Upon achieving sentience, the machine, called simply 'the Array' by its subjects, immediately set about systematically and jealously purging all knowledge of the Emperor, Terra, the Imperium and the Imperial Creed. The people of Amenophis IV came to believe that they were the sole examples of their species, indeed of intelligent life, in the universe and that the Array was their beneficent creator.

When the Tau came to Amenophis IV, their very existence challenged the world view propagated for so long by the Array. The machine ordered its subjects to repel the Tau using weaponry resurrected from long before the Age of Imperium, and having done so removed all memories of the aliens' existence from its subjects' minds. The armies of Amenophis IV proved the equal of the Tau forces sent to oppose them, and a stalemate has since developed. Elements within the Earth Caste would very much like to recover and examine some of the weaponry utilised by the Array's forces, while other, more cautious voices call for no contact to be attempted at all. One faction within the Fire Caste has voiced the belief that the Array and all its followers should be destroyed by heavy planetary bombardment before it develops the capability to launch warships into space and challenge the Tau Empire's control of the region.

EA

The world of Ea is dominated by deep seas of a vivid violet hue and studded with numerous chains of small islands. The world has no native population and has been sequestered by the members of the Ethereal Caste as a retreat and sanctuary. Only the Ethereals and their most trusted honour guards are allowed to set foot upon Ea, and all others are forbidden from leaving their vessels, which are required to hold station in orbit high above the world.

The Ethereals' retreats take place in ancient stone structures built by a long-extinct species eons ago. Apart from these structures, no other trace of the ancient civilisation has been found. The Ethereals are thought to seek peace and inner harmony amongst the cyclopean halls and high atop the rearing towers of Ea, meditating for weeks on end on the proper path the Tau Empire should take.

Given the concentration of such highly ranked individuals in one place, the Tau allocate significant resources in ensuring its existence remains a secret and its borders secure. A large fleet patrols the system and its outer limits, ever watchful for enemy incursion. Initially, it was the agents and assassins of the Imperium that the fleet was guarding against, but recently its concerns have focused on the possibility of infiltration by Tyranid vanguard organisms. To date, none have been discovered, but the warships of the Air Caste remain alert for the slightest sign of Tyranid incursion.

INNANA

When the Tau first came to Innana, they were welcomed with open arms by a small human population that had been dwindling for generations and was rapidly approaching the point at which it would become entirely unsustainable. The natives' woes were caused by the fact that the soil of their world was poorly suited to any form of agriculture and since the coming of the Age of Shadow and the severance of trade with the worlds of the old Jericho Sector, they had become increasingly unable to feed themselves.

Soon after Innana's population declared their allegiance to the Greater Good, their newly declared loyalty was put to the test. The Tau discovered vast reserves of highly desirable minerals beneath the surface of Innana, minerals that rendered the soil all but barren, yet could sustain the empire's industry for generations. The human population was offered the choice of remaining on their world to serve as labour in the Earth Caste strip-mining facilities that would soon arrive, or to be shipped out to live on other worlds in the Velk'Han Sept. Every man, woman and child voted to leave their barren world, and although they were subsequently dispersed amongst the stars, none regretted their decision.

Soon after the human population departed, Earth Caste mining cadres arrived and the process of systematically extracting the world's natural resources began. Vast refineries equipped with fusion-scourers and held aloft by powerful anti-grav generators roam the surface, following the richest seams of the rarest of minerals. The planet is now a scarred and blackened wasteland, its resources plundered to fuel the wars of the Greyhell Front and beyond.

JAYA

Jaya is a world of abundant natural resources, with three major continental masses surrounded by warm seas teeming with life. It is host to a human population that has existed for millennia at a relatively advanced level of culture and technology. Due to its position far beyond the coreward borders of the old Jericho Sector it played little part in sector-wide society or economy and its population was largely self-sufficient. Jaya survived the worst excesses of the Age of Shadow largely untouched by the war and anarchy that swept the region, its peoples continuing the life they had led since time immemorial.

And then, the Tau came to Jaya. At first, the people of Jaya welcomed the Tau, for they had no reason to doubt the aliens' messages of peace and cooperation. It soon became apparent to the world's leaders however that the Tau expected more

than cooperation, and desired that Jaya submit to their rule. The peoples of Jaya had come to value their independence and self-sufficiency and its rulers were unwilling to be made proxies for others. Too late, the armies of Jaya were mustered, citizen militias unused to the realities of full-scale warfare rising up in an attempt to expel the Tau from their world. The ensuing battle was a disaster for the natives, and the Tau used the attack as justification for a campaign of rapid and total suppression. Within six months the entire population of Jaya was under the Tau Empire's rule, the last vestige of resistance retiring to the inaccessible uplands of the world's third continent.

Tau rule was total for several decades, until the arrival of Hive Fleet Dagon changed things once more. Vanguard organisms ranging ahead of the main axis of advance infiltrated the isolationist survivors of the original resistance, tainting them genetically and turning them into pawns of the Hive Mind. Following this vector of infestation the xenos-taint spread outwards, and soon vast swathes of the population had become corrupted and enthralled to the still distant will of the Tyranids.

The infestation was discovered by the Tau during routine genetic sampling of the human population. The Earth Caste scientists were shocked at the extent of the corruption, yet they had no idea what it might presage. Those infected appeared not to be aware of their plight, and had yet to act against the Tau. It was surmised that the infestation may have implanted some latent form of gene-coded domination that had yet to be 'activated', and an extensive study was implemented to ascertain its nature. Amazingly, the Tau made rapid inroads in combating the genetic taint, using recombinant gene-recoding techniques all but unknown to the biologists adepts of the Adeptus Mechanicus.

Jaya's fate now hangs in the balance. Around half of the population have been 're-coded' by Earth Caste cadres working around the clock, yet still the process is expected to take at least another year. The Tau have realised that if any infected humans remain untreated when the call of the Hive Mind activates them, disaster might ensue. To this end Fire Caste pursuit teams are combing the wilderness of the third continent in search of every last isolationist human, intent upon re-coding every last human on Jaya before it is too late. The world has been quarantined so that the taint does not spread any further, but also to ensure that the Imperium does not learn of the re-coding mission. The upper echelons of the Velk'Han Sept have realised that keeping such a capability secret might ultimately prove a significant advantage to the Greater Good.

JUSTERTII

Lying in the otherwise starless depths trailing the Black Reef, Justertii represents an undiscovered enigma. Once an Eldar "Maiden World"—a planet seeded long ago by the Eldar for future settlement—Justertii is now a desolate waste studded with the blasted remains of Eldar wraithbone structures. None can tell what fate befell the world and caused it to become a rogue far from whatever star must have birthed it. To date, both Imperial and Tau scouts have logged the existence of the world, yet it appears to be subject to some unfathomable process that causes it to vanish from the void to

reappear elsewhere. Any vessel closing on the rogue Maiden World finds itself trailed by ghostly augur returns and those that continue on their course invariably fall prey first to minor systems outages and, should they continue, crippling failures. The Chamber of Vigilance has debated the matter of Justertii and determined to investigate the sightings, yet it lies a great distance from any Deathwatch holding, making any mission unlikely in the near future.

VA'JIYA

Va'jiya is a world of deep, dark forests and fetid swamps, and due to its extremely slow rate of rotation its day/night cycle is several standard months in length. An unusual eco-system has developed around this cycle, in which the forests undergo rapid growth during the long 'day', followed by an equally rapid decomposition period during the 'night'. As the sun slowly rises once more, new shoots sprout forth from the sludge and amidst the skeletons of dead trees and the cycle begins anew.

The dark stinking forests of Va'jiya are populated by numerous tribes of savage humans, the descendants of some long forgotten colony mission that evidently failed. The tribes have developed into separate, highly individual groups that wage a continuous and bitter war against one another. The tribal warriors are hyper-violent in their methods, and every aspect of their culture is centred upon death and war, from their primitive religion to the construction of their fortified settlements. Technology has long since vanished from Va'jiya, although some barely recognisable vestiges of failed artefacts are still to be found in use as improvised weaponry.

Va'jiyan society has developed a means of controlling its unregulated psyker population, an order called the 'Red Lodge' existing apart from the tribes, fulfilling a similar role to that of the League of Black Ships in the Imperium. The hooded envoys of the Red Lodge visit each settlement at least once in every three day/night cycles and demand that any children who have developed the 'Sign' be handed over to them. Where these latent psykers are taken or what their fate might be is not known.

The Tau discovered Va'jiya and its primitive human population several decades ago, but the Water Caste has been unsuccessful in its attempts to initiate any sort of negotiation with the tribes. Every attempt at peaceful contact has been met with violence, and the Tau are currently considering exactly what should be done about the situation. As a life-sustaining world Va'jiya has an intrinsic value to the Tau Empire, yet it does not appear to harbour especially desirable or abundant natural resources. Very brief studies of the world's unusual flora have turned up some interesting findings however, and so the Earth Caste has petitioned for more expeditionary missions to be undertaken. The Tau have considered unleashing a large force of Kroot against the tribes in an effort to suppress the savage natives or at least push them back to within a contained area. The matter is further complicated by the need to keep the Imperium from discovering the tribes of Va'jiya, for the Tau fear that the hyper-violent natives might be all too willing to rejoin their kin and to fight against the Tau Empire and the Greater Good.

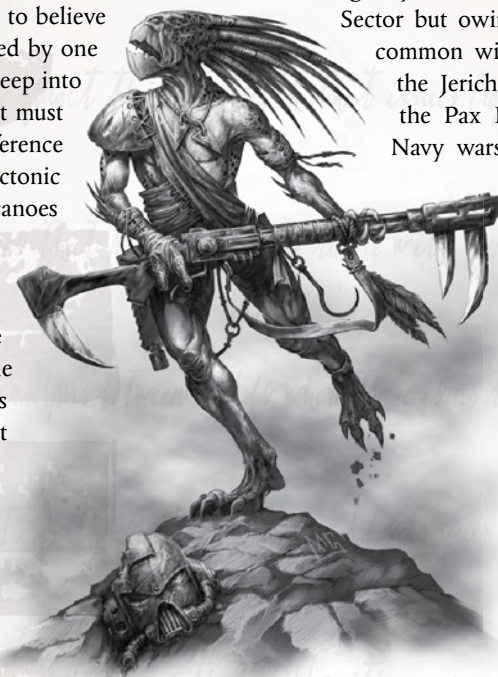
VALLIA

In the Imperium, Vallia would be classified as a 'death world' and, given the abnormally aggressive nature of its flora and fauna, be declared out of bounds to all but those with the very highest level of authority. The Tau however have far less experience with such worlds, and have yet to fully appreciate the extremes of malevolence that worlds like Vallia can exhibit. The Explorators and Rogue Traders of the Imperium know that death worlds are more than just dangerous environments, a fact that the Tau are only just beginning to understand.

Vallia is almost entirely swathed in jungle, the flora extending to every corner of the surface and every crack below it. Even the seas are choked with carnivorous plant life, as are the lightless caverns deep beneath the ground. In fact, Earth Caste scientists have come to believe that the world's plant life is dominated by one single organism, its roots extending deep into the world's crust. In places, roots that must be hundreds of metres in circumference have destabilised the underlying tectonic processes, causing hundreds of volcanoes to erupt across the surface.

Numerous Tau expeditions to Vallia have ended in disaster as the plant life as well as animal life has reacted in concert to expel the invaders. The first three expeditions were completely annihilated, but not before the discovery of unique and highly desirable natural resources in the form of compounds excreted by the carnivorous flora. A fourth expedition was dispatched to confirm these findings, this time accompanied by a Fire Caste battle cadre entirely equipped with battle suits configured to hold the predatory flora and fauna at bay. Although dozens of Fire Warriors died in this mission, samples were recovered and shipped back to Tsua'Malor for analysis. What was discovered during that analysis caused a paradigm shift in the way many Earth Caste xeno-biologists view the evolution of complex symbiotic biospheres, a view which has yet to be accepted by those who have not seen the evidence with their own eyes.

The Earth Caste scientists of Tsua'Malor have discovered that every life form on Vallia is interconnected. This symbiosis goes far beyond the conventional interconnection seen in many life forms, and extends to an amalgamation of will and a form of gestalt intelligence. Though they have yet to fully accept their own findings, the Tau have discovered that the death world of Vallia is in fact sentient, ruled over by a single, utterly malevolent intelligence that can mobilise every single living cell on the planet to repel any who would set foot in its domains.



As if this realisation were not shocking enough to the Earth Caste's world view, some amongst their number have advanced the notion that this planetary sentience can be somehow reasoned with, perhaps even convinced of the primacy of the Greater Good. Initial Fire Caste estimates have placed a high possibility on any contact force being completely wiped out, and the Water Caste can see no way in which meaningful discourse could be established. Nonetheless, research continues and a future contact mission is a distinct possibility.

ZURCON

Zurcon was once a glittering jewel of the Imperium, existing beyond the coreward borders of the old Jericho Sector but owing fealty to the Lords of Verronus. In common with only a handful of other worlds in the Jericho Reach, Zurcon remained faithful to the Pax Imperium even after the last Imperial Navy warship abandoned the region to its fate and the Age of Shadow plunged all into anarchy and bloodshed. When the Tau discovered Zurcon, Water Caste contact specialists knew immediately that they would not easily usurp the population's faith in their distant, yet still present God-Emperor, and so they concocted an ingenious plan. Over the course of a decade, Tau agents infiltrated the ruling class of Zurcon and insinuated their own proxies into its structure. By way of a series of all but invisible assassinations, painless re-educations, and subtle coups, Tau agents took over the government without the populace ever knowing of it, or them.

The average citizen is entirely unaware of both the Tau and the Achilus Crusade, and ignorant of the fact that his toils are all directed towards a war against his own people, the Imperium. The world is entirely in thrall to the Tau Empire, yet only the very highest placed in its government know of the fact. The Water Caste fully intend to slowly usurp the Imperial Creed, which has endured on Zurcon for many thousands of years, yet they know they must do so slowly lest they people rise up in rebellion. To date, this program is only partly complete, and the Tau have gone to great lengths to ensure that the Imperium will not discover the world and upset their plans.

The situation on Zurcon has been greatly complicated by the arrival of Hive Fleet Dagon. A vanguard fleet has recently launched a series of probing attacks into the system's outer regions and a number of Tau-crewed waystations have been lost. To date, the Tau have yet to decide whether Zurcon should be evacuated or its population mustered to fight the Tyranids. Either way, the edifice of lies which the Tau have built around Zurcon must surely soon come crashing down.

THE MAL'CAOR SHI FLEET

"Control of space is the control of power. Control of power is the essence of the Greater Good."

—Kor'O Y'Eldi

Air Caste fleet operations within the Jericho Reach theatre of operations are the responsibility of the Mal'caor Shi Tau high command, a fleet command and control cadre headed by the celebrated Air Caste leader High Admiral Kor'o Y'eldi, a name translating roughly into 'the winged one'. Y'eldi is a veteran of many battles, though it is his greatest regret that he was born too late to participate in the battles of the Defence of the Damocles Gulf. Despite this, Y'eldi has made it his life's work to study accounts of the battles in an effort to learn every last doctrine and tactic utilised by the Imperial Navy, and to have a counter for them all. Y'eldi's first battles were against human pirates operating to the galactic north of the Tau Empire and he was highly successful in countering their depredations and expanding the borders of the Empire's domains into the region. Less than a decade later, Y'eldi was granted the rank of Kor'o and given responsibility for the Air Caste's portion of the mission to explore and exploit Jericho Reach, and he now faces the greatest challenge of his career in pitting his command skills against those of some of the most fearsome fleet commanders the Imperium has to offer.

High Admiral Y'eldi's fleet operates out of a deep space facility spinward of Krrk'tikit, a vast conglomeration of cold-core way stations and sidereal-locked void-wharfs known simply as Anchorage 12. This location fulfils many roles, including fleet headquarters, primary staging zone, logistics hub, and training centre, and it guards the rimward terminus of the Landfall-Black Reef passage. At any one time, thousands of star ships are to be found at anchor there, from the mighty Hero-class to the ubiquitous Defenders and Messengers. Anchorage 12 is equipped with substantial void-docking facilities and is able to repair and refit vessels damaged in battle against the Imperial Navy, and its spinward zones are utilised as training and proving grounds for new crews and vessels.

The mainstay star ship of the Mal'caor Shi Tau fleet is the Kir'qath, or "Hero" class, a vessel developed in the aftermath of the Defence of the Damocles Gulf as a match for the Imperium's Lunar-class Cruiser, the most common war ship of its type in the Imperial Navy. Under Y'eldi's leadership, the Hero class vessels of the Mal'caor have undergone a series of upgrades designed to increase their effectiveness in the battlegrounds of the Jericho Reach. Many of these improvements relate to the vessel's gravimetric handling capabilities, deemed essential given the unpredictable conditions in the vicinity of the Black Reef. Other upgrades have been made in an effort to gain a range of advantages against specific Imperial classes, and involve the balancing of defensive, offensive, speed and manoeuvrability factors.

The greatest challenge facing High Admiral Y'eldi is not any one class of Imperial war ship, but the sheer number of vessels the Imperium can bring to bear against his forces. It is Y'eldi's belief that the Imperium's approach to naval warfare relies more on quantity, firepower, and attrition than the quality and expertise of its vessels and its crews, yet this is complicated by the presence of the Space Marines and their fleets. Y'eldi refuses to expose his forces to attritional battles and schools his captains that a tactical withdrawal is far preferable to a pointless last stand, a doctrine that many of his foes, thankfully, do not adhere to. In truth, Y'eldi's task would be far more arduous were it not for the fact that the vast bulk of the Imperium's forces are engaged in the battles of the Acheros Salient and he knows that were they to redeploy to the Canis Salient, his position would be very different.

The arrival of Hive Fleet Dagon has brought with it a new range of challenges. Fortunately, the Tau are an adaptable species and Y'eldi has not been slow to react. Initial contacts with Tyranid bio-ships were disastrous for the Tau, whose vessels proved highly vulnerable to enemy boarding actions. Y'eldi's response was to ensure that only the fastest and most manoeuvrable of his vessels are committed to combat against the Tyranids, so that they can outrun the enemy and avoid becoming engaged in the type of close-ranged battle that is likely to result in the Tau ships being overrun by swarms of Tyranid creatures. In mitigation against the likelihood that some enemy are still likely to affect a boarding action, Y'eldi has ordered specially configured Fire Caste marine cadres stationed in all vessels, and these have proven successful in repelling many attempts to board their ships.



CONTACT WITH THE TAU

"The Imperium seeks first to destroy what they cannot accept. We must force them to accept that they cannot destroy us, and then the Greater Good shall prevail."

—Por'O Ssalo'yen, senior Water Caste Envoy

The Achilus Crusade was instigated to reclaim the Jericho Reach from the claws of anarchy and alien domination, and until the arrival of Hive Fleet Dagon, the Tau Empire represented the single largest enemy presence in the region. The initial hopes of driving the Tau back across the void towards their home region soon faded however, and with the arrival of the Tyranids and the resurgence of Chaos, the collectivist xenos have become something of a lesser priority in the eyes of Lord Militant Tetrarchus.

The Crusade's attitude towards the Tau has shifted since the ascension of Lord Tetrarchus, and furthermore it varies at different levels. At the lowest level, the civilian populations of the worlds in the Canis Salient are taught to be eternally vigilant for enemy infiltration, though the xenos are rarely named and no real details are ever given. The common troopers of the Imperial Guard know more of course, for they must face the Tau in battle, but they are taught only to hate their foe and the commissariat goes to great lengths to ensure that nothing of the aliens' aberrant collectivist doctrines taints the minds of the crusading warriors.

Higher up the chain of command, senior officers serving on the general staff and supporting echelons may have more of an idea of just where the Tau sit in the bigger picture. Many of these have come to believe that the Tyranids represent a far greater threat than the Tau, and harbour notions of diverting their forces to face the Hive Fleet. Even higher up the chain, some of the most senior leaders of the Achilus Crusade now believe that some form of contact must be made with the Tau in order to bring about an armistice. Some even dare believe that the Imperium and the Tau should cooperate against the Tyranids, at a strategic level at least.

The Crusade is afflicted with a political dichotomy however, for Lord Commander Ebongrave is so manically paranoid about the threat represented by the Tau Empire's philosophy that he will brook no talk of contact or cooperation with them at all. Indeed, since his ascension to Salient commander, Ebongrave has executed several dozen highly ranked generals and senior advisors who dared raise the subject with him. Since then, he has ordered a number of purges of his general staff, ensuring that any who harbour such beliefs are rooted out, exposed, made to renounce the error of their ways and then executed as an example to all others.

While Lord Commander Ebongrave believes that total control of the planets he has conquered is the only way of holding onto them against an utterly insidious threat, Lord Militant Tetrarchus and his closest advisors are slowly coming around to a different point of view. With the slow-dawning realisation that Hive Fleet Dagon might represent an existential threat to the entire Jericho Reach, and potentially the larger Imperium if it reached the Well of Night, Tetrarchus has instigated a series of highly secret contact protocols with the Tau. Entirely unbeknown to Lord Commander Ebongrave,

TETRARCHUS' GAMBIT

Lord Tetrarchus' contacts with the Tau might at first appear to fall foul of the general proscription against contact with xenos species. Yet in truth, the highest peers of the Imperium are fully aware that laws that apply to the uneducated masses and to their own subordinates mean nothing to them. The average Imperial Guardsman might be indoctrinated to hate the pernicious Eldar for example, while the Imperium has in fact fought alongside these enigmatic aliens on several thousand occasions. Men such as Tetrarchus exist at a level far above the common bulk of Humanity, and they are at once blessed and cursed with the powers to do what must be done in the battle for survival.

While Tetrarchus and his ilk are possessed of nigh limitless power, they are nonetheless subject to the often brutal laws that govern life in the highest echelons of the Imperium's galaxy-spanning institutions. If Tetrarchus is victorious, how he achieved his victories will never matter. If he is not, then the manner of his command will be examined in minute detail, often by those who have a vested interest in finding fault in his actions.

Tetrarchus and the Tau have been in contact for some time via a network of diplomats and proxies, often right under Ebongrave's nose and always without his knowledge.

To date, contact between the Crusade's high command and the Tau leadership has been low key and deniable, and has only been carried out when no other course of action has been possible. Tetrarchus does not actually want to converse with these aliens, but he is a gifted and realistic enough man to recognise that if he does not then the entire Reach may eventually be lost. This truth has yet to dawn upon Lord Commander Ebongrave of course, and it appears likely that the commander of the Canis Salient may never be able to accept the necessity of such contact protocols.

Given that the Tau are concentrated within the area of operations that falls under the Canis Salient, any contact between Tetrarchus' envoys and those of the Tau must be kept utterly secret lest the paranoid Lord Commander Ebongrave discover it. Tetrarchus knows that should this ever happen, the entire enterprise will be undone and he will be forced to address the question of whether Ebongrave should continue as Salient commander. Though paranoid and growing increasingly unstable with every passing month, Ebongrave is nonetheless a brilliant commander. In addition, Tetrarchus must guard against division within the Crusade's command, which could mature into overt confrontation if Ebongrave was to be relieved of command. Some of Tetrarchus' closest advisors counsel that the Salient commander might attempt some form of coup to usurp Tetrarchus' position if his contact with the Tau were discovered. Some have whispered that should it become necessary, Ebongrave should be bestowed the 'honour' of a major Warrant of Trade and commissioned by the High Lords of Terra themselves to take his war against the Tau beyond the Reach and into the outer darkness of the void, leaving Tetrarchus free to prosecute the war against

the Tyranids without an unstable rival to consider. So far Tetrarchus has not seriously considered this idea, but neither has he dismissed it.

To date, the Human-Tau contact protocols have been instigated on several dozen lesser occasions and a handful of major ones. It is common for the contact missions to be accompanied by a Deathwatch Kill-team, the Battle-Brothers' very presence acting as a message to the Tau regarding the Imperium's military capacity. But the Deathwatch are not present merely as a form of propaganda—if and when things go awry, the Battle-Brothers are responsible for extricating the Imperium's envoys and, if ordered, delivering a demonstration of the Imperium's superior firepower. There follows a brief description of several of the more important contact missions.

CONTACT "ALEPH"

The first formal contact between the Crusade's high command and the leadership of the Velk'Han Sept occurred soon after the arrival of Hive Fleet Dagon in the Reach, and it was not instigated by either party, but by a highly ranked member of the Inquisition. The Inquisitor in question arrived at Tetrarchus' head quarters and demanded a closed session with the Lord Militant, having journeyed from the coreward region of the Jericho Reach. This individual refused even to give his name, though witnesses surmised he belonged to the Ordo Xenos. What transpired during the meeting with Lord Militant Tetrarchus was not recorded, and the session is said to have lasted an entire night. By morning, Tetrarchus had been convinced of the need to establish some form of contact with the Tau, as if he had been granted some baleful foretelling of an apocalyptic doom for the Jericho Reach that would ensue if he did not do so. The Inquisitor and his cadre set about facilitating the first contact mission, which became known as 'Contact Aleph'. The lead envoy in this group was one of Tetrarchus' most experienced and trusted servants, Plenipotentiary-Designate Urwin Sire of the Adeptus Munitorum.

Having assembled his group of highly experienced envoys, the Inquisitor set out, but not initially for the Canis Salient. Instead, his vessel laid over at Watch Station Resulus, where a Deathwatch Kill-team boarded. Adept Sire was only fully briefed on the nature of the mission once the vessel was underway again, and by the time it reached a nameless and lifeless system midway between the unclaimed world of Melancholia and the Tau-held Zurcon, he was entirely committed to the enterprise. Sire, it transpired, had been granted some portion of the fateful portent the Inquisitor had shown to Lord Militant Tetrarchus, and just like the Warmaster had been convinced of the need to establish contact with the Tau.

Three days later, Sire's group met with their Tau opposite numbers. The Inquisitor did not participate directly in the mission, and neither did the Tau's leader, an Ethereal who, just like him, remained distant and worked through intermediaries. The Deathwatch Kill-team acted as Sire's honour guard, and the Tau's Water Caste envoy was likewise attended by a group of warriors arrayed in a model of personal battlesuit that has only ever been observed during such missions, leading the Ordo Xenos to conclude that the class exists purely to fulfil some specialised role related to the mission type.

Contact Aleph lasted for three days, and consisted of more than a dozen separate meetings. Sire's main goal was to establish a contact protocol on behalf of the Achilus Crusade high command, a line of communication by which contact could be established as and when it became necessary. Despite the seeming incongruity of two warring belligerents seeking to formalise such a means of communication, both sides recognised the far greater potential threat posed by the appearance of Hive Fleet Dagon, and the seeds of further, if highly limited, contact, were sown.

Against expectations, Contact Aleph passed without blood being shed by either side. Ironically however, Plenipotentiary-Designate Sire had cause to be grateful for the presence of his Deathwatch honour guard later on, during the return voyage to Resgulas. During a routine Warp alignment manoeuvre, the Deathwatch Kill-team's Librarian detected the taint of a psionic, and discovered that the vessel was being tracked by another party. The Kill-team's leader engineered an ambush of the unknown pursuer, and two light years coreward of Tabius Rasa sprung his trap.

The pursuers turned out to be a small cadre of Ebongrave's elite household guard, drawn from the elite of the 14th Mortressan Highlanders, led by a command group of hired killers totally loyal to their commander. The Deathwatch enacted a boarding action, the six Battle-Brothers systematically clearing the small vessel of its defenders until only the command crew remained. The battle that ensued was fast and bloody, and at its end only a handful of Mortressans and their leaders remained and one Battle-Brother was slain. The survivors were captured, and taken back to Watch Station Resgulas, where they were interred. The Inquisitor ordered the entire incident struck from the records and the vessel scuppered so that Lord Commander Ebongrave would never know of its fate.

Despite the conflict between rival Imperial factions, Contact 'Aleph' had achieved its goals and the first formalised links were established between the Crusade's high command and the Tau. The protocols agreed would ensure that, in extremis, contact could be made between the Imperium and the Tau, ready for the day when the two sides might have to cooperate against a far greater threat.

Tau Diplomacy

Certain commanders amongst the Tau forces of the Velk'Han Sept are amenable to diplomatic contact with the Imperium. Among these leaders are Commander Flamewing, a celebrated Fire Caste leader who is apt to meet with a Deathwatch Kill-team on a "warrior-to-warrior" basis. Flamewing believes that the Tyranid threat of Hive Fleet Dagon is far greater than any petty conflict with the Imperium, and is keen to make a subtle alliance towards securing any setback for the hive fleet (for more information about Commander Flamewing, see pages 13-15 in **MARK OF THE XENOS**). Another such leader is Aun'la Kal'eth, a low-ranking member of the Ethereal Caste. Aun'la Kal'eth has sent a number of Water Caste envoys to a select number of Imperial commanders in the Achilus Crusade, notably ones outside Lord Ebongrave's circle of advisors. Inquisitor Hezika Carmillus, the Inquisitor of the Chamber at Watch Fortress Erioch, has met with one of these envoys, although the outcome of the discussions has not yet become apparent.

THE BEKRIN 14 MISSION

Four years after Contact 'Aleph', Tetrarchus was faced with enacting another contact protocol with the Tau. In this particular instance, an Imperial Navy relief fleet was inbound for the Shrine World of Bekrin when it was intercepted and attacked by a substantial Tau fleet. Though the Imperial force fought its way clear of the ambush, its mission to Bekrin was compromised and a Tyranid force was able to establish a foothold on the outermost planet of the system. Tetrarchus initiated contact protocols in an effort to persuade the Tau to allow a second naval force to access the planet and deliver a force to contest the Tyranids' foothold before it could become entrenched. The attack was to be spearheaded by a composite company of Space Marines drawn from several Chapters, the very spear-tip of which was to be provided by the Deathwatch. With so much riding on the assault, Tetrarchus knew that it had to get through and so he dispatched Plenipotentiary-Designate Urwin Sire to negotiate a temporary armistice in the interests of opposing a threat to both the Imperial and the Tau.

With the contact protocols established during Contact 'Aleph', the mission was successful and the Tau agreed to allow the naval force unmolested access to Bekrin 14. Once again however, Lord Commander Ebongrave's paranoid scheming came to the fore, but this time, with devastating effect.

Somehow, and despite every effort to the contrary, Lord Commander Ebongrave's agents discovered something of the contact. As the Imperial Navy moved through the Tau blockade around Bekrin 14 they passed within long range of a Tau cruiser. An order, the source of which has never been identified, was passed to the gunnery crews, who followed the instruction to open fire upon the Tau vessel. The duel that followed was brief but bloody, and spelled the doom of three Imperial Navy vessels and inflicted such damage on a strike cruiser of the Crimson Fists Chapter that it only barely escaped intact. Tragically, the Deathwatch Kill-team that was to perform the lightning strike against the Tyranids' hive nodes on the surface of Bekrin 14 was aboard one of the navy vessels and was wiped out to a man when the war ship's reactor collapsed with the loss of all crew.

In the aftermath of this tragedy it was feared that the Human-Tau contact protocols would no longer be possible, but on Tetrarchus' orders Urwin Sire instigated another meeting with the envoys of the Tau, once again attended by a Deathwatch honour guard. Sire feared that the Battle-Brothers might seek some vengeance against the Tau for the loss of their brethren, but the members of the Kill-team assured him that this would not be the case. The subsequent contact mission was a success, and Sire was able to convince the Tau that rogue elements were responsible for the conflict. Furthermore, the Tau were able to provide the mission with intercepted vox-casts that identified the presence of a spy in service to Lord Commander Ebongrave within the Imperial Navy fleet. The Deathwatch acted on this intelligence immediately, and once more, the shadowy agents of Lord Commander Ebongrave were brought to justice, though this time, none of them survived.

TAU TECHNOLOGY AND THE MECHANICUS

To many of the Tech-Adepts of Mars, the advanced technology of the Tau is particularly abhorrent for its use of true thinking machines—the intelligences that drive Tau drones and other devices. Such is considered tech-heresy by the orthodox Priesthood of the Machine Cult, and thus it is particularly difficult for Tech-Priests such as these to work upon or interface with Tau technology to any degree. Some of the more maverick Explorators have learned to overcome or work around these issues. The Techmarines of the Adeptus Astartes consider dealing directly with Tau machine-intelligences to be more akin to foes that they must gird themselves to do battle, albeit upon a battlefield of data and programming rather than bolt shells and flame.

EFFECTS

Tech-Priests of the Adeptus Mechanicus (see **DARK HERESY**) suffer a -20 penalty for Tech-Use Tests involving Tau machine-intelligences. This penalty is eliminated if the Tech-Priest possesses the Forbidden Lore (Tech) Skill. Explorators (see **ROGUE TRADER**) suffer a -10 penalty instead, and likewise may ignore the penalty if they possess Forbidden Lore (Tech). Techmarines do not suffer any penalties. At the GM's discretion, Tech-Priests, Explorators, Techmarines, or any other devotee to the Machine Cult suffer 1 Insanity Point for every Degree of Failure on a failed Tech-Use Test when working directly with a Tau machine-intelligence.

With this second instance of interference by Lord Commander Ebongrave's agents with Tetrarchus' policy of limited contact with the Tau, the Lord Militant was advised by his counsellors to exclude his subordinate from his inner circle. Tetrarchus was forced to accede, and although he has no conclusive evidence that Ebongrave is actively working against him, he is being pulled inexorably into a shadow war between rival elements within the Crusade's highest echelons. With the threat of Hive Fleet Dagon growing greater every day, such a conflict cannot be allowed to escalate to such a degree that it degrades the strategic power of the entire Crusade.

THE ANDRONICUS PERFIDY

The third time the contact protocols were initiated was a year ago, when Watch Station Andronicus detected via a sub-aetheric augur reading that a substantial Tyranid force was moving through the outer reaches of the system on a heading that would take it towards a known Tau outpost. The Chamber of Vigilance debated the matter, and the Inquisitor of the Chamber posited the view that Tetrarchus should be consulted so that he could warn the Tau of the Tyranids' presence. Though the debate lasted long into the night, the Deathwatch ultimately saw the wisdom in allowing a lesser enemy to engage a stronger one, and the intelligence was transmitted to Tetrarchus.

Keeping in mind the fact that two previous contact missions had been compromised by the actions of rival elements with the Crusade's high command, every possible effort was made to ensure that the same thing did not happen again. The transmission was made via the Inquisition's most trusted Astropaths, and received under cipher only by others in the service of their order. The message was sent under a seal that only Tetrarchus himself could unlock, and when he read its contents the Lord Militant agreed that the Tau should be warned of the approaching threat. Tetrarchus agreed with the Chamber's logic that the Tau were the lesser of the two enemies in this instance, and warning them of the peril would ultimately serve the Imperium's greater agenda.

Once again, Plenipotentiary-Designate Urwin Sire was dispatched to deliver the message to the Tau, and he met his opposite number, a senior Water Caste envoy, at a deep space rendezvous coreward of Oertha. On this occasion, the Tau appeared confident enough to come aboard the Imperial vessel, a sure sign, Urwin believed, that some degree of trust and understanding was developing between the two factions. It was a great surprise then when the Water Caste envoy's honour guard reacted with extreme aggression the instant they laid eyes upon one particular member of Sire's own guard, a Deathwatch Battle-Brother and a "black shield." Violence exploded in the tight confines of Sire's audience chamber, resulting in the Tau envoy being slain in the crossfire and both groups of honour guards sustaining fatalities. It was at the climax of this bitter battle that the Imperium discovered the true capabilities of the battle suits worn by the Tau envoy's guards. The suits, it transpired, each contained a staggering array of concealed weaponry, and were configured for operating in the void. The Tau guards fought through the Imperial lines and broke free by blasting their way through the bulkhead using high-yield fusion charges, fleeing through the breach towards their own vessel. Urwin Sire himself was wounded in the exchange of fire, but was able to utilise concealed weapons of his own, holding an attacker at bay using a digital flamer long enough for a Deathwatch Battle-Brother to intervene and fight off his attacker.

The incident left the status of the Human-Tau contact protocols uncertain, although Tetrarchus has yet to declare them defunct. A thorough Inquisitorial investigation determined that on this occasion Lord Commander Ebongrave's agents were not responsible. The Ordo Xenos sealed all further records relating to the Battle-Brother whose presence appeared to precipitate the Tau's violent reaction, but details of the capabilities of the Tau honour guards' suits have been circulated amongst high Salient level commands. To date, no such suits have been observed in the field.

POR'O VOLESCUR: THE LUCENT EMISSARY

A senior member of the Water Caste, Por'O Volescur is known to have been highly successful in negotiating treaties with human populations in the regions surrounding the Black Reef. Imperial authorities believe that the so-called 'Lucent Emissary' has gained a specific expertise dealing with humans. This specialisation may date from his studying under the celebrated envoy known as 'Aura', who was instrumental in many of the Tau Empire's dealings with humans before, during and in the aftermath of the Damocles Gulf Crusade. Though Aura has since disappeared from or retired from active service, those who served beneath him appear to have carried forward many of the lessons he learned from dealing with outcast elements of the Imperium as well as its representatives.

The Lucent Emissary travels the area around the Black Reef in a small, but fast and highly stealthy vessel whose name translates as the 'Liberation'. He is attended by a Fire Warrior cadre configured for and specialising in marine and escort duties, and on several occasions this group has extricated him from the otherwise fatal confrontations.

Por'O Volescur is adept at forming ties with outlying human worlds and at exploiting any misgivings such worlds might have about the encroachment of the Achilus Crusade. He has convinced dozens of planetary leaders that the arrival of the Imperium in their orbital sphere can only bring death and destruction, causing such worlds to throw in their lot with the Tau Empire instead. Several of these planets have since ascended to become full members of the Empire and human troops raised from their populations serve alongside Tau Fire Warriors and other auxiliaries throughout the Reach and beyond.

Needless to say, the Imperium considers the Lucent Emissary a high priority target. The Deathwatch have come close to capturing him on several occasions, yet each time he has escaped thanks to the capabilities of his transport vessel and the dedication of his Fire Caste escort.

COMMANDER FLAMEWING

One of the most prominent leaders amongst the Fire Caste of the Velk'Han Sept is Shas'O Vior'la Suam Eldi, although his preferred title translates to "Commander Flamewing." This relatively young Shas'O has earned a great deal of frontline combat experience, particularly against the outlying tendrils of Hive Fleet Dagon.

More than most Tau Commanders, Flamewing is willing to work alongside the Imperium forces of the Crusade towards the destruction of the Tyranid Menace. Flamewing strongly believes that the hive fleet is far more dangerous to the Greater Good than the presence of the humans, and he has made some tenuous alliances towards this end with a few like-minded Inquisitors of the Ordo Xenos... including Inquisitor Adrielle Quist.

RELATIONS WITH THE TAU

"Give me Tyranids, Orks or heretics; simple hateful foes that will face me with a scream on their lips and bloodlust in their eyes. These blue-skinned devils are just far too reasonable for their own good."

—Edens Haltorenium, Former Planetary Governor of Braanos V

The Tau are an insidious and persuasive threat to the Imperium, spreading their ideology and aggressive imperialism under the guise of an open hand and invitation of treaty. Unlike many of the Imperium's other foes, such as the Tyranids or the Orks which seem to exist only for bloodshed and war, the Tau are not merely a force of discord and destruction. Rather, the Tau are calculating, scheming, and (worst of all) good natured about their conquests. The Tau turn worlds against the God-Emperor not with the corrupting nature of the Warp or by completely destroying them, but rather by offering their populace a chance at a better existence. Those humans that turn to an allegiance with the Tau do so not because they have been twisted by daemons or cowed with fear of reprisals and death if they do not, but rather because the skilled diplomats and emissaries of the Tau Water Castes have shown them that they can have a better life under the rule of the Greater Good.

Still a minor empire in terms of the galaxy and tiny by comparison with the sprawling breadth of the Imperium (which technically counts all worlds within the galaxy the rightful domain of man) the Tau Empire has nevertheless made great advances into Imperial space in recent years, spreading at a rapid rate from a handful of worlds to a coalition of dozens of races all gathered together under the strong leadership of the Tau themselves. Not all of these conquests have been military either (though the armies of the Tau have proven themselves time and again against all manner of foes) and the greatest weapon in the Tau armoury seems to be their ability to reason and bargain with their enemies. Humans especially have fallen prey to their aggressive diplomacy time and time again, man's own fractious nature costing the Imperium more than one world. For their part, the Tau see themselves as a great benevolent force uniting the galaxy under the banner of righteousness and light, throwing back the darkness and oppression of ancient regimes and leading the way to a better galactic order. Where this drive comes from and why the Tau function as they do in a galaxy largely populated by malevolent and extremely violent aliens has been a subject of speculation for Imperium scholars ever since the Tau were first encountered. Were the Tau weaker, like many other minor alien empires, then perhaps the Imperium might have snuffed them out without dwelling overly on their psychology. However, as it stands, the Tau have risen to become a power in their own right and so the Imperium has been forced to take a longer view as to their eventual destruction.



A HISTORY OF CONFLICT

Ever since the Imperium first encountered the Tau there has been war between the two races. As aliens, the right of the Tau to coexist with the Imperium was never considered an option. Their very presence, like that of all the xenos empires within the galaxy was seen as an affront to the divine right of the God-Emperor and the right of the Imperium to exist. To date the largest and most costly encounter with the Tau has taken place in the Damocles Gulf against the Dal'yth Sept. It was the first real attempt by the Imperium to wipe out the Tau and the moment when Imperial commanders realised that what they faced was no ordinary threat (a costly mistake that was paid in the blood of countless Imperial Guardsmen and numerous naval vessels). While tiny when compared to the vast armies of the Imperium, the Tau possess amazingly advanced military technology and innovative weaponry unrestricted by the dogma or superstition of the Adeptus Mechanicus. Combined with good leadership and a willingness to fight, the Tau have proven a serious obstacle for the Imperium to overcome and more than a match for its forces. In the decades since that time, the Tau menace has spread all along the Eastern Fringe and in numerous sectors the Imperium finds itself clashing with the Tau Empire and its alien allies.

The Jericho Reach now counts itself among these hot spots, another section of the frontline against the ever encroaching borders of the Tau. Throughout the Canis Salient, the Tau have taken root and possess a strong powerbase of numerous worlds from which they are steadily spreading deeper into the sector. Against their incursions, Lord Commander Ebongrave directs the troops of the Crusade in their efforts to break the Tau's hold on the sector, all the while fighting off their advances and protecting his flanks against the Imperium's other foes, namely the insidious forces of Chaos and the unwelcome arrival of the Tyranids. Unlike his attitude towards these two latter foes, however, Ebongrave has fostered a special hatred for the Tau, and what he sees as their scheming ways. While he can face the heretics of the Reach or the murderous xenos hordes of Hive Fleet Dagon with open warfare and uncomplicated conflict, the Tau continue to confound him in their attempts to 'integrate' worlds into their empire and their overtures of peace amidst the carnage of total war. Though Ebongrave has never seriously considered any of the Tau diplomatic advances, he lives in fear of the effect they have on the leaders under his command and the worlds under his protection. More than once he has felt worlds of the Salient slipping through his fingers even as he tightens his grasp, populations rejecting the harsh rule of the Imperium for the promise of prosperity and peace offered by the Tau. The Quarantined Worlds (see page 352 in the **DEATHWATCH** Rulebook) are a good example of Ebongrave's reaction to the Tau and the result of his paranoia regarding their ability to subvert human populations.

These kinds of "grey areas" typify the Imperium's relationship with the Tau. While ostensibly any human or world which gives itself over to the Tau is considered to have turned traitor on the God-Emperor, and therefore considered heretical, it is not as clear cut as those which succumb to the Ruinous Powers or fall under the thrall of other alien masters.

TAU DIPLOMACY ADVENTURE SEEDS

A Grim Beacon: Astronomica Relay Substation 77-Epsilon is a tiny outpost defended by a small Imperial Guard garrison force. Its size and position belie the importance of the installation. A dozen worlds require it to safely communicate with the main Imperial forces.

Hidden as it is in the burnt spires of a desert moon it is unlikely that the Tau forces nearby would ever find it. However, the Psychic communication emanating from within the base have drawn the attentions of the Hive fleet. Even worse, there are no Crusade forces within range to reach the endangered station in time. With a splinter of the Tyranid forces descending on the planet, it falls to the Kill-Team to convince the Tau that it is in their best interests to join forces with the Deathwatch to fend off the Tyranid forces. The Tau have their own agenda, of course... evacuating a number of Ethereals from the region during the height of the battle.

False Rescue: A group of Tau Water Caste merchants have been abducted, along with their Messenger-class escort ship, by the Ork Big Mek Wurrzog (for more information about Big Mek Wurrzog, see page 64 in **MARK OF THE XENOS**). Inquisitor Carmillus informs the Kill-team that one of these Water Caste Tau possesses a specific message meant for her ears alone, and dispatches the Deathwatch to rescue this particular envoy from the clutches of his Ork captors. The Kill-team must track down the wily Wurrzog's base amongst a series of booby-trapped asteroids in the Black Reef, find a way through the defences and ork warbands of the region, and rescue the Water Caste Tau before the Orks become bored with their captives.

Once the first part of this mission is successful, Inquisitor Carmillus presents her plans for the Water Caste envoy; to give him a piece of select misinformation that will guide the Tau forces away from a vulnerable Ordo Xenos installation in the Canis Salient. However, this misinformation will result in a massive assault on a weak point for the Crusade forces. The Kill-team must choose their path carefully, for to follow the Inquisitor's orders to the letter will result in a setback for Battle-brothers of many Chapters.

This is in part because the Tau allow all aliens under their control a certain degree of autonomy and do not challenge the culture of a world which enters their empire, so long as it embraces the Greater Good and serves the Tau faithfully. More than one Imperial commander has had doubts about attacking such worlds, seemingly functioning human planets with seemingly untainted humans living on it. Some Imperial tacticians have compared this to the seditious effects and heretical beliefs of the servants of the Dark Gods, though perhaps even more insidious. They note that it is uniquely difficult to fight a foe who assaults with such reason and goodwill; one hand holding the sword of conflict and one hand extended ready to offer the promise of peace.

Of course many of the Imperium's foes are shared by the Tau (Tyranids and Orks for instance both make little distinction between the races they will assault) and during the years of conflict between the Tau and the Imperium within the Jericho Reach, the Tau have also been beset by other perils to their dominance. The Tyranids in particular have torn a hole in their empire, smashing into the Eastern Fringe not long after the Tau themselves had risen to province as a galactic power. While much of the Tyranid presence within the Jericho Reach is limited to the Orpheus Salient, the Tau know all too well how the hive fleets can surprise the unwary, arriving in unexpected and supposedly 'safe' sectors. The heretical forces of the Stigmartus have also clashed with the Tau on more than one occasion, though they see them as a secondary threat compared to the looming juggernaut which is the Imperium. In both cases, the Tau have openly offered alliance with Imperium forces facing these threats as they encroach on the worlds of the Canis Salient. However, more often than not, the lash of Lord Commander Ebongrave or the inbred hatred of xenos most humans possess has thwarted such temporary alliances and condemned thousands to death lest they become traitors to the God-Emperor. This is not universally the case of course, and during the long years of the Crusade, both individuals and organisations have sided with the Tau for mutual gain or protection—though there has always been a price to pay.

TAU GUNBOAT DIPLOMACY

Part of the Tau's ability to subvert human and alien worlds can be attributed to the exceptional skills of their Water Caste (Emissaries and Diplomats), however this is not the only tool the Tau use when trying to win over a new world or race. Just like the Imperium, the Tau enforce their rule through the presence of their armies and navies, and the spectre of their warships is never far from the minds of those they enter into 'negotiations' with. Often they will keep ships in low orbit or garrison troops in a world's capital under the pretence of protecting the local population, all the while intimidating local leaders into submission. Unlike the Imperium, however, the Tau seldom resort to force and brutality when arriving on a new world, respecting local customs and allowing those in power to remain so, unless they would endanger the Tau themselves. This is a difference which many Imperial commanders see as a weakness (most human generals more than ready to teach a new world the glory of the God-Emperor by spilling its blood), however its effectiveness cannot be denied and more often than not such worlds gladly welcome the Greater Good and accept the yoke of the Tau without so much as a struggle.

TRUCES AND TRAITORS

It has been over forty years since the Achilus Crusade crashed into the Jericho Reach, igniting a sector wide war, and in that time the Imperium has suffered numerous successes and failures in its efforts to subdue the native worlds. None are quite as humiliating for Imperial commanders as those against the Tau where their own officers and men willingly embrace the alien ideas of this foreign empire and turn to oppose their own brothers on the battlefield. While the reasons for these alliances or wholesale defections are numerous, the end result is the same and, in the eyes of the Imperium, another damning step toward corruption by a xenos species which should have been wiped from existence thousands of years ago.

One of the earliest instances of human forces turning traitor to join with the Tau within the Reach was during the first precarious years of the Crusade, in the worlds outlying the Pelegius system. Skirting the far edge of the Hadex Anomaly and the core worlds of the sector, the 145th Scintillan Battle Group, led by Captain Kynassis and the Dauntless Light Cruiser *Imperious Fortis*, entered the Pelegius system on orders to conduct a survey of its worlds and defences. Ill fortune however saw them chance upon a Tau waystation and a significant Tau fleet in transit to investigate the recent Imperial incursions. The result was a short but bloody battle in which the majority of the Scintillan Battle Group (outnumbered and outgunned) was destroyed. Kynassis was then given the choice to save his life and spare the rest of his men and vessels if he surrendered. What kind of deal the captain made is unknown, however it was not long after word of the encounter had reached the Lord Militant that reports of Imperial escorts supporting Tau attacks came to light. The Inquisition issued an assassination edict against Kynassis and all who served with him. To date however the captain and the *Imperious Fortis* remain unaccounted for, living on to fuel secret muttering among conscripts and ratings as to what life might be like within the Tau Empire.

More than once, Tau and humans have sided with each other for brief alliances against great threats, such as during the first stages of the invasion of Zurcon. Initially a Tau held world, close to their powerbase on the far side of the Black Reef, Zurcon became a hotly contested battleground as the Imperium advanced deeper into the Jericho Reach. It was during this protracted skirmishing that the first vanguard of Hive Fleet Dagon made its appearance, attacking both Imperial and Tau vessels and their supply lines with little regard for the fact they seemed to be fighting each other. Facing two foes, the Imperium decided to pull back to establish a safer front, a task in which, surprisingly, the Tau aided them. While no official treaty for this time ever existed, it did see several battlefield alliances between humans and Tau. Examples of this include in the Hollowing Deeps on the edge of the Stygian Break, where a single Hero-class Tau cruiser defended an Imperial colony transport flotilla against a swarm of Kraken, or on the airless moons of Vartesh where Fire Warriors held the line against a Genestealer infestation while the humans sealed the world's wealth in great core vaults for future generations. Imperial leaders, Lord Commander Ebongrave especially, scoff at such stories and

pass them off as pathetic Tau propaganda. Regardless of the truth, they have changed the perception of some amongst the Crusade and made them question their will to fight the Tau, considering the threat of greater, more dangerous foes.

ALLIED WORLDS

When a world joins the Tau Empire it does not so much fall as it accepts a new master. A world conquered by the Imperium is usually punished for its transgressions against the God-Emperor. Even should it surrender willingly, it will be subjected to religious purges, Inquisitorial investigation, and having a good sized portion of its population conscripted into the Imperial Guard for off-world assignment, never to see their family or cities again. Not so for most of the worlds which side with the Tau Empire, which are instead welcomed into a collective of alien races, given aid and technology, and 'invited' to support the Tau Empire's efforts to unify their sector with men and materials. Of course such worlds are also subjected to the subtle indoctrination into the Greater Good, a process just as persuasive as the imposition of the Imperial Creed, though usually considerably less bloody. The world is then presented by the Tau to others of its race as an example of what membership within their empire can offer and the promise of peace and prosperity in a galaxy torn asunder by war and bloodshed.

Within the Jericho Reach, the world of Iphingenia is the Tau's greatest success at integrating humanity into their empire and stands as an example and a reminder to the Imperium of just how dangerous Tau diplomacy and subversion can be. Though a relatively primitive world, and therefore easier for an advanced race such as the Tau to control, Iphingenia does enjoy a degree of harmony and prosperity since the arrival of their alien masters. While Iphingenia's conversion has encouraged some humans to side with the Tau, the most important impact has been on the Water Caste diplomats of the Tau, which now use the world and its 're-education' facilities to hone their skills with humans and work toward bringing more human worlds into the empire.

Elusus Minor is another example of a human world ruled by the Tau, which lies not far coreward of the Tyrandid beset world of Zurcon. Originally a Mechanicus research facility, Elusus Minor is little more than a collection of vast asteroids orbiting an ancient red dwarf star. After the Fall and the onset of the Age of Shadow, the outpost was largely overlooked by the heretical forces which rampaged across the Reach and left to its own devices. The influence of the Mechanicus gradually faded as the outpost's Magos perished and its small human population swelled. By the time the Tau moved into the sector, the people of Elusus Minor had become an independent manufacturing facility and a nest of what the Imperium deems 'Tech Heresy'. Capitalising on the mechanical skills of the people of Elusus Minor, the Tau, which has no issue with their thirst for experimentation or interest in 'progress' added them to the empire and began using their facilities as a forward arms factory. The Inquisition has since learned of the existence of Elusus Minor and sees it as a blight upon humanity, pushing for the Navy to destroy it and its heretical human population. However, to date it still lies too far beyond the frontline of the Crusade and is too well protected by the Tau to ensure the success of any attack.

Not all human worlds allied or sympathetic to the Tau have enjoyed such harmony as Iphingenia or Elusus Minor, especially those still nominally under the control of the Imperium or close enough to the edge of the Crusade to be a target for their forces. The most pronounced examples of this are Argoth, Kaggeran and Rheelas—more commonly known as the Quarantined Worlds. Initially they were integrated into the Imperium by the advancing Crusade, and each of the three worlds promised to greatly strengthen the Lord Militant's hold within the Jericho Reach. Unfortunately for Lord Tetrarchus, he did not anticipate the paranoia and heavy handedness of Lord Commander Ebongrave. Early on it was discovered that each of the worlds had been visited by the Tau at some time in the past and tentative diplomatic relations established. The rain-swept agri world of Kaggeran in particular had fostered a strong relationship with the Tau, exchanging diplomats with the Velk'Han Sept and even selling the Tau food stuffs prior to the return of the Crusade. Lord Commander Ebongrave's reaction to this sedition (real and imagined) was to quarantine the worlds completely ensuring no contact with the alien empire would be possible. The result has been a rapid decline into ruin for the three worlds, the trade-dependent hive world of Argoth most notably, as it relied heavily on material from Rheelas and food from Kaggeran for its massive population. It has also given rise to extremist cults and pushed the nominal governments of all three worlds further from Imperial control. Lord Militant Tetrarchus sees the quarantine as a vast and terrible waste of resources which could be fuelling his Crusade, however he is loath to confront Lord Commander Ebongrave on the matter, given the already weakened state of the Canis Salient, fearing the removal of its leader could spell disaster. Ironically Ebongrave's actions have actually given Tau Water Caste diplomats help in winning over some of the marginal human colonies bordering the Black Reef, worlds which have for centuries survived without the Imperium and can see only too clearly what kind of 'aid' it offers should they bow to its will.

HIGHLOCK FREEMEN

Even among the Gue'vesa, there are elite formations of men, skilled human warriors dedicated to the service of the Tau. Once such regiment is the Highlock Freeman—hardy men and women from the world Highlock IV, another abandoned Imperial colony resting on the edge of the Stygian Break which joined the Tau when their empire expanded into the Reach. Coming from a high gravity world of ice and snow, the Freeman are short and stocky, covered in hair and incredibly tough. Armed with bulky stubcannons and armoured in heavy plasteel mail, they are often used by the Tau as shock troops, smashing into enemy formations and breaking holes in their defences. There is a saying on Highlock, "live free or die fighting," a maxim the Freeman seem to take to heart whenever unleashed into battle.

FOR THE GREATER GOOD

"Ours is the destiny of all races to find peace and harmony amongst the stars against the reckless aggression of ancient and fearful empires. We are the new life of the galaxy, a tiny sapling from which a mighty tree will grow, and we will not be denied our right to thrive!"

—Por'O Volessur, Tau Water Caste

For a human to fight on the side of the Tau inevitably means he will face his own kind and accept the mantle of traitor in the eyes of the Imperium. This has not stopped thousands from offering their men, materials and even their worlds to the Tau in the hopes of protection from a benevolent empire and freedom from the oppression of the Imperium. It was just this pattern that first emerged during humanity's first encounters with the Tau and in turn gave rise to the Farsight Enclaves, which ultimately sparked the brutal Imperial response within the Damocles Gulf. It is a trend which has been repeated more than once in the years since that time and a tactic the Tau have found to be effective as they slowly try to erode the Imperium's borders. Against the vast and unquenchable military might of the Imperium, these Gue'la axillaries are also vital in the kind of war of attrition the Imperium favours.

Commonly known as Gue'vesa within the Tau military structure, humans, like all aliens of the Tau Empire, are organised into cadres of auxiliary troops, sometimes armed with Tau technology but as often as not equipped with weapons of local manufacture (or those they brought with them when they turned traitor). While the Gue'vesa will find a certain degree of acceptance within the Tau army, and certainly a respite from the brutality or callousness they might suffer under Imperial command, they are rarely used as anything more than support or garrison troops when facing the Imperium. Gue'vesa often hold positions behind the lines while pure Tau formations and their more favoured allies (such as the Kroot or Vespids) lead the assault. For many ex-Imperial Guardsmen this reduced responsibility is fine with them (especially if they have served a tour in the Greyhell Front). However, for others, it feels like an insult; especially those from more independent worlds which have been free from the Imperium for centuries or longer and who are eager to earn their place within the Tau Empire. The truth of the matter is that the Tau do not completely trust humans to reliably face their own kind, and were it not unavoidable they would use them solely against other aggressive alien forces such as Tyranids or Orks.

As it currently stands, the Tau have anywhere up to a million or so humans at the command of the Velk'Han Sept, largely deployed to Zurcon but also stationed at various minor worlds around the Black Reef. Millions more are counted among the local militia and planetary defence force regiments of Tau-controlled human worlds, though the Tau Fire Caste does not count these 'indigenous soldiers' as part of their

overall strength within the Canis Salient. It is also rumoured that the Tau enjoy the support of numerous human vessels, be they ex-Navy, pirate wolfpacks or even Rogue Traders (though Rogue Traders, being notoriously self-serving, tend only to work alongside the Tau when their own ambitions align with those of the aliens). However, such is the vastness of the Crusade's resources when compared to those of the Tau that these treacherous men and women are regarded as more of an affront to humanities' faith in the God-Emperor than a tangible military threat.

IMPERIAL DIPLOMACY AND TRADE

Despite the open conflict between the Imperium and the Tau Empire, a certain level of trade and diplomacy between the two species continues to exist. This is as true of the Tau presence in the Jericho Reach as it is in other places, and as much as commanders like Lord Commander Ebongrave would like to see it completely stamped out, it persists. Even in the midst of the Greyhell Front, Rogue Traders and merchant magnates move goods from the Tau Empire or ferry envoys from Imperial organisations to Tau worlds. It is the paradox of the Imperium that it officially denounces all alien species as the enemies of man, while men themselves are far less picky about their allies and trading partners if it means profit or protection.



THE DEATHWATCH

As a significant xenos threat, the Tau are ranked highly amongst the foes of the Deathwatch. However, the Deathwatch and many Inquisitors of the Ordo Xenos have opened diplomatic relations with the Tau in the past. It is a tenuous business at best, as all parties are aware of the open conflict between them and the fact that most Tau consider the hulking black-armoured Battle-Brothers as harbingers of death. Many members of the Inquisition however see merit in such dealings, a way to face this new alien threat head on and better understand its methods of warfare and tactical diplomacy that has cost the Imperium so many worlds. Inquisitors also enjoy the presence of the Deathwatch on such forays, the intimidating presence of a Battle-Brother often more eloquent than the most well worded threat. For their part, the Battle-Brothers of the Deathwatch have learnt to be just as wary of the Inquisitors they are tasked to protect on such missions as the aliens whose company they must tolerate. More than one such envoy mission has met with disaster as the secret agendas of the Inquisition force a Kill-team to fight its way free of a Tau-held world.



ROGUE TRADERS

Perhaps those most eager to deal with the Tau have been the Rogue Traders. Dangerous free thinkers and shameless entrepreneurs, they see new worlds and races with minds not clouded by ideals or indoctrinated hatred but rather shrewdly looking for profit. The first Rogue Traders to come to the Jericho Reach after the opening of the Warp Gate came looking for worlds to exploit and races to trade with. The Tau provided both, cunning Water Caste ambassadors seeing the potential in making alliances with the Rogue Trader dynasties of the Calixis Sector as they expanded into the Reach. Many of these dynasties had had dealings with alien empires before and thought little of exploiting a new race in their quest for profit. However, as they were to discover, the Tau are a different kind of xenos and a different kind of threat to the Imperium. Before they knew it, many Rogue Trader houses had become deeply dependent on the Tau Empire, snared in elaborate endeavours and enterprises engineered by the Tau themselves to win over human support. Among these, the great Fel and Vanderlin houses are counted as staunch allies of the Tau and sympathetic to their cause within the Jericho Reach, subverted from their more traditional Imperial loyalties by the vast wealth, trade agreements and treaties which the Tau can offer. Such is the involvement of

Rogue Traders in the affairs of the empire and the Tau preference for using these 'wayward' elements of the Imperium, that both the Ministorum and the Inquisition have begun to favour the use of Rogue Traders for gathering information and the placement of agents within Tau held space. As long as there is profit to be made, Rogue Traders will always walk the fine line between treachery and trade, and take opportunities wherever they find them.

INQUISITOR QUIST AND THE TAU

Of the Inquisitors of the Ordo Xenos who frequent the halls of Watch Fortress Erioch, none are more diligent or zealous than Adrielle Quist. A powerful and skilled telepath, Quist is careful to hide her fascination with alien technology, particularly the intriguing developments used by the Tau Velk'Han Sept.

Quist has directed a number of Deathwatch missions into and beyond the Black Reef, often including instructions to retrieve particular xenos artefacts of interest to her and certain Magos of the Adeptus Mechanicus.

However, the Inquisitor is also well-aware of her true duties to the Imperium, and many dire threats to the progress of the Crusade have been exposed and halted thanks to her efforts. She has been known to personally accompany a Deathwatch Kill-team from time to time, particularly if the current mission is important to her own interests or those of Inquisitor Carmillus, her nominal superior.

THE BLACK REEF

"The Warp is a child's play pen compared to that place; mark my words, you cross the Stygian Break and you had best be ready to die."

—Callat Glass, void-master of the *Mark of Perdition*

The Jericho Reach is littered with celestial perils from the Slinnar Deep Gulfs to the Hadex Anomaly, a combination of stellar debris and void-born chaos so common in the far galactic east. Among these wild zones stands the Black Reef, a briar patch of gravitational madness stretching across a dozen light years and effectively closing off an entire area of space. Located at the extreme edge of the Canis Salient on the coreward rim of the sector, it has for decades been a natural shield against the Crusade's advance, providing the Tau Empire with a solid edifice against attack. Bordered by the Tau worlds of Tsua'Malor, Krrk'tikit and Iphigenia, the Black Reef is practically impassable to void-faring ships, its gravity storms reaching into the Warp itself, fouling Warp routes and disturbing the Immaterium, forcing vessels to return to real space and face its brutal power. The Tau have made extensive use of this barrier to shield their worlds from assault and have created their defensive line to either side, confident that no Imperial battlegroup could hope to cross it alive.

The Black Reef is far more than a mere celestial hazard however, and over the years both the humans and the Tau have made attempts to determine its purpose and perhaps what lies at its core. It is known to both sides that it covers a number of ancient systems and perhaps hides the remains of some long lost civilisation, one that predates both the Tau and the Imperial presence in the sector. The laws of physics however break down as soon as a vessel enters the Reef and gravity loses all reason as it pulls, pushes and crushes areas of space seemingly at random. Entire worlds are flung across the void, torn away from their stars by these random forces and imperilling all in their path. Those few intrepid explorers that have penetrated deep into the Reef (and returned to pass on their findings) tell wild and conflicting tales of their experiences, though all seem to agree there is something hidden deep within its core, something big...

GRAVITY STORM

The Black Reef is a gravitational anomaly which follows none of the natural laws of the universe. Vessels crossing into the Reef, across what has become known as the Stygian Break, are immediately assailed by gravitic eddies and tides. These ripples across the void are practically impossible to detect or predict and any one can smash a ship to fragments. Even those vessels fortunate enough to avoid the worst of the gravity storm will likely be thrown wildly off course by the constant energy fluxes and shifting nature of the void. This problem is compounded by the fact that the gravity storm does not just affect ships crossing the Reef, but all celestial objects and bodies within it, making it virtually impossible to take an accurate bearing as planets, gas clouds and even the stars themselves move erratically across the sky.

Gravity swells and navigational mayhem are not the only perils of the Black Reef however as it is filled with the detritus of dozens of worlds and the wreckage of thousands of vessels. Given the vast size of the Reef, more than one captain has scoffed at the notion of 'running into' such stellar flotsam and jetsam, and under normal circumstances it is a simple matter for a vessel to easily avoid such perils when plying the void. However another astronomical quirk of the Black Reef is that the same gravitational ripples which can rip a ship apart seem to cause all kinds of mass to be drawn together. This means wrecks, asteroids and rogue planets will all seek out ships trying to cross the Reef, changing course and accelerating as if drawn in by some potent magnetic force. Often a craft will have only moments to detect, avoid or destroy such objects as they appear, before they crash into the hull with massive destructive force.

THE BLACK HEART

Several attempts by the Adeptus Mechanicus Explorator fleets have been made to navigate the Black Reef, though to date all have met with failure. Lord Commander Ebongrave himself has also launched numerous scouting parties into the Reef in the hopes of somehow flanking the Tau positions and gaining a decisive military victory. These too have met only with failure, many of them disappearing completely, leading the paranoid Ebongrave to suspect treachery. A few Imperial explorers have managed to delve deep into the Reef and return, among them the famed Rogue Trader Telas Kai



and his ship the *Ancient Fable*. With the aid of his skilled Nostromo House Navigator, Telas has been able to glimpse the heart of the Reef and discern some of its ancient secrets. What he has passed on seems hard to believe, though if true could turn around the fortunes of the Canis Salient in a single stroke. Telas asserts that beyond the chaos of the Reef's outer regions lies a dark centre and a macro-system of dozens of worlds from dozens of systems, all drawn into the orbit of a single, massive, star-sized object. As with the rest of the Reef, this macro-system, dubbed the Black Heart by Telas, is a tangled web of gravity fields and unpredictable orbits.

Telas tells how he explored several of the worlds and discovered the remains of an ancient, highly advanced xenos civilisation long turned to dust. He also encountered primitive reptilian aliens, which he deduced to be the descendants of the race which once dominated these worlds and this region of space. The aliens, which called themselves the Syrshin, roam the worlds of the Black Heart, defending the ruins and warring among themselves. Without the technology to cross the void, Telas discovered they could use naturally occurring gravity wells, vast plumes of air and water millions of kilometres in length, which would periodically link the planets and allow the Syrshin to literally 'fly' between worlds. Cobbling together xenos writing from the walls of the ruins, and secrets pulled from the minds of the Syrshin by his psykers, Telas came to the conclusion that they were waiting for some powerful enemy which they believed would soon return, rising from a millennia long slumber, once more to enslave them as it had so long ago.

Of more interest to Telas than the ghost stories of the Syrshin was what he discovered about the great mass at the centre of the Black Heart. Though he was not able to get closer than a billion kilometres from it, he believes it is in fact a vast engine built by the lost Syrshin civilisation to protect them from the ancient enemy and is the cause of the Reef itself. Telas also suspected that while no ship could approach, it might be possible to travel 'on foot' using the gravity wells to skip between worlds. Unfortunately for Telas, the shifting gravity tides forced him to leave the Black Heart before he could put his theory to the test. Thus far he has

not been able to find the Heart again, though Ebongrave has become interested in his tales and the possibility of harnessing this Syrshin Singularity Engine and is eagerly funding a return

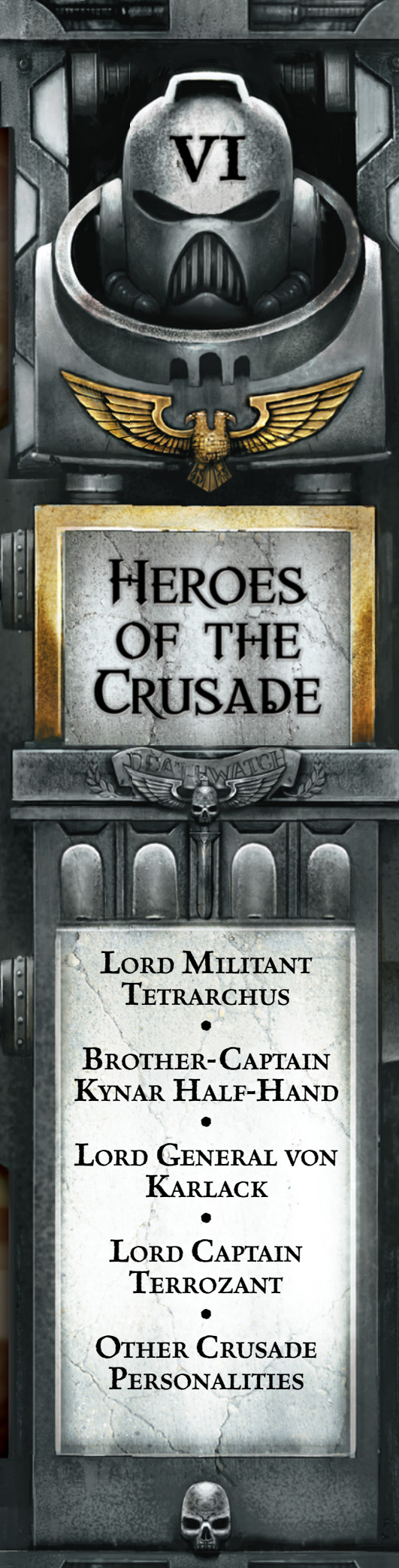
trip for the Rogue Trader.

TAU INVOLVEMENT

The humans are not the only ones to explore the Black Reef and the Tau too have been sending scouts into its gravity ravaged depths. Less willing to needlessly sacrifice their warriors, the Tau have employed those aliens from their empire with an affinity for the void and a skill at space faring, such as the ethereal Ji'atrix and the void-dwelling Nicassar. More successfully than the Imperium, the Tau have mapped a number of routes through the edges of the Reef, at least on their side of the anomaly, allowing their ships more tactical flexibility than those of their enemies and also allowing them to lay deadly ambushes within the edge of the Stygian Break. The Tau also enjoy a rare speed advantage over the Imperium within the Black Reef as their unusual method of near-Warp travel works more effectively than completely entering the Warp and is less prone to disruption by the gravity storm.

The Tau have long been aware of the Syrshin and their lost empire, from artefacts gathered from the fragmented worlds of the Reef. Aun'El Basel'kyth himself has taken an interest in understanding the empire which once dominated this area of space. The senior Tau researcher's interest in the Black Reef and the amount of Tau resources allocated to its secrets has increased in recent times since Tau spies learned of Telas' discovery of the Black Heart. While Aun'El Basel'kyth does not fully believe the wild stories of the Rogue Trader, his research so far makes him believe that such a thing as the Singularity Engine could exist. While the Tau high command is generally sceptical about the existence of such a device, they have nevertheless decided to allow Aun'El Basel'kyth to make a serious attempt at reaching the Black Heart before the Imperium and harnessing the power of the Syrshin Singularity Engine before Telas Kai and his crew can find its location again.





HEROES OF THE CRUSADE

LORD MILITANT
TETRARCHUS

BROTHER-CAPTAIN
KYNAR HALF-HAND

LORD GENERAL VON
KARLACK

LORD CAPTAIN
TERROZANT

OTHER CRUSADE
PERSONALITIES

CHAPTER VI: HEROES OF THE CRUSADE

"All too often, the difference between victory and defeat lies with one man."

—Commissar Holt at the final liberation of Volistad

This chapter details ten of the most famous, infamous, or influential individuals surrounding the Achilus Crusade. Many of these individuals may be considered allies or even commanders within the Crusade's structure, whilst others are bitter foes, or at best, amused spectators. All are of interest to the Ordo Xenos and the Deathwatch, for all may help or hinder the long-held vigil in the Jericho Reach.

FRIEND OR FOE

The individuals introduced in this chapter can serve either to assist the Deathwatch or to hinder them. Some of these individuals may even be ideal to serve as a Kill-team's primary contact with the Crusade. If the Game Master chooses to use these individuals as allies in his game, he is free to introduce them as he wishes: perhaps as having been supporting the Kill-team's missions from the start, or as a new player seeking to use the Kill-team's activities for his own ends.

As an enemy of the Deathwatch, any of these individuals can serve admirably as a nemesis. A nemesis is a reoccurring villain with plans that the Kill-team has interfered with and whose vengeance spitefully dogs their steps. A nemesis is a classic plot device for a long-term campaign; few things motivate players more than discovering that their nemesis is behind the conspiracy that they have uncovered, and nothing is more satisfying for those players than when they finally bring their nemesis down. To help GMs introduce and use a nemesis in their game, there are a few guidelines that are worth bearing in mind:

A nemesis should not be behind every mission. While it is important that a nemesis reoccurs in the campaign, if he is omnipresent then his impact is lessened. It is better to save him for the main events.

A nemesis should significantly hinder the Kill-team. For a nemesis to be an effective threat, he must genuinely have the potential and the motivation to damage, undermine, or kill the Deathwatch Space Marines, their allies, and friends. More to the point, he also has the power to get away with it, at least for a time. This way a nemesis can easily become a genuinely loathed figure that players will do almost anything to destroy, a villain the players love to hate.

A nemesis should escape until the final showdown. In order to be an effective focus of the Battle-Brothers' thirst for vengeance, they must confront their nemesis several times and have him slip through their fingers (or defeat him only to find out someone else was pulling his strings—the real nemesis!). This makes the final triumph all the more satisfying.

VILLAINS

For the Deathwatch, the success of the Achilus Crusade is an important factor, but the primary purpose of the Deathwatch must take precedence. The key to remember when using an individual connected to the Achilus Crusade as the master villain for a campaign is that he is more than just a collection of powers and abilities; he has a motivation and an agenda all his own!

The best way to create a villain is to start with a well-defined idea of what he will be in the campaign. One of the best tricks to creating a cool villain is to give him a good narrative, a back-story, a personality, a style of his own, and his own motivations. Many Game Masters go so far as to give their villain a signature, in the shape of a recognisable *modus operandi*, a visual style, or an exclusive goal. These are the things that make for a first-rate villain, not simply a set of Characteristics, Talents, and game mechanics. Once the Game Master has an idea for 'what' and 'who' the villain will be, then it's time to pick up a rule book and lend him some definition—not the other way around!

USING THIS CHAPTER

Each of these individuals has a potent amount of influence and authority, either within the Crusade or without. Each is intended to be a worthy adversary for any group of Deathwatch Space Marines, and any one of them can become the arch-nemesis for a campaign or simply provide a memorable villain for a single adventure.

PROFILES?

Profiles for the Personalities of the Crusade are not included in this chapter. This omission is quite deliberate, as the danger, abilities, and powers of these individuals have not been pinned down or specified. These factors are for the Game Master to decide; they can be moulded into a powerful villain, or a potent and diligent ally for a Deathwatch Kill-team.

This section includes a Talent, Touched by the Fates, that is ideal for building powerful villains—the sort that require more than a lucky bolter round to take down.

TOUCHED BY THE FATES (TALENT)

Prerequisites: Limited to Non-Player Characters with free will; may not be applied to daemons and other non-living creatures.

The NPC has a number of Fate Points equal to half his Willpower Bonus (rounding up). He may use these Fate Points in exactly the same way as Player Characters and may even 'burn' a Fate Point to survive death and destruction (if possible), although this should always happen 'off camera'. If in any given situation the NPC would be defeated and the scenario resolved in the Acolytes' favour, the NPC will return another day (probably for revenge!). In addition, the rules for Righteous Fury also apply to this NPC.

LORD MILITANT SOLOMON TETRARCHUS

"Where others have failed, I will be triumphant. I will burn my name into the core of the Reach; a bloody brand which will endure for a thousand years!"

—Lord Militant Solomon Tetrarchus, 'Beyond the Reach of Man' Vol. XXI

Ordained by the grace of the God-Emperor, Lord Militant Solomon Tetrarchus is the supreme commander of the Achilus Crusade and has directed its strategies and actions for over thirty years. He is characterised for his boldness and aggressive style of leadership as well as his willingness to take risks and seize opportunities as they arise, traits often lacking in such high ranking commanders of the Imperium. They are traits, however, that have got him into strife more than once, and now years after his first optimistic predictions of complete victory within the Jericho Reach, his political and ideological enemies have begun to circle, perhaps sensing a loss of confidence in the Lord Militant and an inevitable change in the overall leadership of the Crusade.

Those that work closely with the Lord Militant know that his is an utterly unenviable task, as he tries to counter the many problems assailing the Reach, from the slow and steady advance of the Tau to the sudden and cataclysmic arrival of the Hive Fleet Dagon. Spending much of his time on the Crusade fortress world of Karlack, the aging Lord Militant spends as much of his time dealing with the petty squabbling of his generals as he does with his strategies for conquering the Reach. Added to the distrust and disdain many of his commanders have for each other, Tetrarchus must also contend with the political and jurisdictional nightmare involved in commanding so many conflicting Imperial adepta and organisations. This is especially true of his dealing with the Deathwatch and

the Adeptus Astartes, which operate largely outside of his direct influence. This can at times lead to friction between the Lord Militant and the Watch Captains and Battle-Brothers of the Space Marines.

Despite these problems and the monumental nature of his task, Tetrarchus is however a man driven to succeed, not for personal glory, nor even the glory of the Imperium, but out of a deep and secret fear of failure. This hidden fear, of which Tetrarchus has confided in not even his closest advisors, began in the first years of his reign as Lord Militant when the ghost of Achilus came to him in a dream. What the ghost said to Tetrarchus he cannot recall, only that it filled him with a terrible sense of dread and the certain knowledge that should he fail in his mission, the consequences for all Mankind would extend far beyond the boundaries of the Reach. Since that time Tetrarchus has been haunted by the memory of Achilus, coming to believe that the old Lord Militant's ghost does indeed wander the surface of Karlack, residing in the great Cenotaph. So far Tetrarchus' regular visits to the Cenotaph, and the fact that he sends his advisors and bodyguards away to pray while there, have been passed off as simply piety.

However some have begun to notice a growing desperation in the Lord Militant and glimpsed him talking to himself while in the shrine.

The presence of Achilus' ghost has also increased Tetrarchus' already growing paranoia about infiltrators and subversives within his own staff.

While still far from the excesses of madness exhibited by Lord Commander Ebongrave (a general who Tetrarchus has also begun to suspect of corruption), his behaviour has already begun to influence the direction of the Crusade, as more able commanders find themselves sidelined, or held back on Karlack (so Tetrarchus can keep an eye on them) and younger more inexperienced commanders and sent into the field. It can only be a matter of time before the dire state of the Crusade, his own mental strain, or perhaps the whispering of Achilus' ghost drive Tetrarchus to make a terrible mistake—a mistake which will have long and lasting consequences for millions of souls.



BROTHER- CAPTAIN KYNAR HALF-HAND

"There is no honour in simple death alone. Only those that can sell their lives at the highest price in alien and heretic blood have earned the right to stand at the Emperor's side; all others are but the bloody dust beneath my feet."

—Brother-Captain Kynar Half-Hand

Of all the Chapters of the famed Adeptus Astartes, the Storm Wardens have one of the largest presences within the Jericho Reach and few among them have earned a reputation for grim determination and uncompromising violence like that of Brother-Captain Kynar Half-Hand. Captain of the Storm Wardens 7th Company, Kynar arrived in the Reach with the vanguard of the Achilus Crusade aboard the Strike Cruiser *Mark of Honour*. During those first years the captain made a name for himself on the bloody battlefields of Khazant and later Vanity, against the forces of the Stigmartus and their foul allies. Kynar is a remorseless giant of a man, tall even for a Space Marine and exceptionally skilled with his ancient hand-and-a-half power sword Widowmaker (from which he draws his nickname Half-Hand). He leads by example and his men follow him without question knowing that their captain will be wherever the fighting is the thickest, hacking down the opposition with Widowmaker, and pushing back the foe. Kynar has also earned much glory for himself and his Chapter by defeating powerful enemies of the Imperium in single combat, such as the Fly Lord of Hestos and the Crooked King of Night during the heavy fighting among the dead hives of Vanity. It is even rumoured the Storm Warden killed a Genestealer with his bare hands during the Seven Hour Conclave, when it infiltrated into the inner sanctums of the firebase and found him unarmoured and unarmed.

It is understandable then, given Kynar's prowess in battle and his exceptional combat record, that he has only contempt for much

of the rest of the Imperium's fighting forces. Even fellow Space Marines must work hard to earn Kynar's grudging respect and even then he only truly trusts other Storm Wardens to watch his back in battle. Despite this, the nature of the Crusade, and the orders of the Lord Militant, have on more than one occasion forced Kynar to work with the Imperial Guard, Imperial Navy, other Adeptus Astartes Chapters and the Deathwatch. When dealing with the first two, Kynar's fearsome presence and the dire reputation of the Space Marines is sufficient to keep commanders and troopers alike at a distance and stopping them meddling too much in his personal quest for glory; however it is a different story when he must mix with his own.

Kynar has become contemptuous of the Deathwatch, especially after an incident on the world of Baraban against the Tau where he claimed a Deathwatch Kill-team slighted his honour by arriving before his own strike force and killing a high priority target. Both the Deathwatch, and the Ordo Xenos which directs many of their actions, disregarded the incident as they do not officially function within the command structure of the Crusade or answer to the Adeptus Astartes.

Kynar was incensed enough however to take the matter first to Lord Commander Ebongrave and then later to the Lord Militant himself (when Ebongrave proved indifferent). Tetrarchus has of course done his

best to smooth things over, more than a little concerned that he could

lose desperately needed support from the Storm Wardens, however there is little he can do as he has only limited

power over the Deathwatch or the Inquisition and they have always

conducted their own private operations within the Reach, quite often without informing the forces of the Lord Militant. Kynar

however is not to be pushed aside when it comes to a matter of honour, and has vowed to return the slight against the

Deathwatch by taking glory from a Kill-team and robbing them of their honour by proving their cowardice once and for all.



LORD GENERAL MAGRATHA ORPHEL VON KARLACK

"We failed in our attempt to create an icon. Instead, we created a hero, and must now deal with the consequences."

—Prefectus Nyl Riefenstadt of the Administratum Historical Revision Unit, Jericho Reach Division

Since its establishment, the Acheros Salient has shifted between multiple commanders. The high rate of attrition in the Cellebos Warzone, coupled with the Salient's inability to make headway in the region, meant a steady stream of commanding officers felled by the enemy, executed for incompetence, or murdered by their subordinate officers after engaging in one disastrous strategic gambit too many. Indeed, it is a longstanding joke amongst the scribes of the Departamento Munitorum that the Acheros Salient has spent more time between commanders than under any individual authority. However, the Salient's current commander looks ready to change this trend.

ENTER MAGRATHA

Duchess Magratha von Karlack was born into House Orphel, one of the few lines of Imperial hereditary nobility to survive the Age of Shadows. Little more than a child at the time of Lord Militant Achilus's death, Magratha was taken from her family and sent to the Calixis Sector by order of the Administratum, there to be educated and indoctrinated into the ways of the Imperial orthodoxy. Under the supervision of Administratum-vetted tutors and advisors, Magratha was groomed for a position as a political figurehead, moulded into a leader capable of maintaining order in a tamed and re-founded Jericho Sector. As a native of the Jericho Reach she would easily command the loyalty of the locals, but being raised within the confines of an established Sector, she would hold loyalty to the Imperium itself, making her an ideal sub-Sector Lord or Sector Governor. However, this was all under the assumption that the Achilus Crusade would proceed swiftly.



During Magratha's absence, the Administratum propaganda machine in the Jericho Reach prepared for her return. With a program of targeted propaganda beginning on Karlack and eventually spreading to worlds throughout the Iron Collar, broadsheets, pict-reels, and folk hymns began to circulate proselytising the virtues and natural leadership qualities Magratha von Karlack. In time Magratha became a symbol of everything Imperial soldiers were fighting for. Most importantly, she became a unifying icon of hope for Guardsmen tithed from the worlds of the Iron Collar. Portraits of Magratha adorned barracks halls, conscription posts, and shrines from Hethgard to the Greyhell Front.

RETURN AND ASCENSION

When Magratha returned to the world of her birth in 813.M41, she was welcomed by an adoring, war ravaged populace and an Imperial command structure with little use for an inexperienced noblewoman entitled to a leadership position that did not exist. Her future in sector politics circumscribed, Magratha was forced into the highly visible token position of Adjutant to Lord Admiral Gorvus Xant, then commander of the Acheros Salient. Magratha's rise to true power would not come until 815.M41, during a push beyond the Cellebos Warzone.

During the Siege of Vespasia, Lord Admiral Gorvus Xant and most of his command staff perished when a chance strike from an orbital defence platform destroyed the bridge of the Salient flagship *Sword of Macharius*.

The surviving crew and officers, influenced by over twenty year's Crusade propaganda, instantly saw Magratha as the obvious successor to their commander. Magratha, viewing herself a natural leader by virtue of her noble blood and the promises made by her handlers in the Administratum, eagerly assumed command.

As the orbit of the *Sword of Macharius* decayed, Magratha fled from the crumbling battleship with a host of Guardsmen aboard every drop pod, gun cutter, and freight lighter that could be salvaged. Magratha and the warriors under her command touched down upon Vespasia's only functioning space port, claiming the installation, cutting off the main Stigmartus supply line to the world, and winning one of the Salient's few victories.

Word of Magratha's victory spread quickly through the ranks of the Salient, bringing the first hope of overall victory most Guardsmen operating in the region had ever known. When Magratha demanded Tetrarchus officially name her as Xant's successor, the Lord Militant agreed, much to the surprise of the Canis and Orpheus Salient commanders.

Despite many public objections, and her inexperience and cavalier leadership style, the newly ascended Lord General Magratha Orphel von Karlack tenaciously holds to her current position and has yet to fall prey to the tragic ends which claimed her predecessors. Her short career has seen a handful of victories in the Cellebos Warzone and a handful of worlds beyond. While the tide has not turned in the Imperium's favour in the campaign for the core of the Jericho Reach, the eyes of countless soldiers now look to a brash young Duchess for leadership, hope, and victory. However, not all eyes look upon the Lord General with adoration.

THE VON KARLACK CONSPIRACIES

There are many within the Achilus Crusade's command structure that question Lord General Magratha von Karlack's sudden rise to power. Many look upon Magratha and see a desperate gamble for victory in a war where loss is inevitable. Others see a commander long on luck but short on competence. A quiet few observe Magratha's ascension and see the workings of a conspiracy. These few nurture and spread their theories among those of like mind, and work tirelessly to gather whatever scraps of data and speculation support their claims. Of the many rumours haunting Lord General Magratha's career, three continue to surface despite repeated attempts at suppression by the Lord General's own agents.

TREASON BY BLOOD

It is claimed that the Orphel bloodline shares ancestral ties to the exiled overlords of Khazant. Those who advocate this connection believe Magratha is also aware of these ties and has forged an alliance of sorts with the surviving overlords. In exchange for the impressive but strategically insignificant victories on which Magratha has built her career—the Lord General's detractors say—the overlords reap a harvest of munitions and intelligence from the supply convoys supposedly lost to Kokabiel's Drop.

THE IGNORANT MARTYR

Few can fathom the notion of Lord Militant Tetrarchus trusting the future of an entire Salient to a commander with anything less than decades of experience. However, some take solace in the notion that Magratha's promotion to Salient commander is merely a prelude to her ultimate purpose as a tool of propaganda. Lord General Magratha is meant to fail gloriously. As a martyr, her value as a symbol of the Achilus Crusade is incalculable. Like Saint Drusus, Magratha will become a being of legend, fuelling the conquest worlds with her memory alone.

ASSASSIN AND MUTINEER

The sheer improbability of the strike that destroyed the heavily shielded, armoured, and reinforced bridge of the *Sword of Macharius* is seen as proof of sabotage by many. They claim Magratha orchestrated the hull breach which killed Xant and his command staff, taking advantage of the resulting chaos to assume leadership of the Siege. As the remains of the Salient's former flagship plummeted into the depths of Vespasia's northern sea shortly thereafter, the firsthand accounts of Magratha and her loyal Guardsmen stand as the only records of what transpired.



LORD CAPTAIN GRAVIS TERROZANT

"Roll up, roll up, one and all! Sample the luxuries of a distant Empire that's closer than you know! However, if comfort isn't to your liking, perhaps I can offer you something to give your enemies grief? All is mine to sell, for the right price."

—Lord Captain Gravis Terrozant, master of the Wayfarer
Resplendent

When Lord Militant Achilus first set his sights upon the Jericho Reach, he realized lasting victory could not be accomplished by military means alone. Knowing well the power of industry and lure of coin, and their place in expanding the Imperium's borders, Achilus sent out a call to Rogue Traders operating out of the Calixis, Scarus, and Ixianid Sectors, enticing them to join in the Crusade with promises of profit, plunder, and a stake in all worlds brought into the Imperial fold. Regrettably, few heeded the Lord Militant's call, most flocking to the boundless opportunities of the Koronus Expanse rather than the uncertainty of an active war zone. Gravis Terrozant was the exception.

SELLING THE EMPIRE

A relatively young Rogue Trader from an obscure Dynasty originating in the Calixian Periphery, Gravis Terrozant saw opportunity where others saw only war. After a brief period of negotiation and oath swearing with Crusade commanders, Terrozant led his small fleet of treasure ships, dubbed the Golden Chain, through the Jericho-Maw Warp Gate and into the worlds beyond the Black Reef.

Always a few parsecs ahead of the Canis Salient, Gravis Terrozant maintains several commercial inroads into contested regions of Tau space, selling weapons and medical gear to human dissidents beyond the Greyhell Front and valuable intelligence to Lord Commander Ebongrave. In addition, Terrozant's smuggling network brings innumerable defectors and examples of Tau weaponry into Imperial custody, and a steady supply of agitators, spies, and propagandists into the worlds of the Velk'Han Sept.

In recent years, Lord Captain Terrozant has expanded his endeavours to include organising disparate human malcontents from the Velk'Han Sept into his own private mercenary army. Armed with a combination of standard Imperial pattern weaponry and armaments stolen during raids into Tau supply depots, Terrozant's Terrors have become a respected unit in the war to end Tau hegemony in the Jericho Reach's coreward fringe.

Most successful of all Terrozant's dealings, however, is the brisk slave trade the Lord Captain maintains between the Greyhell front and the Iron Collar. With almost clockwork regularity, the ships of the Golden Chain return to Spite, Calisi, and Karlack, opening their holds to disgorge a broken host of Tau, Kroot, and miserable Gue'la prisoners of war to work the mines and labour camps that fuel the Imperial war effort. With most able-bodied men and women from these worlds conscripted into the Imperial Guard, these slaves are indispensable to maintaining the high levels of production needed to supply the three Salients of the Achilus Crusade.

PROFIT THROUGH TREACHERY

Not even Lord Captain Gravis Terrozant is immune to Lord Commander Ebongrave's paranoia. Over the past several years, with progress in the Greyhell Front grinding to a halt, the Lord Commander has begun

to suspect Terrozant of working against the progress of the Canis Salient. Indeed, why would a man who profits so greatly from war want either side to attain victory? Ebongrave suspects Terrozant's smuggling endeavour runs both ways, the Lord Captain selling intelligence and military hardware back to the Tau in an effort to keep both sides evenly matched, locked in perpetual stalemate.

Perhaps more chilling is Ebongrave's suspicion that Terrozant's time beyond the Greyhell Front has left his mind contaminated by alien ideas. The Lord Commander fears Terrozant is sympathetic to the corrupting notion of the Greater Good preached by Tau emissaries.

If so, it is only a matter of time before Terrozant turns his mercenary armies against his own people.

Worse still, he may reveal the secret of the Jericho-Maw Warp Gate.



PLENIPOTENTIARY- DESIGNATE URWIN SIRE

"Diplomacy is like unto the Writ of Exterminatus – done well, all enemies are rendered powerless with a single word."

–Urwin Sire to Inquisitor Carmillus at the Seventeenth Conclave of Hethgard.

Urwin Sire is one of Lord Militant Tetrarchus' most senior servants, a counsellor who has served his master faithfully for many years. Sire is an adept of the Priesthood of Terra, and blessed to be born on Humanity's home world. He entered service into an obscure division of the Administratum tasked with performing diplomatic missions to recalcitrant Imperial Commanders, performing the combined duties of ambassador, messenger and executioner. Many of these missions ended in violence, as uncompromising planetary governors refused to accede to one or both of the only two obligations they have to the Imperium – the rendering of tithes and the purging of latent psykers. However, Sire's success rate was notably higher than many of his peers thanks to his ability to reason with even the most obstinate of opponents.

Sire rose to the notice of his masters during the wars of the Delgado Succession, when his tireless work stopped three entire systems from joining the nascent, self-proclaimed Delgado Hegemony. Though the wars raged for another decade, it is commonly held that they would have dragged on for at least a century were it not for Sire's intervention, and many millions more would have died.

Four decades into his career, Sire was assigned to the Margin Crusade on the borders of the Calixis Sector, and having assembled a substantial staff, set out upon a specially commissioned naval sprint hauler. Four months later, Sire was assuming office as Plenipotentiary-Designate to Lord Militant Tetrarchus, not in the Margin Crusade in the Calixis Sector, but the Achilus Crusade in the Jericho Reach. As a senior adept, Sire was informed of the truth of the Crusade and made aware of the dire necessity to hold the Well of Night against the foes of the Imperium.

With the coming of Hive Fleet Dagon to the Jericho Reach, Sire's skills have been in high demand. Tetrarchus has utilised Sire in two main capacities. Sire has performed dozens of missions to worlds that have thus far refused to join the Imperium,

delivering the message that if they do not do so now, they will be left to defend themselves against the oncoming storm. The second type of mission has been to the Tau, where, on Tetrarchus' orders, he has secured a number of concessions conducive to both sides of the wars of the Canis Salient.

Sire's greatest rival however has proved not to be any rebel planetary leader or sly xenos diplomat, but the commander of the Canis Salient. Lord Commander Ebongrave holds many paranoid beliefs about those both below and above him in the chain of command, and some of them, including the fact that Tetrarchus has sponsored contact with the Tau behind his back, are in fact true. Sire's mission is a dangerous one, for the agents of Lord Commander Ebongrave are ever vigilant for signs of what he deems as treachery, and will go to any lengths to ensure his dominance of the Canis Salient is total.

In temperament, Urwin Sire is a patient man, his genial wit masking a razor sharp intellect. He is especially skilled at presenting the impression of empathy – it has been said of Sire that he can, if needed, convince a rebel governor to walk willingly into the excoriation chambers of the Ordo Hereticus, convinced that they will receive a fair hearing thanks to his interjections. This is not to say that Sire is duplicitous or disloyal, merely that he is utterly devoted to his mission and extremely skilled in his calling. Sire never overtly carries weapons, relying instead on the employment of seconded Imperial Guard troops should a show of strength be required. He does, however, wear a number of jokkaero digital weapons, and has used them to bring unsuccessful negotiations to a close on a number of occasions.



LORD CASTELLAN ORTARNA LOKK OF CASTOBEL

"Let the price in blood be paid, no matter the cost! Let your fear become hatred and your hatred become madness, for only when we shed the weakness of man can we hope to best the alien!"

—Lord Castellan Ortarna Lokk addressing new recruits of the Castobel 117th Militia Regiment

When the Imperium returned to the Jericho Reach forty years ago, the Achilus Crusade began the slow and bloody process of reclaiming lost worlds. Most of those they encountered had long since fallen to foul Chaos heretics or vile xenos during the Age of Shadow, and opposed them bitterly. A few however welcomed the Imperium as blessed savours. Among these was the world of Castobel, deep within the Orpheus Salient, which had through the years of blood and darkness never lost its faith in the Emperor. This is the world from which Lord Castellan Ortarna Lokk hails and the world which first brought him to the attention of the Lord Militant.

Lokk comes from one of the great noble houses of Castobel, a staunch member of the Aquilan Pluracy, and was always destined for greatness. However it would take the arrival of Hive Fleet Dagon and the near annihilation of his world to thrust him into the limelight. Once a careful military strategist and shrewd politician, Lokk spent years navigating the dangerous social circles of Castobel's noble elite, rising steadily into a position as Lord Commander Ascendant of the forces of Hive Trimalov. In any other time he would have been able to grow old and prosperous in such a position, contending with only minor skirmishes between rival hives or seeing off the occasional concentration of dust raiders. However his fortunes changed dramatically in the span of a few years as first the Imperium returned and then

the Hive Fleets descended. It was during the first bloody days of the Tyranid invasion that Lokk was to distinguish himself, rising up above the largely ineffectual and confused Castobel commanders to create an effective defence. Perhaps his crowning glory in these early days was his command of the defence and later retreat from Hive Trimalov, saving thousands of guardsmen and tonnes of vital materiel from the claws of the Tyranids.

When the Lord Militant learnt of Lokk's efforts he was immediately taken by the Lord Commander's daring and tactical genius, admonishing his own generals and pointing out Lokk as an example of the dynamism and bold new thinking he wanted the Crusade to embrace. In reward for his efforts and tactical genius, the Lord Militant decreed Lokk Lord Castellan of Castobel, making him its highest ranking military commander and giving him control of all Imperial forces fighting on his world. Unbeknownst to Tetrarchus though, the loss of his hive city, most of his family, and much of his world to the Great Devourer had forever changed Lokk and begun slowly to erode his sanity. This madness would be responsible for the destruction of Hive Tyralos. After the loss of Trimalov, one of the world's six great hive cities, Lokk was struck with worry that another of the great hives would fall, and he would once again suffer the loss of so many of his brothers and sisters to the swarm. When the hive's fall became inevitable, he decided to cheat the swarm and secretly deployed a stormtrooper squad to infiltrate the hive. They set off a chain reaction in the hive plasma reactors which destroyed both the hive and the swarm in a pyre of atomic fire. After the destruction of Hive Tyralos, Lokk openly praised its defenders for their selfless sacrifice, even as he secretly rejoiced in the blow he had struck against the Tyranids.

Kill-teams which operate within the Orpheus Salient, and certainly those deployed to Castobel, will likely come into contact with Lokk. Despised by the old guard, Lokk is a young and dynamic commander of the kind Tetrarchus has come to pin his hopes on, and the successor in many ways of the lost General Curas (see page 344 in the **DEATHWATCH** Rulebook). To operate under his command is to be part of daring and reckless plans against the Hive Fleets, cunning strategies and brilliant tactics, tinged with the taint of the Lord Castellan's growing madness.



COMMODORE THALION VYCARIOUS

"Every failure we suffer comes at the hands of over zealous or inexperienced commanders. These are the true heretics, these slack jawed fools who squander the Emperor's resources and spill the blood of honest guardsmen in pointless battles for their own vanity."

—Commodore Thalion Vycorious

Many Imperial commanders are callous and shallow men and women, filled with a personal lust for glory and possessed of a blind observance of doctrine. They often have little regard for the lives of those below them, especially if the expenditure of those lives would further furnish their own advancements. There are some, however, that manage to rise to power with their sense of morality intact and never forget that the larger games they play across the stars are played with the lives of thousands of living souls. Commodore Thalion Vycorious is such a commander. Risen up through the ranks of the Imperial Navy and blessed by connections to some of the most powerful noble families of the Calixis Sector, she is the master of the Emperor-class battleship *Belial* and overall commander of the Calixian 5th Expeditionary Battlefleet.

Thalion was among the first naval commanders to enter the Reach, and was chosen by Lord Militant Achilus himself for her bravery and skill during the 775.M41 Year of Lamentation and her personal actions which destroyed a Yu'vath Dark Fortress, saving numerous worlds on the edge of the Calixis Sector. Eager and willing to serve the Lord Militant and do her duty, Thalion felt it was the will of the God-Emperor that guided her to the Jericho Reach and the chance to reclaim part of the Imperium from the hands of foul aliens and vile heretics. During those first years of the Crusade, she was kept busy smashing worlds to dust and cowing others into surrender with the presence of the *Belial*. Against the largely primitive and backward worlds of the Reach, it was rare that her Battlegroup faced any kind of serious opposition, the guns of the *Belial* hammering apart system ships and ground targets from the safety of high orbit. All that changed however with the death of Achilus and the arrival of his replacement Tetrarchus. Thalion and her fleet were among the vanguard of the assault into the Acheros Salient and narrowly escaped with her ship and her life after becoming isolated and ambushed by a Traitor Legion fleet. Since then she has become embittered towards Tetrarchus and constantly questions his judgement (a fact that has made her senior staff more than a little nervous). She has also come to view the Crusade as a pointless waste of life and resources, which has little to do with her own sector or with the noble families of Scintilla from which she hails.

Unknown to all but a few of her most trusted advisors, Thalion has also begun to have doubts as to the right of the Imperium to dominate the Jericho Reach and whether or not it should concern itself with this far flung piece of void. These seditious rumblings have been slowly increasing in Thalion in recent months, especially as in the aftermath of the Acheros disaster she was reassigned to the Canis Salient against the Tau. These are foes that seem to value life, human or otherwise, and Thalion has become dangerously sympathetic to their point of view. She has even spoken to Tau prisoners at length about the notion of the Greater Good. How far these treacherous thoughts might take Thalion not even she knows, though she is thoroughly disgusted with the quality of her commanders (an opinion not improved by her time in the Canis Salient under the paranoid Lord Commander Ebongrave). However Thalion's sedition develops, it can only spell disaster for the Imperium, as the loyalty she commands among her crew and the captains of her battlegroup would cost the Crusade not just a talented naval officer but also the terrifying firepower of the *Belial* as well.



SYNDILIAN SHANYR THE TRAVELLER

"Like motes of dust in a beam of light, the lives of men are fleeting and aimless. Where the humans flounder and fail against the fates, however, the Eldar tread carefully along the crooked path, each foot fall a moment in time, each stride a step closer to the opening of the way."

—Syndilian Shanyr, Eldar Pathfinder

The Imperium has precious little information on the presence of the Eldar in the Jericho Reach. Beyond the presence of a few corsairs and xenos pirates, such as the Black Prince of Slinnar or Qulisanna's Blade, it is largely believed that no significant Eldar threat exists. This of course is far from the truth and the Eldar have long had eyes watching the Reach, moving in the dark and keeping vigil over its dead worlds. Among these Eldar scouts and spies is Syndilian Shanyr, also known as Syndilian the Traveller among his kin. Originally from the Il-Kaithe Craftworld located near the Eye of Terror, Syndilian and others from his people undertook the epic journey through the Warp Gate and into the Jericho Reach at the behest of their Farseers. This was a result of what would become known as the Prophecy of the Crooked Path, laid down by the Il-Kaithe Farseers hundreds of years ago, and identifying the role their people would have to play in this region of space.

It was seen by the Il-Kaithe Farseers that a time would come when the great enemy would rise in the Eastern Fringe of the galaxy. Aided by the forces of discord and destruction, it would lay claim to a gateway to the heart of the world, a gateway the humans would be powerless to defend or to close. It was a fate, however, which could be averted—if the enemies of the Eldar could be turned in upon each other and time could be won to close the gate themselves. This lofty task is why Syndilian has spent much of his life moving silently and unseen between worlds with his cadre of elite rangers. Using the wisdom of the Eldar and his own cunning, Syndilian has been subtly influencing events across the entire Reach, instigating battles, assassinating influential targets and even creating alliances between enemies—all for the purpose of prolonging conflict. Most recently, Syndilian and his followers have been operating in the Orpheus Salient, meddling with the

course of events and the advance of Hive Fleet Dagon. Before her death, Inquisitor Kalistradi of the Ordo Xenos had even uncovered some evidence of the Eldar's presence on Avalos, though this has since been lost during the bloody course of the Tyranid invasion and her own demise at the hands of the Lordsholm Broodlord.

Syndilian Shanyr is an extremely dangerous foe with decades of training and experience in stealth and subversion. It is for this reason that only the tiniest whispers of his presence have ever reached the Imperium, and even the Inquisition has only the vaguest information on him—little more than a name and some sketchy second-hand reports of a deadly Eldar assassin. What worries the Inquisition and the Deathwatch the most about Syndilian, however, is not the lack of information on him but rather the fact that they have no clear idea of the nature of his mission. In their eyes, the Eldar seems to appear at random, killing, sabotaging, or otherwise altering events often without any clear short term effect. While the damage he has inflicted seems limited, he has still been branded as a priority target and dangerous xenos terrorist by the Deathwatch. Kill-teams dispatched to areas where he is thought to be operating often have Syndilian's assassination given to them as a tertiary mission objective should they chance to encounter him. To date, however, Syndilian has yet to be cornered by a Kill-team, and his few brief encounters with other Imperial forces have been brief and very one-sided.





LORD COMMISSAR VANCE THEREN

Lord Commissar Vance Theren is currently the head of the Triumvirate that is in command of the Orpheus Salient. Educated at the Schola Progenium on Veneris, he has faithfully served the Commissariat for the past sixty-five years. He was assigned to the Achilles Crusade from the outset and was attached as a liaison to General Curas' staff. Theren is a hard man, but unlike a stereotypical Commissar, he actually cares about the lives of the men and women under his command. This became apparent to the other two members of the Triumvirate when he rewrote the defence plan for Treyan upon seeing General Arkelius had called for over one million Guardsmen to be sacrificed as bait to bring the Tyranids into a specified kill zone. The death of General Curas hit Theren hard. While they could not be considered friends, the two men had a mutual respect for one another and General Curas would often take Theren into his confidence about private command matters. As the orchestrator of the Great Deception, Lord Commissar Theren is constantly on the lookout for signs that one of the two Arkelius siblings is plotting his downfall. Without his iron discipline keeping the rank and file in line, the Orpheus Salient would be lost. His relationship with the Deathwatch is strong since, as a Commissar, he always appreciates when a walking morale booster shows up on the field of battle.

LORD ADMIRAL ANASTASIA ARKELIUS

Like her brother, General Derian Arkelius, Lord Admiral Arkelius is member of Noble House Arkelius on Scintilla. She is also an excellent tactician, albeit in naval engagements, but she commands the respect of her crew and the Captains of her fleet. Those that serve her understand that while their souls may belong to the God-Emperor, their lives belong to her. Before General Curas was killed, he placed her in command of Battlegroup Cerberus. This fleet of over fifty ships ranged



in size from her flagship, the Battleship *Emperor's Nobility*, to the nimble Sword-class Frigates. When Lord Commissar Theren created the Triumvirate, Lord Admiral Arkelius was the first of the two siblings he approached, as she represented a skill set in which he was sorely lacking. She is constantly mentioning this to her brother, General Arkelius, in hopes that she can provoke him into doing something rash that will eliminate him from being chosen as General Curas' successor. Her attitude towards the Deathwatch is that of a cautious respect. She does not trust their ulterior motives, nor does she appreciate it when one of her ships is commandeered for a near-suicidal mission.

GENERAL DERIAN ARKELIUS

General Derian Arkelius is the eldest son of the Noble House Arkelius on Scintilla. He is a tactician without peer, but his field leadership skills are weaker than would be expected of a man of his rank. General Arkelius is at all times accompanied by an elite bodyguard drawn from the veteran squads of the 84th Scintillan Grenadiers. He feels that this sends a message to his men that they should always be expecting trouble and to never let their guards down. When General Curas was killed in action, General Arkelius immediately began lobbying Lord Militant Tetrarchus to be appointed to the post. While his request was never officially denied, neither has he been appointed Commander of the Orpheus Salient. This is why, when Lord Commissar Theren proposed his deception, General Arkelius jumped at the chance. If nothing else, it would give him an opportunity to deny his sister the ability to make a stronger case for herself. His attitude towards the Deathwatch (and Space Marines in general) is barely constrained hostility. To him, Space Marines represent a force that should be under his direct control, and he sees them as nothing but glory seekers who are denying him the chance to prove himself worthy as Curas' successor.

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