

DARK MAGENTA

An Acolyte's Tutelage

By Ruaridh Dall, Robey Jenkins and Derek Gillespie

An Unexpected Enquiry

Several months ago, at the end of 2010, I received an e-mail to my moderatorial inbox at *The Conclave*. "Rhincaps" (the joys of forum usernames!) was asking me for my thoughts on various aspects of *Inquisitor*. Initially, I began to type a reply, but it then occurred to me that there was something more interesting lurking within the subject matter. It's been quite a while since *Dark Magenta* let someone get back up on the metaphorical soap-box, and I thought that Rhincaps' e-mail was the perfect chance to let a few highly-opinionated souls hold court once again.

Here's what Rhincaps had to say:

Dear Dark Magenta,

I just read Derek Gillespie's "Piercing the Shadows" article, and I was quite happy to read such a critical view on the way Inquisitor is being played. In some points I felt Derek also criticised me, which I really liked because, being the most knowledgeable of Inquisitor in my gaming club, I miss having a more experienced person who can tell me what I am doing wrong.

I have been following Inquisitor from a point not long after it was released by GW in 2001. At that time there was a lot of enthusiasm about the new game and the "narrative wargaming" idea, and GW seemed to be supporting it. However, with not enough models available at 54mm scale, and too many gamers wanting to use everything they'd see in a game of Warhammer 40,000 in a game of Inquisitor, our talk of having a narrative campaign died before we actually got started.

For me the Inquisitor rulebook has always had this special feeling, perhaps of nostalgia. What I am most proud of is that the rulebook, to me, seems to create this really dark universe of special individuals all fighting for what they believe is the true cause. I really like the idea of the sub-title "The Battle for the Emperor's soul" and the idea of section wars within the Inquisition. But this dark universe slipped away quickly when people thought it was just 40k on a more detailed scale. Also, GW started releasing models like the Genestealer and Kroot, which made it harder for me to say, "Inquisitor is about humans."

I have tried to hold campaigns with gamers but there are a couple of points I always seem to get stuck on and that's why I wanted to ask Derek's advice, as his article is basically about some of the "barriers" I face when trying to balance a campaign. I think every GM deals with this – how to decide what people can and cannot field? Derek mentioned in his article that it's not that you can't include a Tau Fire Warrior, but it's why you shouldn't. My annoyance is, when I want to write a campaign intended to capture that dark atmosphere of Inquisitor and focusing it on a human-only campaign, most players still end up wanting something totally outside the box,

like their Nurglite Sorcerer accompanied by his daemonic minions, or a "fully-loaded" Space Marine.

My dilemma is that, on the one hand, I as a GM write this campaign, and I want people to be able to come up with really creative ideas for their warband. I don't care if one of their characters happens to be an Eldar pirate, but sometimes people ask for what I believe are such big deviations from the script that, for me, it takes the fun out of writing and running the campaign. I felt that Derek's article also touched on this – it's about the story, and if you want to go kick ass and chew bubblegum maybe Inquisitor is not the game you should play. On the other hand, it had me thinking, 'Am I not very selfish?' If you think about it, I write the campaign and I would I not like to see warbands that fit the campaign atmosphere? So I am simultaneously asking for the creativity of my fellow gamers but, at the same time, I limit what they like so it fits "my" idea of Inquisitor. I was wondering how an experienced GM deals with these sort of decisions?

One thing I thought as a possible explanation why "my" idea of Inquisitor varies from that of others is because of my knowledge. My good friend and I are always of one mind about how to play Inquisitor, because we both know all the background related to it. However a lot of people are too lazy to actually read more than 10 pages from the rulebook. Those people then also don't understand that "dark universe"



How, in the name of the Throne, do you handle it if one of your players thinks it's appropriate to use something as monstrous as this Eversor Assassin as his or her player character?

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atmosphere I was talking about, and that makes it logical that they look at stereotypical stuff like the aforementioned Fire Warriors, Space Marines and others. So, I was wondering - how do you think I should better educate them on "the purpose" of *Inquisitor*?

Now, the first thing I'd have said is that Rhinocaps isn't doing anything "wrong". However, I certainly can think of some general pointers I'd give and, as I scanned the e-mail over again, I could discern what I thought of as three broad areas of focus - *Inquisitor*'s distinction, background, and freedom - each of which can be both a blessing and a curse, depending on how they're each handled. As a result, I've enlisted the help of Ruaridh Dall and Robey Jenkins (fanatical *Inquisitor* gamers, games-masters and writers, both), and we're going to tackle each of these three areas with some short mini-essays.

Distinction

As a campaign gamesmaster, what methods do you use to drive home the unique emphasis of the *Inquisitor* game? How do you make you players understand what the game's about?

Ruaridh: Getting players into the right frame of mind for games of *Inquisitor* is without doubt one of the biggest hurdles a Gamesmaster has to cross, especially with new players who have perhaps come straight from the Warhammer 40,000 tabletop game. The competitive element of most war games leads to a winning-at-all-costs mentality that really doesn't work within *Inquisitor*'s narrative emphasis. The lack of "points" in *Inquisitor* (discounting the quite rightly maligned Ready Reckoner) can serve to confuse new players and leave them wondering what reason could there be for not taking a tooled-up character with stats in the 80s and 90s. The Battle for the Emperor's soul sounds like a job for power swords and boltguns, does it not? Designing characters for players is an obvious answer, but that can discourage players from taking part in one of the best elements of the game - building and modelling their own characters. A good author sticks to the rule "show, don't tell" and a good Gamesmaster should follow that advice too - we are supposed to be telling grand tales with *Inquisitor* after all. I believe the Gamesmaster's greatest responsibility is to show the players through their scenarios that having the best equipped and most powerful characters does not necessarily result in the most exciting games and stories. If players find out for themselves that simply taking aim and killing everyone results in failure they will quickly come to understand that *Inquisitor* is about so much more than Warhammer 40,000 with fewer models.

As I said before, I feel that scenario and campaign design are paramount to keeping *Inquisitor* flourishing in its unique niche. If players are constantly lined up against mooks with a mission no more complex than gunning them down, then players are going to treat *Inquisitor* like a simple wargame. Gamesmasters have a wonderful opportunity to introduce the unseen face of the Imperium, and sticking to the battlefield all the time misses out the true charm of the *Inquisitor* game. The rich tapestry of the 41st millennium is ripe for exploration and should be delved into with relish by the Gamesmaster. Searching the sulphur deserts of Nayan IV for the data storage crystals containing the complete works of Magos Null is so much more evocative

a scene than gunning down the mutie rebels, again. Now, everybody loves a bit of gunplay, but all too often *Inquisitor* can become a game of highest Ballistic Skill wins, and that's a shame. *Inquisitor* games should be exciting, memorable affairs, and the Gamesmaster can encourage this with appropriate use of applied handwavium. This concept rewards exciting play and keeps the game running at a fast pace, and stops the game becoming bogged down in dice rolls. Can the free-running death cultist cartwheel over the gap between these two buildings and throw a knife down at the twin stubber-toting, one-eyed bounty hunter below? Sounds great - don't bother rolling the action dice. Can the telekine propel himself upwards to grab onto the landing skid of the Valkyrie as it departs with the prisoner on board? Awesome. Go for it. If the Gamesmaster thinks something will add to the spectacle of the game, then it absolutely should be encouraged. There is a fine line to tread between helping the game and favouring one player over another, but if a player has his models acting "in character" then perhaps he should be rewarded for playing *Inquisitor* as it's meant to be played.



The battle reports featured in *Dark Magenta* attempted to emphasise the "cool factor" of the *Inquisitor* game. Here, Arkat Skar gets the drop on Inquisitorial Operative Susannah Ward, preventing her from easily achieving her infiltration and data-drop mission on behalf of Inquisitor Saussure.

This notion of acting "in character" comes back to the richness of the setting, especially the fractured and complicated nature of the Inquisition. There are more shades of grey in the Inquisition than any subject of the Imperium would believe, and players should be tasked to decide where in the spectrum their characters sit, before, during and after games. Scenarios should challenge players intellectually - both in terms of working out how their characters will achieve their goals, but also have them question their characters' morals and their motivations. A character's beliefs go a long way to deciding the natural progression of a campaign, and the Gamesmaster should design scenarios to challenge these notions. Soon players will be approaching the gaming environment through the eyes of their characters, not their own, and at that point the legendary tales from the underbelly of the Imperium will begin to tell themselves. The Gamesmaster's next challenge is keeping his scenarios fresh for further

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excitement and intrigue!

The main point for any budding Gamesmaster to take home from this lot is to be creative. Novel ideas for missions far detached from the usual objectives of tabletop war games stand a far better chance of showing players what *Inquisitor* should be all about – exploring the unseen side of the Imperium.

Robey: I once described *Inquisitor* as “wargaming for poets”. The sad fact is that a game like *Inquisitor* simply isn't for everyone and part of the challenge for a Gamesmaster is tracking down and initiating the “right” people into the game's particular delights. If you can pick the right people to introduce to the game then a lot of the work will be done for you, making the transition from traditional miniatures wargame or paper-and-pen roleplay game to the challenges of narrative skirmish game that much smoother.

There are really three basic ways to find the right person to introduce to the game. The first is the simplest: the self-selector. Some people see the game for themselves and just know in their hearts that it's the game they've been looking for. They might see you or others playing the game in the local club or at Warhammer World and be captivated by the drama and unusual flow of the events. They might download the rulebook from the Games Workshop website and be sucked inexorably into seeking out a game. They might stumble upon The Conclave or some big forum sub-board dedicated to the game and find the community's remarkable openness and intelligence a refreshing change from the perpetual cries of “cheese!” and “broken!” on other forums.

Others don't know that they're looking for *Inquisitor* and for these you need to be alert. The second sort of person you might spot who would be ideal to introduce to the game are those who are already playing with narrative elements. Look for the players who write their own scenarios for tabletop games, who want to design armies that tell a story rather than ones that annihilate all comers, and who would rather be part of a campaign than a tournament. These players already understand that miniatures wargaming can be as much about weaving a compelling narrative as it is about defeating your opponent, so the discovery of a game wherein that is an integral part of play and a key source of the game's attraction will come as a refreshing enlightenment.

Finally, look for those on the fringes of the miniatures wargaming community who may not be into collecting mighty armies or painting endless squads of armoured blue super-humans, but who nevertheless feel the call of the compelling background of the 41st Millennium – people who love the Black Library novels, or who contribute fan art to projects; people whose roleplay groups are enjoying *Dark Heresy* or *Rogue Trader*. These people already grasp the idea of the narrative, but have most likely never seen how it can be a “game”.

Target these three sorts of potential player with your demonstrations or discussions of the game and you will be assured of a receptive audience who are already primed to enjoy the poet's wargame.

Background

The best Inquisitor campaigns often involve players with a deep understanding of the background “canon” of the Warhammer 40,000 universe. What publications would you consider to be “required reading” if someone is looking to really understand the Imperium of Man in the forty-first millennium?

Robey: The question is a particularly perceptive one, because whilst I think that neither a player nor a GM should necessarily possess an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Warhammer 40,000 canon, it is absolutely true that an understanding of the context is absolutely vital. By this I mean that, whilst one may not necessarily have to know the cognomen of the founder of the Temple of the Saviour Emperor* or the date of the Conclave of Mount Amalath** to enjoy the game, one does need to have a grasp of the essential aesthetic of the background: yes, it's “grimdark”; but it's more than that – it's a time of deepest pessimism set against highest faith; it's a place where the shadows are haunted by monsters, but some of them are on your side; it's a universe consumed by wars, but not all of which are fought on battlefields; it's an age of conquest, but where the vital ground is the hearts of men and, of course, the Emperor's soul.



In the forty-first millennium, men of faith treat the entirety of Imperial society as the pulpit from which to preach. The word of the Emperor must be taken to the masses, and an Inquisitor often has need of robust spiritual guidance during their work.

With all of that in mind, then, what would I consider to be the “required reading” list for players of *Inquisitor*? Well, it would be easy to recite the names of the books I can see on my bookshelf from where I sit, but that would be unfair to new or potential players out there, because there's so much that can be read and enjoyed without needing to spend a penny. Start at the Specialist Games rulebooks.

*Fatidicus, since you ask.

**I can't remember, either.

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Obviously, you should read the *Inquisitor* rulebook - ideally from cover to cover. But you can also get the *Necromunda* rulebook for a look at life in the underhive (a popular setting for many *Inquisitor* scenarios, after all); and the rulebook for *Battlefleet Gothic*, which shifts perspective from the dirtiest, most insignificant gang scraps to the loftiest and most magnificent exchanges between city-sized space vessels: the sort of perspective every *Inquisitor* (or *Inquisitor's* nemesis) should possess. Some would also point to the *Epic: Armageddon* rulebook but, personally, whilst I love that game, I'd recommend skipping it. It's light on background, in any case, and the battles depicted in the game are a very long way from where an *Inquisitor* should find him- or herself.

The core rulebooks for the Specialist Games are far from the only reading matter to be obtained for free. The *Thorian Sourcebook* can still be downloaded, along with Gav Thorpe's article on using Space Marines and Derek "Dark Magenta" Gillespie's thoughtful ideas on how to approach the *Inquisitor* game: both good reading, but especially the latter.

fast-lane.

If you've devoured all of these and feel prepared to part with some cash, then the next steps should be the Warhammer 40,000 5th, 4th and 3rd edition rulebooks. Whether you play the game or not, they all include images, background and plot hooks aplenty, including many glimpses into aspects of the WH40k universe otherwise ignored: historical references to the Novaterran Interregnum and other historical anomalies of the Imperium's shady history are all ripe for GM's and players alike to plunder, even the Slann get a brief appearance, and most importantly they give the best overall sense - captured in microcosm in the Specialist Games range - of the stakes for which the games are played.

Beyond these, the next books I highly recommend are those published by *Fantasy Flight Games* in their *Warhammer 40,000 Roleplay* series - *Dark Heresy*, *Rogue Trader* and now *Deathwatch*, plus all of the expansions and campaigns associated with those. No other range of books concerns itself so deeply with the minutiae of life in the Dark Millennium or with the myriad unseen and unknowable threats that lurk beyond the thinnest of veils. And besides that, the 40kRP series lends itself extremely well to adaptation to new rules archetypes and equipment for *Inquisitor*. They are a barely-tapped seam of sheer genius.

For the *Inquisitor* player, the books I've suggested are only the nearest at hand. Over the horizon, of course, lurk the ever-increasing Black Library back catalogue of Warhammer 40,000 novels, the *Imperial Armour* books from Forge World (which, whilst they cover major military campaigns, often hint at shadowy operations between and behind the lines) and no end of resources such as codexes, White Dwarf articles and even some of the better fan fiction. But by the time one reaches this point, one reads not to expand one's understanding, but to simply increase one's immersion in the context. I would even go so far as to say that, if you've truly understood the Dark Millennium from reading the suggestions above, your enjoyment of the extensive body that remains will be deepened and your discrimination concerning what will and what will not contribute towards appreciating a good game of *Inquisitor* will slowly be honed to a razor's edge.

But, having said of all of that, everything you've been told is, of course, a lie.

Derek: Well, I'd call Robey's answer to this, "comprehensive". Certainly, in terms of the books that you should ensure you've looked at to understand the canon of the Imperium of Man in the Warhammer 40,000 universe. What he hasn't touched upon are the books that the Black Library makes available, or has made available in the past. If you're looking for novels that may help you immerse yourself further within the dystopian nightmare that is Imperial society, then your obvious starting points are the *Eisenhorn* and *Ravenor* trilogies, from the pen of Dan Abnett. I would also recommend the Shira Calpurnia series, by Matt Farrer, for an insight into the relationship between the law-keepers of the Imperium and several key aspects of society. If you can get your hands on them, the *Rogue Trader* series from the early days of the Black Library are also excellent windows onto a lesser-explored avenue of the Imperium. These two novels are currently



The imagery of the forty-first millennium is dark and gothic, but it's also a wonderful blend of archetypes from history and science fiction. This Imperial Crusader looks at first glance like a medieval knight, but the bionics, weaponry, purity seals, banners and cherubs help to place him firmly in the madness of the Warhammer 40,000 universe.

Battlefleet Gothic resources include extensive background sections on the Imperium of the 41st Millennium and the many races and factions levelled against it, and *Necromunda* resources offer similar insights into the forgotten corners of the underhive and life in the Imperial

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available from the Black Library's print on demand service as a compilation entitled, "The Gothic War".

Perhaps even harder to come by today are the Black Library sourcebooks, some of which contained excellent insights. First and foremost amongst these, in my opinion, was *Xenology*, though if you are presented with a chance to look through *Tactica Imperialis*, the *Battle for Armageddon* or the *Thirteenth Black Crusade*, then I'd recommend you to do so. Written from the view point of Imperial citizens or soldiers struggling to come to terms with what the galaxy has thrown at them, they convey the desperate emotions of a man faced with crushing adversity. And, if there's one thing your average *Inquisitor* player is going to encounter, it's crushing adversity within the Imperium of Man!

Freedom

How strict are you in enforcing the type of player characters you permit in a campaign you've written? If you are relaxed about the types of protagonists that will take part, how do you deal with the player who wants a highly unusual character or war band?

Derek: Over the space of time that I've been playing, gamesmastering and writing about *Inquisitor*, I've dealt with players of all persuasions when it comes to the character, or characters, that they'd like to control on the tabletop, or have represent "them" in a campaign. I have run campaigns and one-off games in which I laid down very strict rules as to what was and was not permissible, and am still willing to resort to a tailored character creation system that limits what archetypes players can select, and what paraphernalia those characters can then begin the game or campaign with. However, there's an over-arching principle here that, if everyone takes it to heart, should make most of those suggestions redundant. It's also the reason that this is the last question of the three in this article (cheating, I know!). Here's my advice – if you get your players to buy in to the unique focus of *Inquisitor*, and they appreciate the richness of the Warhammer 40,000 universe, then they shouldn't pose you any problems. And, conversely, if you, as the gamesmaster, trust your players to keep within the boundaries of those points, then you shouldn't have too much to fear from one of your players wanting to try something a little bit unusual.

Whilst you can use the *Inquisitor* rules to represent 54mm skirmish combat between pretty much any denizens of the forty-first millennium that you want,

the primary focus of the game is clear from the outset – this is the battle for the Emperor's soul, and thus the majority of our protagonists are likely to be men and women of the Imperium. To really play *Inquisitor* well, you have to inhabit the Imperium of Man in your mind, mentally role-playing within that environment, even if you're not necessarily role-playing on the table-top (of course, some of you might be doing that as well!). Thus, Men – or things that can pass as Men – can be present in their infinite variety, and move in many circles of Imperial society largely unnoticed. On the other hand, players that want to choose a character that is unmistakably xenos in origin are going to have a hard time blending into the midst of a civilised Imperial world.

When you're planning a campaign, you are likely to be in one of two situations - either you, as the gamesmaster, are coming to the table with an idea in your head of what your broad storyline will be, and you need some player characters to populate it. When I adopt this approach, I either opt to restrict the wildest excesses of my potential players when it comes to character creation, or I try to ensure that my campaign setting is broad enough to provide some settings that are not solely populated my "normal" Imperial citizenry – it needs to be feasible that a more unusual character could hide out, or pass by unnoticed. The second approach, and potentially more enjoyable, is to sit down with your potential players and discuss the broad strokes of a campaign before you plan it – an approach that can somewhat build the campaign up around a more unusual character type, providing a rationale for the likelihood of their involvement. This doesn't mean that you're having your fun taken away as gamesmaster; there are still plenty of opportunities to spring surprises – all you're doing is creating the broad



Inquisitorial warbands will inevitably be made up of a diverse mixture of characters from across the whole range of Imperial society, or beyond. Players and GMs need to work cooperatively to ensure that they can accommodate the ideas of the players into the campaign or game setting.

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strokes of the campaign setting together.

In either scenario, you need an understanding between yourself as gamesmaster and the players. Even if the campaign setting has been adapted to make it possible to include a player who has their heart set on playing a Tau operative, for example, the player in question is going to have to think like an invader in an alien land. In other words, they're going to have to find creative solutions to solve certain situations, in which a human character could perhaps take a simpler, more direct approach. This also applies to characters carrying around highly unusual/visible/alien wargear as well – things like that are going to get you noticed much more readily than anyone wandering around with a minor side-arm like a respectable citizen of the Imperium!

So, in my gamesmastering old age, I've adopted a comparatively collaborative approach towards the characters I like to see on my gaming tables. Ultimately, *Inquisitor* encourages creativity and free-thinking, so I'd encourage everyone to think laterally about how they can incorporate aspects of the oddities they love into the Battle for the Emperor's Soul. If your player wants to field an Ork Boy, might they consider a lone, skulking, isolated Blood Axe Kommando? Even better, how about an ex-guardsman, who has become barely less feral than the Orks he spent his career fighting? Someone obsessed with trying to bring a Necron to the tabletop might just be interested in taking a corrupted Mechanicus follower of The Dragon instead. And the player who craves the Fire Warrior from T'Au could perhaps instead consider a Gue'vessa Auxiliary, now moving once more through Imperial society to spread the Greater Good.

It's a big galaxy, and a wonderful canvas for everyone to play on – it's up to you and your players to fill it...

Ruaridh: Derek's advice here is pretty sound – having tried to run a campaign encompassing a huge variety of warbands I've come to similar conclusions about player characters. You can't please everybody and keep a campaign focussed around a single theme at the same time, and usually the campaign suffers for it. Discussing the concept behind a campaign with potential players before getting underway is the best way to bring easily manageable player characters to the table. These characters don't have to be conventional by any stretch of the imagination, but a convincing story as to why they have been caught up in everything is a necessity to minimise the headache mass inclusions can cause.

I hope the thoughts we've put together here will be a help to all players of the *Inquisitor* game, but most especially those of you who have only recently discovered how much there is to offer within the pages of the rulebook. Please feel free to let us know your thoughts. Even better, if you have another point of view, why not put your ideas down on paper? Dark Magenta would be delighted to host an alternative point of view if you can construct an interesting counter-point article to what you've just read...



There are always alternative ways to view any "traditional" character archetype, such as this near-crazed Imperial Guardsman, traumatised by long service against the Ork threat.

About the Authors

Ruaridh Dall is a qualified dentist, living in Elgin, in the north of Scotland. When not filling teeth, he can commonly be found attempting to complete far too many modelling projects at any one time. He goes by the online moniker, "Van Helser".

Robey Jenkins is a self-styled *Inquisitor*-Missionary, founder of the York Garrison Wargaming Club and of the *Inquisitor* Grand Tournament. He is also the owner of *Precinct Omega*, an independent miniatures and wargaming company, and the writer/designer of the science fantasy skirmish game "*Skrapyard*". Rumours that he is working on an unofficial second edition of *Inquisitor* are not completely unfounded.

Derek Gillespie has had a semi-official involvement with the *Inquisitor* game since it was first released. He was a member of the *Inquisitor* Rules Committee in the early days of Specialist Games, and has moderated The Conclave internet forum from the moment that it was created by GW, through to its independence of the present day.

