



Summoning the Muse

Inspiration for character creation in Inquisitor.

By Derek Gillespie

EVERYONE HAS TO START SOMEWHERE

I should apologise before I start - this article will most likely be only of the most passing interest to veterans of the Inquisitor game system. However, there are plenty of people out there who, for one reason or another, have either never played Inquisitor, or are only just taking their first, tentative steps into this most wonderful Specialist Game. In my capacity of moderator for both the Specialist Games Forum, and The Conclave inquisitor forum, I have the pleasure of seeing many new people come over to playing Inquisitor for the first time, and one of the areas in which people struggle is the process of thinking up the background for a new character.

This is, of course, a process that many gamers will go through with other GW games - many people invest more effort in their armies or gangs if they have made some degree of simple back-story for the key players. However, Inquisitor is unique in requiring this background as a key part of the game. With the emphasis on character-driven narrative, and the potential for further, potentially off-table role-playing elements, character is everything in a game of Inquisitor.

The primary requirement is that the character fits within one of the broad archetypes of the 41st millennium. For this, it's vital that an Inquisitor player has a wonderful depth of knowledge about, and love for, the grim, brooding darkness of the 40K universe. The fact that Inquisitor rewards such a player is one of the reasons why it's often seen as more of a "veteran" game than even other Specialist Games - newcomers to the 40K mythos almost inevitably tend to look to the most powerful archetypes available. This results in one or more of the following characters wandering around (often together!) - Inquisitor Lords, Space Marines, Officio Assassins, Alpha-level Psykers and the most senior of Techno-Magi. These are characters that belong in the pages of a 40K codex, and not as common occurrences in games of Inquisitor.

The beauty of Inquisitor is that the game functions better when more "low-brow" characters are involved. It is an invitation to explore the corners of the 41st millennium which are not covered in games of Warhammer 40,000 or Epic 40, 000. Thus, the power-armoured Inquisitor Lord is surpassed in enjoyment by playing a more investigative, covert Inquisitor who cannot simply walk out into a hail of gunfire and laugh it off, just as the Tech-Magos with implanted heavy bolters is far less engaging than the Explorator, diligently unveiling lost technology while protected by a lone Skitarus guardsman. Psychic characters might only have a few, minor abilities, while the young Inquisitorial Explicator simply does not have the influence or connections to call in assistance from the Grey Knights at the snap of his or her fingers. If you see such "restrictions" as detrimental to your fun, you probably shouldn't be playing Inquisitor at the moment. However, if character driven story-telling where brains are rewarded as much as brawn appeals to you, then you've found your game!

I've written about the physical process of generating characters before, a long time ago in the pages of Exterminatus magazine, so that's not what I want to focus on over the next two or three pages. If I've said that you might want to look away from the pages of your Codex for all but the broadest of inspiration for your characters, then where on earth can you turn?

Well, plenty of places, in fact. That's what I want to look at...

LOOK IN THE LIBRARY

The Black Library, in fact! In a monument to understatement, I'll point out that there are, of course, plenty of authors out there who write non-GW-based fiction. And of course, you can find ample inspiration from hundreds of tales to fire your imagination for characters, and not purely from science-fiction or fantasy literature either.

However, in order to be a bit more specific here, I'd like to draw your attention to the increasingly enormous range of tales available thanks to the Black Library. One of the best functions that a Black Library author can provide is to shed extra light into corners of the Imperium that are otherwise unexplored. Now, if you get a group of long-standing 40K players together, they will almost certainly have differing views on which authors are good at this and which play a bit more "fast and loose" with background - in other words, they're arguing the case for or against Black Library authors and their adherence to the background "canon". Authors are as open to interpretation of what has gone before as anyone else, and some people will have their preferred authors, whose interpretation of the 40K universe sits best alongside their own. In other words, if you're going to openly draw on the works of the Black Library as an inspiration, be prepared to occasionally find someone who disagrees with your source!

That said, the wealth of material in Black Library books is vast. The massively prolific Dan Abnett has, through the Gaunt's Ghosts novels, revealed huge swathes of the Imperial Guard, and detailed the workings of their chaotic counterparts, the Blood Pact. If you're attracted to aerial combat, Double Eagle could easily prove archetypes for combat pilots seconded to Inquisitorial duties. Of course, with his Eisenhorn trilogy, and the ongoing Ravenor series, Mr. Abnett has shed light not only on the multitudes of the Inquisition, but also on the huge spectrum of civilian life in the Imperium.

The range of inspiration on offer is huge - Sandy Mitchell's Ciaphas Cain novels present a more light-hearted look at life in the Guard through the eyes of a commissar trying to dodge his partially undeserved reputation for heroism. Gav Thorpe's Last Chancers series has yet more examples of the myriad of people you find in the Imperial Guard, as well as encounters with the Tau in Kill Team. Gordon Rennie has explored life in the Imperial Navy in his superb Gothic War novels, Execution Hour and Shadow Point, which also feature encounters with the alien mindset of the Eldar. Simon Spurrier's Lord of the Night features an Inquisitorial acolyte hunting a rogue Chaos Marine, and encountering resistance from her terrifying master and the rest of his entourage. Beyond this, the Daemonifuge graphic novels

open up a whole side of the Ecclesiarchy, as does the excellent Faith and Fire by James Swallow. Crossfire and Legacy, by Matthew Farrer, show the workings of the Adeptus Arbites and the rule of law, while background sourcebooks as Xenology

give mindsets into Imperial outlook and opinion. As well as all this background-hunting, of course, most of these books are highly addictive reads to boot!

LOOK AT ART

Now, specifically, I'm talking about Games Workshop commissioned art here. Just as with looking in literature, there are plenty of famous artists out there that have painted works which may inspire character concepts for you but, closer to home, Games Workshop also has a tremendous group of in-house artists, lead by the venerable John Blanche.

Artists that produce work for GW are steeped in the lore and mythology of the 40K universe, and add significantly to that lore with each and every drawing, painting and sketch they produce. Pick up any Warhammer 40,000 codex, and you are confronted with a hundred and one different examples of the gothic weirdness of the 41st millennium.

Exactly what triggers your imagination visually is a personal foible, but since I began playing Inquisitor, and therefore began thinking more deeply about the look and feel of individual models than I ever had in all my years of Warhammer and Warhammer 40,000, I have come to appreciate the work of the maestro himself, John Blanche. Blanche's work oozes with the insanity of the Imperium of Man, in everything from his most-recognisable works (such as the Black Templars cover art for Warhammer 40,000 third edition, or the famous Sister of Battle painting) down to his most "throw-away" sketches. Fortunately for the public, it is now easier than ever to get your hands on much of this work, through the series of art books produced by the Black Library. Works such as The Art of Warhammer 40,000, Inquis Exterminatus, and The Inquisitor Sketchbook are all bursting at the seams with ideas and possibilities. Not only that, but a quick glance at John's website - <http://www.lvxmvndi.com> - will also give you many a good idea.

Indeed, as if the title were not sufficient give away, The Inquisitor Sketchbook is almost a must-have in the library of an Inquisitor player. For those of you who haven't seen it, it is a compilation of many of the concept sketches Blanche produced as concepts for the character archetypes outlined in the Inquisitor rulebook. With an introduction by both Gav Thorpe and John Blanche himself, the pages of the book contain ideas for dozens of characters that you might never have heard of or considered; Whip Mistresses, Black Priests, Ecclesiastical Crusaders, mutant overlords, female Guard veterans, Imperial nobility, Inquisitors of all shapes and forms, Solar Priests, Siddith Death Cultists, Calculus Logi, and many more. Even if you are not individually inspired by the overall appearance of one of these, you can mix and match elements to help you find the inspiration for a character of your own.

A picture is worth a thousand words, as the saying goes, and I know that this holds true in my case - three of the last five Inquisitor models I have constructed, including my online namesake Herodotus Benedict Saussure, are all inspired by material held within the priceless pages of that sketchbook!

LOOK AT MODELS

A pleasingly simple one, this one - Inquisitor is a model-driven narrative wargame, and one of the best places for inspiration is the work of other painters and modellers. There are two useful things to keep your eyes on. Firstly, look carefully at the wealth of parts available throughout the whole GW range - there are hundreds of options for your Inquisitor models. If one particular combination of parts goes together in your mind to inspire a new character, then that's excellent - making the model first, and letting that model inspire the background and gaming abilities of a character, is a perfectly viable way of creating a character.



Inquisitor Saussure

Inquisitor Herodotus Benedict Saussure, of the Ordo Hereticus Terran. My longest-serving Inquisitor character was directly inspired by one of the sketches of a veteran Inquisitor hidden within the pages of the Inquisitor sketchbook.

Using this picture as inspiration, Saussure was constructed from stock pieces chosen from amongst the Inquisitor range. While the model is not an exact copy of the sketch, the inspiration should be immediately apparent to anyone who flicks through the pages of the Sketchbook.

The main influences are the overall pose, the power hammer, tabard and the sheathed knife, while the main departure from the sketch are the facial features.



Sanctioned Psyker

This Sanctioned Psyker, from my recent Incunablian warband, was inspired almost entirely by the Necromunda Wyrld Telepath model, and his truly enormous staff. I've wanted to put that staff head on an Inquisitor model for ages, and as soon as I saw Scarn, I knew I had a candidate! Keep an eye out on the 28mm model ranges as well - there are more than a few parts in those ranges that work well on Inquisitor models. Even the Warmaster and Epic ranges can be employed imaginatively...

Secondly, look carefully at what other people are doing with their Inquisitor models. To pull out the second cliché so far in this article, imitation is the greatest form of flattery. No-one can have all the best ideas, and you never know when you'll see a superb example of a characterful model. If you see a superb model, don't simply sit there stunned. Try to work out what parts of that model particularly inspire you - is there a particular paint scheme or effect you like? Is it a simple combination of stock parts that you'd never considered before, or has the modeller added a nice bit of sculpting? Maybe the model has some innovative scratch-built weaponry, or perhaps the base of the piece is imaginatively decorated?



Eldar Ranger



I have no shame in admitting that the colour scheme for my Eldar Ranger was inspired by the outstanding paint job on the Studio's Navigator model, with my own added twist. The deep, lustrous red contrasted so well with the rich browns and purples that I had to use it on a 54mm piece myself. The Eldar Ranger, easily one of the most beautiful models in the GW range, was crying out for the scheme, with the opportunity to contrast the rich colours with a range of wraithbone accoutrements.

Ask questions to find out how it was achieved, and think if you could incorporate similar details into your character. If it inspires you, you should act upon it - it's very unlikely that another gamer will take offence if you ask how they did something. In fact, they're more likely to be extremely flattered that you're taking an interest! You'll probably want to stop short of copying an entire model, as that's highly unlikely to represent your unique character, but taking some key features and applying them to your model is perfectly acceptable.

LOOK AT THE INTERNET

The internet can be a wonderful tool for the novice Inquisitor player. It can do two main things - provide inspiration, and offer advice. Of course, I must declare a personal interest here as, as I indicated back on page one, I have a hand in the moderation of two internet Inquisitor forums, both the Specialist Games Inquisitor forum, and The Conclave. However, this personal involvement isn't going to stop me pointing out the benefits!

As a source of inspiration, there are two things you can use the internet for. The first is an extension of the "Look at Models" concept. There are lots of wonderful sites out there that are dedicated to the art of miniature painting, most notably the famous coolminiornot.com, which features work from some of the best miniature painters in the world. If you can't be inspired by something in there, then you might have a problem! As well as dedicated miniature sites, internet forums such as The Conclave (http://www.specialist-games.com/inquisitor/forum_b/default.asp) may have the ability to display pictures, meaning that members post examples of their work and ideas, and receive constructive criticism and feedback upon those ideas. With the ability to easily ask questions of the modeller concerned, these sites are great reservoirs of inspiration that you can tap into to gain ideas, and get help from people who might know how to make them a reality.

The second source of inspiration comes from the discussion aspect of an Internet forum. The Conclave, Exterminatus.net (www.exterminatus.net), and the Specialist Games forum (<http://www.specialist-games.com/forum/default.asp>) are all vast resources, where you can see the opinions of hundreds of other Inquisitor players from around the world. You can post modelling ideas and get feedback regarding conversions, sculpting and painting, and you can easily post the statistics and backgrounds of your proposed characters and get some constructive criticism.

If you do choose to go down this internet forum route, a word of advice - please, be willing to change the ideas you start off with. You will hardly ever find an idea that every single person likes and, if you put something on the internet, someone will criticise it. There is no point in posting something online if this criticism is going to make you either (a) rude, (b) upset, or (c) obstinate. Be measured in your consideration of ideas, and your responses to them, because context can be hard to interpret when you're only presented with a faceless internet discussion board. Most of all, be willing to take on board the comments, and be willing to change your ideas based upon them. If you're not willing to change ideas in response to feedback, then the only real point of your post can be to boost your own ego by showing off what you clearly consider to be the perfect character.

Pete Haines, back in the days when Fanatic Magazine still existed, wrote a persuasive Last Word article about how the internet could do more harm than good to the creative process. I sympathise with the views he expressed, but have to only partially agree. Look around at the different internet sites available for Inquisitor, take the time to find one that has a "feel" you like (because many of them are very different), and you can get an awful lot out of the 'net.

LOOK AT THE CODICES

Okay, confession! I told you at the start of this article to look beyond the 40K codices as sources of inspiration, because they encourage people to want to play Space Marines, Eldar Aspect Warriors, Tau Fire Warriors, Orks, etc. etc. However, there are two instances in which I think they are of use.

Firstly, and inspired almost directly by Inquisitor itself, the Inquisition series of codices are full of archetypes that are crying out to be explored - penitent witches, crusaders, expiators, lexmechanics - the archetypes outlined as members of a 40K inquisitorial retinue are prime candidates for taking back to the game that inspired them - Inquisitor itself.

Secondly, a quick look in any of the Imperial-themed codices will instantly show you a snap-shot of the gothic weirdness of the 41st millennium. Winged familiars, machine-man hybrid constructs, dogmatic preachers, frothing cultists, whizzing servo skulls, sycophantic scribes and menials - they all feature in the background of many of the stunning pieces of art that adorn codices, or perhaps loiter in the sidebar or border decoration on some otherwise non-descript page. Any of these might provide the spark that generates a whole new character, destined to give you hours of gaming enjoyment.

CLIMBING DOWN FROM THE SOAPBOX

Well, that's about it for this extended rant. I hope that, for those of you approaching the game for the first time, you've got some new ideas for the all-important process of creating your first character. Like anything else, character creation and development takes practice, and your later efforts are likely to be deep and engaging compared to your first, clumsy forays into the previously unexplored backwaters of the 41st millennium. But, once you put your foot on the road of engaging character backgrounds and model design, you'll find the problem is no longer a lack of inspiration, but a lack of time available to realise all the ideas you now have!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

When not spending his time cracking the scourging whips on internet forums, Derek lives in Bristol, though he originally hails from north of the border. Outside of work, he tries to find time to paint some more of his currently-stalled Imperial Fists, and attempts to persuade his flatmates that they want him to bring his drums into the house...

