



# Thoughts of a First-time Gamesmaster

*Running an Inquisitor campaign*

By Ruaridh Dall

In this article, Ruaridh shares his experiences of running an Inquisitor campaign in GW Glasgow and shows us how he went about creating the world on which the campaign was staged.

## IN THE BEGINNING...

The moment I got my hands on a copy of the Inquisitor rulebook, it caught my imagination entirely. Here was a game that actually required me to write background for characters, something that I'd always liked doing anyway. I'd played a few games and been a member of the Conclave for about a year when I started talking with some of the other veterans in GW Glasgow about the game, and then showed a couple of the guys how to play. I ran a few introductory games which peaked a lot of interest. I then thought, why not run a campaign?

I'd never 'gamesmastered' a tabletop Inquisitor campaign before, so I was a little unsure of how to go about things. I read the section in the rulebook and Derek Gillespie's article in Exterminatus magazine issue 7, which were great starting points. I had run a few role-plays on the Conclave, so I drew on my experiences from there as well during creation of the campaign's background.

Lots of people had lots of ideas concerning the types of characters they wanted to play, so I tried to create a world that would tender to as many of them as possible while trying to stay linked to the one main plot I'd chosen. In hindsight, this was not a particularly good idea as it became tough for me to keep control of the multiple plot-lines that crept up. The next campaign I'm planning is going to have serious restrictions on character types because of this!

The world I settled on creating was in the Eastern Fringe, as having a campaign here would lend itself to having a lot of trouble without too much explanation; when you're about as far away from Terra as you can get, things are always going to get a little wayward. I decided the main plot would centre around an upsurge in pro-Tau terrorism in the planet's capital city, mainly as I really quite liked the look of the Tau Water caste model and at the time didn't have one. That weird little frog-alien thing was to become a major antagonist in the coming campaign. I also began thinking about putting in another sub-plot about Chaos cult activity to please those minds that preferred all things daemonic. Something I won't be doing again.

So Colonia Nova was born, ready to fall in the name of the Greater Good. I wrote up an overview of the planet for the players that concentrated on the capital city, Compasis, where I intended to set all the games. I gave some fairly basic information about the city's population and layout, and some more detailed parts about the Planetary Governor and the rather quite important role of the church on the planet. I finished the overview with a couple of paragraphs on the increasing threat from the pro-Tau terrorists in order to show them exactly where I had been intending to go with the campaign.

## Colonia Nova, Caurus Sector, Segmentum Ultima – Planetary Overview

Colonia Nova is a civilised world in the Eastern Fringe of the galaxy. The planet lies to the galactic northwest of Macragge, and to the immediate west of the Damocles Gulf. The Caurus Sector encompasses eight systems, four of which are uninhabited. The sector is approximately 120 light years from Tau space, and as such maintains a battlefleet in the Tenvellan system.

Colonia Nova is the fourth planet of the Bacalli system, and is one of the system's two inhabited worlds; the other being the water world of Bacalli, after which the system is named. Both planets lie within the system's primary biosphere, Bacalli the closer to the system's M-class star.

Colonia Nova's surface is approximately 78% water, leaving four large continents: Fernbach in the east of the northern hemisphere, Winsawen in the west of the northern hemisphere, Meksia in the west of the southern hemisphere and Povania at the bottom of the world.

The lands of Colonia Nova are largely barren, supporting little in the way of life above plants and insects. The seas too support little life – the high salt content of the waters preventing anything other than microscopic creatures flourishing in the oceans. As such, the population is reliant on food imports from Bacalli; the lack of foodstuffs on Colonia Nova being the reason Bacalli was settled first.

The major urban areas are spread widely over Fernbach, Winsawen and Meksia; there are no cities of note upon Povania, which lies frozen all year round.

The planet's capital is Compasis, which lies on the Great Plains in the south of Fernbach. Compasis is home to around 16 million people, and is the centre of industry on the planet, with the rail industry being the largest, employing around 3 million. The city has many distinct areas: the commercial district is located in the very centre of the city; the residential areas surround this district, the more affluent areas nearer the centre; and the industrial zones form the outskirts of the capital, with the almighty rail depot making up almost a quarter of the industrial zone.



The people of Colonia Nova are governed by an elected representative who takes up office in Compasis, the current Planetary Governor being Goran Alphar, who is three years into his 4-year reign. Alphar is regarded as a fairly weak-willed leader, his policies nothing like as hard-line as his predecessor William von Trepin, the main reason he was elected. Alphar's lax rule is being blamed for the current problems on the planet.

The Ecclesiarchy on Colonia Nova is represented by the Church of Saint Pereira, a rather harsh division of the Ministorum, renowned for their hard-line views on deviancy. Under von Trepin, attendance at church was compulsory, a policy scrapped by Alphar. This has put the Ecclesiarchy at odds with Alphar, but the populace love the freedom they now have. Unfortunately, this lack of religious guidance and the absence of any retaliation for failure to attend church have resulted in the upturn in numbers of both pro-xenos and anti-Imperial cults.

The cults are becoming more and more organised, and over the last few months there has been a marked increase in acts of terrorism and sabotage. Signs of Imperial authority, including P.D.F. and Navy recruitment buildings, government offices and Enforcer patrols have been attacked. Imperial Rail report cases of vandalism daily, most of it deploring the regime that the company represents, but worryingly pro-Tau propaganda is being scrawled across wagons, carriages and stations.

Though the Caurus Sector is close to Tau space, galactically speaking, it is disconcerting that members of the populace are even aware of the xenos race, let alone know the details of their political stance. How the propaganda is reaching Colonia Nova, no one is sure, but investigations are being carried out.

As the planet descends into anarchy, it is rumoured that the Inquisition are beginning enquiries of their own, hopefully to save the planet from damnation.

## **BUILDING THE CHURCH**

I had wanted the church to have a large role in the campaign, as it would provide both help and hindrance to the players. The Ecclesiarchy traditionally has had as many facets as worlds in the Imperium, so I dreamt up something original

for the Ministorum on Colonia Nova. The machinations of the church is something that I'd seen little of in what games and small campaigns I'd played and I always thought that was a shame as there is so much potential for downright tyranny and unbridled hope when the Ecclesiarchy is flexing its muscles. I gave birth to the Church of Saint Pereira, a diocese that verges on the monodominant way of thinking. I set them at odds with the Governor to stoke the political fires and get the players thinking about conspiracies.

### **The Church of Saint Pereira**

The Church of Saint Pereira has rule over a half-dozen worlds in the Caurus Sector, and traces its beginnings back to the late 40th millennium, when a lowly farmer led his villagers against the mutants that had seized power on his world.

The planet of Madaschi is an agri-world in the Sepian system, one of the four inhabited systems in the Caurus Sector. Madaschi is responsible for producing foodstuffs to supply the hives in the Tenvellan system. The general workforces of the world were mutant slaves, less cared for by their masters than the livestock. The constant maltreatment of the slaves caused much anger within the mutant shanty towns, and isolated revolts were far from uncommon.

However, in the year 963, millennium 40, the workforce rose up as one. No one is sure how long this had been planned, no one is sure, but one night every mutant on the planet threw off their chains and attacked their masters. Madaschi woke up the next day with the social positions of its peoples reversed. The mutants took a horrible revenge, showing less mercy than even their draconian masters had, and soon farmers and ranchers were burnt to death within their own homes.

Some escaped the initial murders, one of the lucky few being Alvaro Pereira, an arable farmer from the Bronze Vale, who with his brothers and closest friends formed a resistance and fought back against the subhumans.

Pereira took personal charge of a great number of assaults on mutant strongholds, his sword always in his hand, ready to purge the unclean that had stolen the planet from its rightful rulers. He located the surviving P.D.F. units that had until that time had been performing guerrilla attacks, and reunited them to form a capable fighting force again, his militia



bulking out the numbers and making great use of the surplus weaponry the guardsmen could offer. It was not long before the servants of the Emperor were reclaiming the stolen farmland from the foul mutants, burning the abominations wherever they found them.

The element of surprise had served the mutants well in their initial coup, but their lack of military organisation was their ultimate downfall. Wherever the militia and P.D.F. attacked, the mutants died. Madaschi was retaken nine months after the night of the uprising and Pereira was a hero.

Pereira had grown to be disgusted by the mutants and lost all trust in them. Wherever he saw an abnormality, he had the person, mutant or not, destroyed. The mutant workforce was systematically removed from the face of the planet on Pereira's orders, the monumental respect he had gathered permitting such a drastic measure.

Pereira set off on a personal crusade around the Caurus Sector, slaying every mutant unfortunate enough to cross his path. A following grew up around him and even after his death in the year 978 of the 40th millennium, people were following his example and casting out the unclean from their communities. A petition went out to the Ministorum to have Alvaro Pereira canonised and sixteen years later the former farmer Alvaro Pereira became Saint Pereira, purger of the unclean masses, warrior of purity. Churches in his name were established on the six worlds he visited, the grandest being in Compasis, the capital of Colonia Nova, where his sword hangs above the altar as a symbol of the weaponry used to deal out death and judgement to the mutant.



## CHARACTERS

With the background of the world now set I then moved on to helping create the characters people would be playing games with. I kept to the rule years of watching Scrapheap Challenge had taught me: KISS – Keep It Simple, Stupid! Keeping to this mantra made it easy for me to run my first few games, as well as making playing the games easy for the players who were novices.

I limited everybody to one initial character for their first few games. I let the players choose who their characters would be, advising them if they were unsure of what would fit the campaign, or if they really had no idea about the game at all! Fortunately, there weren't many of players like this at all. I used Derek Gillespie's guidelines to creating new characters, as I had no wish to allow monsters into the campaign at the beginning. All player characters were rolled from the new profiles provided in Exterminatus magazine issue 10, though I didn't use the random statistic advance and equipment tables from the 2002 Annual, instead allowing a character a single skill from the rulebook. Inquisitor characters automatically got Leader, and I allowed psykers to have up to four powers, three of which had to be of difficulty 15 or less.

When it came to selecting equipment for the characters, I cried out whenever someone suggested giving their characters power weapons and bolt weapons. Having seen their devastating effects on the table before, I was certain that allowing the starting characters these weapons would result

in actual character deaths, something no one would really want. They are exceptionally powerful weapons, and extremely rare throughout the galaxy – just because Imperial Guard officers can be equipped with one for 5 points in Warhammer 40,000 does not mean they are kept in boxes at the Departamento Munitorum ready to be handed out to whoever comes asking. A good thing to point out to people that moan about not being allowed a power sword for their cult leader is that Space Marine Assault troops, the elite close combat force of the Imperium, wield chainswords. 'Nuff said 'really.

Bolt weapons were a trickier point though, as some people already had models that were quite clearly armed with bolt pistols. Being a sucker for WSIWYG, I let them away with this, but limited their ammo to one clip per weapon with no reloads and made sure they'd be facing off against NPCs for a good while to whittle down their reserves.

Eventually, I had most characters armed with mundane weapons that were shown on the model. I allowed people one reload for laspistols, autoguns and the like, and gave the shotgun-armed people a number of shells that seemed fair and, most of all, able for the character to carry.

## LOCATIONS, LOCATIONS, LOCATIONS

Now that I had everyone's first character set, I needed to get on with providing somewhere for them to begin their investigations/set about bringing down the Imperium.

The way I see it is, in Inquisitor you should have almost equal time spent role-playing your character as you do shooting it out with your nemesis on the table. With this in mind, I created eight separate areas within the city where either games could be played, or discussions held.

### Key Places in Compasis

*The Rail Depot:* Miles and miles of track, wagon yards, fuelling stations, engineering workshops, warehouses, container yards and power sub-stations provide ample space for anti-Imperial organisations to scheme and plot unnoticed. The sheer size of the depot means it would take weeks for an Enforcer team to search thoroughly for signs of heresy, but the workforce provides a great number of eyes and ears. Vandalism of trains is occurring in the depot; someone must know something.

*St. Pereira's Cathedral:* The great church of Saint Pereira dominates the skyline of the centre of Compasis, its many spires seen for miles around. The head of the church, Cardinal Tobias Prieton, resides within the almighty building's walls along with his numerous personal staff. Prieton is not a man to cross, Governor Alphar can tell you as much, but he is rumoured to have access to an Arco-flagellant and even a member of the Sororitas.

*The Spaceport:* Reliant entirely on food imported from Bacalli, the spaceport is vital for the well-being of Compasis, and Colonia Nova as a whole. The manager of the spaceport, Michael Muldoon, has been actively recruiting for his personal security force, as he fears that the terrorists must surely see the port as a prime target in their fight against Imperial rule.

*The Adeptus Mechanicus Holdings:* There is only a small Mechanicus presence in and around Compasis; the planet's majority being located in the manufacturums of Meksia, but the Techpriests are a vital part in the maintenance of Compasis' industries. Without the Enginseers caring for the Machine Spirits of the locomotives, the rail system would soon fail, seriously harming both commercial and industrial interests in the capital.

*The Merchant's Quarter:* In the shadow of St. Pereira's Cathedral is found the Merchant's Quarter, from where the entire planet's economy is controlled. The adepts look after the books of all the companies on the planet; it would be disastrous if the terrorists targeted this ancient institution.

*Dechan Heights:* Overlooking the outer ring of the industrial sector on the south of the city is the residential area known as Dechan Heights. This is the most underprivileged area in the capital, and is little more than a glorified shanty town sandwiched between the plasticrete buildings of the better-off and the steel structures of the factories, foundries and warehouses where the residents work. The people here have been crying out for help from the government for years, but to no avail. Could the resentment of their situation lead to the "Heighters" taking things into their own hands?

*Government House:* In the central plaza in the middle of Compasis' bustling commercial heartland lies the marble clad building from which Governor Alphar rules. Alphar is aware of the growing resentment of both his people and the church but feels that he is in no immediate danger and that his government is competent enough to deal with the terrorists. The building itself maintains a standing guard of a complete P.D.F. platoon, and is surely safe from attack.

*Other Locations:* As with most Imperial cities, Compasis is a colourful, vibrant mix of the old and the new. Towering gothic buildings rub shoulders with equally huge armaglass office blocks on most streets. People go about their business aware, but happily ignorant of the threat of terrorism. Bars thrive with talk and gossip, indeed it is said that rumours flow more freely than the ale in the Emperor's Arms on Benbrethin Street. Numerous arms traders, some authorised, most illegal, ply their trade in the dark winding alleys. Enforcer teams patrol the more seedy neighbourhoods, while the Ministorum faithful wander the streets in the city centre waving their placards of warnings about the witch and the mutant.

Four of the areas – the rail depot, the spaceport, the Adeptus Mechanicus holdings and Dechan Heights – would play host to the battles that would inevitably spill out onto the streets. The remaining four – St. Pereira's Cathedral, the Merchant's Quarter, Government House and the "other" locations – were for polite conversation. There was, of course, the potential for overlap; not everyone would be out to steal things from the Mechanicus, and not everyone would want to share a drink with the Head of the Guild, but the basic role for each of the areas would allow me to govern games and role-plays. I showed the list of places to each of the players at the start of the campaign and after every game/role-play session they completed. I allowed them to choose where they wanted their character to go, within logical reason, and then came up with a game for them to play, or practised my acting skills as the Cardinal, Governor or whoever.

## **RUNNING IT ALL**

The first few games were an experience for me and taught me a few things. Firstly, having as encyclopaedic a knowledge of the rules as possible is vital for the smooth running of games without interruptions to read the rulebook. Having a great head for numbers (something I am exceptionally fortunate to have) is an asset that can't be underestimated when quickly working out what people need to roll to hit when their characters open fire or attack an enemy. In large enough numbers, even NPC grunts with stats of 30 and autoguns can inflict damage on player characters. This in turn taught me perhaps the most vital lesson of all: as games master I am God. It was rather a nice revelation, and saved scenarios that were on the verge of going exceptionally wrong.

From the moment the campaign had begun I had taken records of all the player character's stats, equipment, abilities and taken notes of what each character had done so far in the campaign. I got this idea from Jervis Johnson's advice in the back of the Inquisitor rulebook, and it helped immensely with keeping things running smoothly. I instantly had records of which characters had interacted with each other, meaning that I could remind players of injuries they'd suffered at the hands of others, where there characters had been previously, how many rounds they had left for their precious bolt pistols and so on. It was an exceptionally useful tool for both myself and the players and I highly recommend that everyone has a notepad for this purpose when you run a campaign.

So I progressed the campaign, shakily at first, to a position where I was ready to run the first multiplayer game that would pit some of the PCs against each other for the first time. All I had to do was get them there.

Through the Deputy Head of the Guild, I gave invitations to the characters that came visiting him looking for information to a grand and lavish ball the Guild was throwing to mark its anniversary. The invitations were given out by the Guild because the Guild's Master was an exceptionally busy man and the only time he would be able to speak to the Inquisitors would be at the ball. Fortunately, the characters all accepted. Other invitations were stolen and passed on through more shady routes, and eventually I had most of the PCs ready to party.

As this was a major landmark for the campaign, I wanted a realistic setting for it, so set about constructing a bar, tables, benches and even a cake in 54mm scale. The staff at GW Glasgow were very helpful in providing me with the materials I needed, and I suggest that people should just ask their local Games Workshop staff if they want to do something similar, you never know just how favourable a response you could get. The terrain turned out better than I had expected, and drew some appreciative comments from the other veterans.

The game was an event that did the table proud, if I do say so myself! I introduced rules for characters getting drunk, which a few of them did, put a bomb in the cake, and had terrorists working behind the bar and posing as guests. The result was an unsuccessful assassination attempt on the Head of the Guild from the exploding cake, and the brutal death of Michael Muldoon, the owner of the spaceport. This was an incident that I had planned to have dire effects on the campaign, and because of the "good" PCs failure to save the man who was almost single-handedly preventing a massive influx of aliens through his ultra-secure port facility, the balance for forthcoming events shifted very much in the favour of "evil." It was also during this game that I brought Chaos into the proceedings. A daemonhost attacked the follower of one Inquisitor and brain-leached him, stealing information about his leader. It seemed like a really good idea at the time, introducing a new sub-plot and set of baddies, but all it really did was stop people thinking about the real reasons their characters were present; to put down a pro-Tau rebellion. Learning from our mistakes is one thing we all should embrace.

Setting up turning points in campaigns, such as the death of Muldoon, is a great way to keep people interested as they actually feel that their contributions mean something to the campaign as a whole. This is something I learnt from 40k campaigns where nothing actually changed no matter how many games your army won. They just seemed a bit pointless and dull to me. Suddenly having the appearance of four-legged xenos monstrosities, and Eldar Rangers with vengeance against the Imperium on their minds, makes for

uneasy times for the faithful as they find themselves on the back-foot. It meant the players had to start thinking differently and begin to start taking risks. However, it allowed me to introduce new players to the campaign who had characters that I couldn't have previously really justified being there. I did this more out of wanting to get more people involved than actually progressing the story. As it turned out, this was another thing that made things tougher for me to juggle and detracted from the main plot. There is a fine balance between subtly changing the direction of a campaign and throwing it completely off course fortunately; for me I didn't shipwreck things entirely.

As things continued, I put in a rough Experience system, awarding stat bonuses to characters that performed well during games. I also allowed people to search for new equipment, through favours from the Adeptus Mechanicus and the Ecclesiarchy, and buying from traders. One thing that I came to notice was the huge number of Psychic test failures, and risky Action rolls that occurred whenever the psykers attempted anything. This could be traced back to the character generation that had started everyone off with lower Willpowers usually seen on the tabletop, so I hummed and hawed and settled on allowing characters to regain some of their lost Willpower between games. It was not in keeping with the rules, but I imagine training and meditation can

rebuild lost psychic potential, and being God for this campaign allowed me to do this.

## **MY FINAL POINT**

When the end came, I learnt my final lesson. You can't please all the people all the time. After having a stranglehold over the gaming room for five months, it was time for other games to receive some attention, and I was asked to wind things up. This wasn't too much of a problem for me as things had pretty much come a bloody head, so I prepared for a showdown. The last day would have been a Monday as usual, but this one happened to be Valentine's Day, and the Warhammer campaign was now in full swing, so I moved the end day to the Sunday. This, unfortunately, limited the number of players, so I tried to wrap everything up for the people who were unable to attend on the Sunday. Some people fell threw the net, however, something I regret, but that's life unfortunately.

I hope my ramblings have provided entertaining reading, as well as inspiring those of you who've never even considered GMing to get out there with a pen and pencil and begin planning an epic adventure for your gaming group. The only way to gain experience as an Inquisitor gamesmaster is to begin running games; it may seem like a daunting task at first, but the reality is things can only get easier and better for you

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Ruaridh Dall is a keen Inquisitor player and now an experienced GM. He is also an active member of The Conclave – an online role playing forum based on the Inquisitor background. Go to the links section of the Specialist Games website for more information.

and the players.