

WARHAMMER QUEST

BLACKSTONE FORTRESSES



BACKGROUND

THE STORY OF THE BLACKSTONE FORTRESS



THERE IS ONLY WAR

In the grim darkness of the 41st Millennium, Humanity stands on the brink of extinction. Bloodthirsty servants of the Chaos Gods sow terror and ruin across the stars, ravenous hordes of Daemons pour from tears in the fabric of reality, and hostile alien races advance upon the worlds within Mankind's domain. Peace is a distant dream, and the only hope for survival lies in the complete annihilation of the enemies without and within. Yet few know the full truth of the horrors that pervade the galaxy...

After first stepping out into the cold of space some four hundred centuries ago, Humanity swiftly spread out amongst the stars. Records of when and how so many disparate planets across the galaxy were settled have been lost to the ages, destroyed in the fires of war in the long millennia that followed. After this era of meteoric development and technological enlightenment, Mankind was plunged even more quickly into an age of darkness. Mutation ran rampant across countless worlds, psykers began appearing with ever-greater frequency, and the machines designed to serve Humanity turned violently upon their masters. Warp storms of unprecedented ferocity severed the connections between Mankind's colonies, leaving them open to xenos invasion and catastrophic civil strife.

From this time of anarchy emerged a leader known only as the Emperor. After forging Legions of genetically augmented warriors known as the Space Marines, he began a long campaign to unite the fractious elements of Mankind. The psychic signal of the Astronomican was created at this time, allowing Navigators to plot courses over the vast distances between stars. But at the height of this Great Crusade to reclaim the lost colonies scattered across the galaxy, the Emperor's vision was undone. The Warmaster Horus and fully half the Space Marine Legions betrayed the Emperor and sided with the Chaos Gods. Though the Heretics were defeated, it was at great cost, for the Emperor was cut down and his fledgling Imperium was brought to its knees. The Emperor was placed within the Golden Throne, where he has been interred for ten thousand years.

This was the beginning of a new era for Humanity – an era in which reason gave way to superstition, and progress was replaced by stagnation. The looming Chaos and xenos threats drove the gears of the Imperial war machine, and any deviation from the dogmatic institutions of the Imperium were ruthlessly crushed. Millions died every day on battlefields across the galaxy, while those that toiled endlessly to produce the vast supplies of materiel dared not look to the skies for fear of seeing what lurked amongst the stars.



Yet even this oppressive regime has now been divided. The lattice of warp storms known as the Great Rift has cleaved a path across the breadth of the galaxy, bisecting the Imperium. Empyric energies flow from this maw-like gash in reality, and with them the servants of the Chaos Gods emerge from their daemoniac realm to devour worlds. Those Imperial planets to the galactic north of the Great Rift are cut off from the light of the Astronomican, leaving them unable to call for aid against the horrors that besiege them, while in the rest of the Imperium, the beleaguered defenders are stretched thinner than ever before as they desperately try to hold back the Chaos hordes and warlike xenos races encroaching on every side. For Mankind, there is no escaping this war for survival.

But amidst the cataclysmic upheavals, rumours have begun percolating across the galaxy of a newly discovered artefact that could turn the tides of countless wars. What these whispered accounts tell of is no mere weapon, but an ancient planetoid-sized object of unfathomable power – a Blackstone Fortress. In millennia past there had been six other Blackstone Fortresses, and though all have since been destroyed or enveloped within the Great Rift, the devastation they wrought across the stars was the stuff of fearful legend.

The first whispers of this newly uncovered Blackstone Fortress came from the Western Reaches of the Imperium, and have spread towards the furthest extents of Mankind's domain. Ships en route to war zones or fleeing from worlds already lost have detected strange signals emanating from a previously uncharted and unnavigable region of space. Only the bravest and most foolhardy star-farers attempt to locate the source of these impulses, for in these dark times it is perilous to journey into the unknown. Indeed, almost none of those who have ventured towards the signals have returned. Those few who have, however, not only claim to have seen the Blackstone Fortress, but speak of a bounty of arcane technology that lies within its darkened corridors.

The warring factions of the 41st Millennium cannot afford to ignore these stories, but neither can they divert massed forces away from their battlefronts. So it falls to the cunning and the adventurous to find the Blackstone Fortress, to enter its ancient chambers and to unlock the mystery of this monolithic starship.

THE BLACKSTONE FORTRESS

As vast and dark as a sunless planetoid, the Blackstone Fortress is a creation far beyond the technological ken of any race in the galaxy. Who built this colossal craft and for what purpose are questions that many wish to answer, for even in its current state of torpor the Blackstone Fortress is possessed of immense power. Yet this mysterious structure is not unique. Six others like it were found by the Imperium many centuries ago, and the destruction they wrought helped to tear the galaxy in half...

The earliest Imperial records of the Blackstone Fortresses date back to the second millennium of the Emperor's rule. Extensive analysis and attempts to activate the dormant stations proved fruitless, though each generated more than enough power for them to be fitted by the Adeptus Mechanicus with defence turrets and primary weapons systems. Soon, the Blackstone Fortresses boasted military capabilities that rivalled the greatest command stations in the Imperial Navy. But the untapped potential of the Blackstone Fortresses would prove the undoing of their controllers.

Around 143.M41, the Chaos fleets of Abaddon the Despoiler flooded into the Gothic Sector, marking the beginning of the Twelfth Black Crusade. All six Blackstone Fortresses served as fortified naval bases in the Imperium's defence of the sector,

taking up blockading positions above vital worlds and outposts. It was at Rebo V that an enormous armada of Chaos ships broke through the Imperial lines to lay direct siege to one of the Blackstone Fortresses. As the invading fleet drew within range, the Blackstone Fortress' power systems shut down completely, rendering it defenceless against invasion.

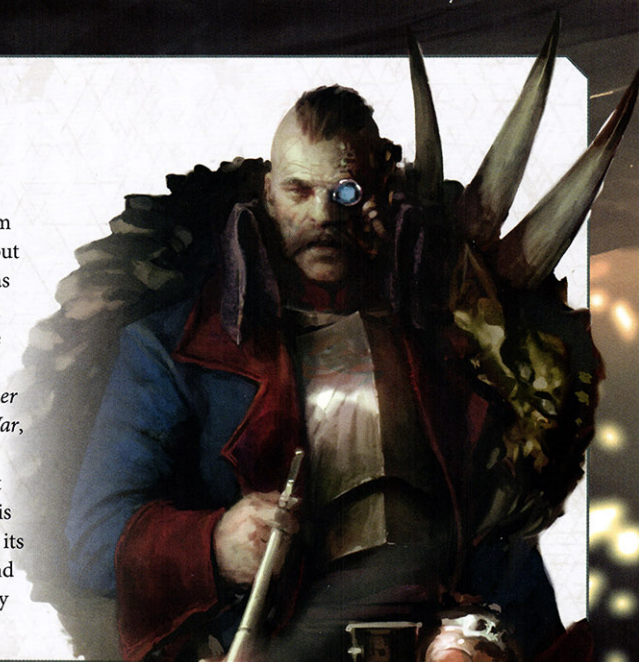
Over the course of the war, two further Blackstone Fortresses were captured by Abaddon's forces. By some arcane means, the Heretic Astartes brought more of the ancient systems into function than had been thought possible by Imperial Tech-Priests. The newly awakened power of all three was used to wreak havoc on the Tarantis star, leading to a supernova that wiped out the entire system. But through grim determination and bloody sacrifice the defenders of the Gothic Sector were able to drive back

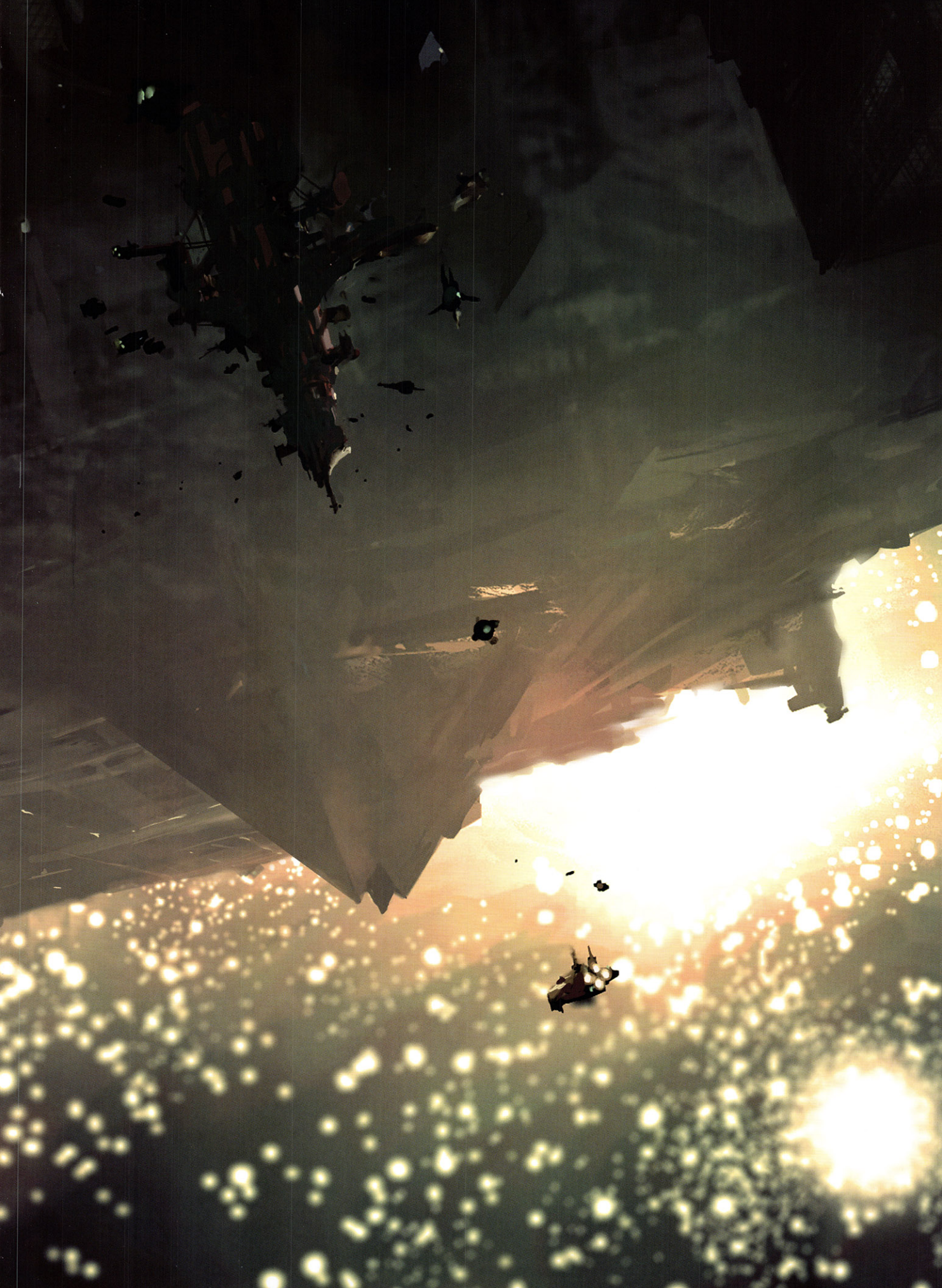
the invaders, and Abaddon fled into the warp with two of his captured Blackstone Fortresses. The remaining four then mysteriously shattered into thousands of pieces.

The next time the power of a Blackstone Fortress was unleashed upon the Imperium was during the Thirteenth Black Crusade. Abaddon hurled one of the colossal stations into the surface of Cadia, and the resulting warp storms that enveloped the planet led to the collapse of the Cadian Gate – the bulwark against the Eye of Terror that had stood for ten millennia. The last of the six Blackstone Fortresses was gifted by Abaddon to Huron Blackheart, the tyrannical master of the Red Corsairs, and now sits within the Maelstrom at the heart of the Great Rift. In all the galaxy, there had been no sign of any other Blackstone Fortresses in existence, until recently...

*– Rogue Trader Janus Draik
Warrant of Trade R38-79N1
Datalog Entry: 11,657*

The rumours that abound have piqued my interest. I am a sceptical man – in part, that is why I am still alive – but if the stories are true, and a new Blackstone Fortress has indeed appeared within the borders of our galaxy, then it shall be me that claims it <<AMENDMENT> for the glory of the Imperium>. Through my contacts in the Daedalian Sub-sector I have procured copies of the *Liber Monumenta* and Ravensburg's *Treatise on the Gothic War*, amongst other less reputable works on the subject of Blackstone Fortresses. There is much in these texts that would give a pusillanimous man pause, but Humanity is fortunate enough to have one as bold as Janus Draik as its servant. I have set a course for the Western Reaches, and upon arrival will investigate – to the fullest extent of my powers – these intriguing rumours.





As the Great Rift tore open, the entire galaxy was flooded with waves of Chaos energy. Countless systems were destroyed by the empyric deluge, embroiled in newly formed warp storms or beset by ravenous Daemons. But other regions of space that had been shrouded for millennia were suddenly unveiled. In the Imperium's Western Reaches, at the far edge of Segmentum Pacificus, a patch of reality known to be completely unnavigable and astropathically silent began to emit strange signals. Reaching the source of these signals proved difficult, but from those vessels that made the journey came whispers of a monumental discovery – another Blackstone Fortress.

The westernmost division of the Imperium is known as the Segmentum Pacificus, one of the five Segmentae Majoris that comprise the Emperor's domain. Like all Imperial territory, the Segmentum Pacificus is not a contiguous network of systems, but rather a loose scattering of sectors and sub-sectors, divided by large swathes of dead space and hostile territory. Even before the opening of the Great Rift, this Segmentum was riven by mass uprisings and Chaos invasions in what came to be called the Night of a Thousand Rebellions.

The Blackstone Fortress is located in what was once a silent zone. No routes of warp travel passed through this region, and no known webway spars emerged into realspace within the vicinity. Yet there are now those who claim to have entered this space, and to have seen the gargantuan creation that lies at its heart. Such rumours have spread quickly, for a Blackstone Fortress is a treasure without compare.

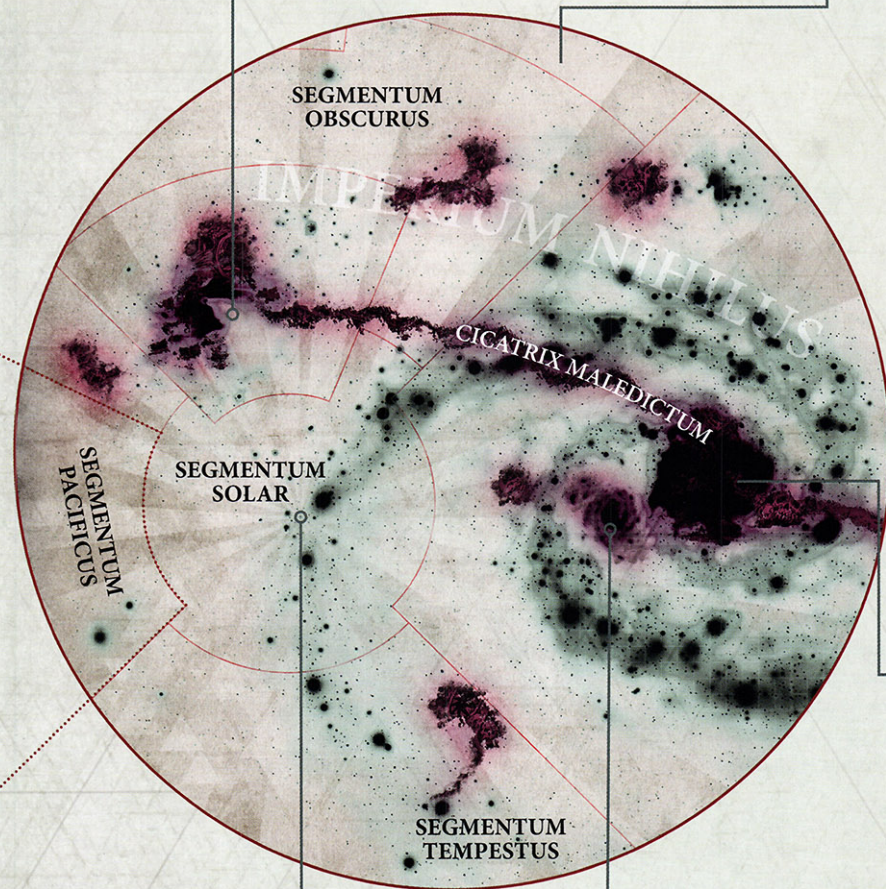


CADIA

The Blackstone Fortress known as the *Will of Eternity* was crippled during the siege of Cadia, but by sending the gigantic vessel hurtling into the planet Abaddon was able to sunder the Imperial world in a single fell blow.

THE IMPERIUM Nihilus

When the Great Rift opened, the region of space to its north was plunged into darkness. The light of the Astronomican that had bridged the vast distances between Imperial systems was cut off, leaving untold worlds isolated amidst the emerging terrors. Imperial, Chaos and xenos forces now desperately search for weapons that can be brought to bear in this nightmarish zone of reality.



THE GREAT RIFT

Known as the Cicatrix Maledictum, the Mouth of Ruin and a thousand other names, the Great Rift is a confluence of raging warp storms that stretches across the entire breadth of the galaxy. From this empyric scar pour the foul servants of the Chaos Gods, ravenous Daemons and bloodthirsty Heretic Astartes, who sow the stars with terror and destruction. Navigation and astropathic communication across the Great Rift is impossible, save for through those rare and perilous passageways that bridge the roiling tempests.

HOLY TERRA

The centre of the Imperium and the seat of the Emperor of Mankind, Terra is the most heavily fortified and defended planet in the galaxy. It is here that the impossibly complex task of organising the supply, defence and compliance of a million worlds is undertaken. Through labyrinthine channels of bureaucracy and ritual, Humanity is steered towards the common purposes of survival and supremacy.

THE MAELSTROM

One of the largest and fiercest clusters of warp storms, the Maelstrom has raged for millennia, and is now adjoined to the mangled lattice of the Great Rift. During the Terran Crusade, the Imperial fleet led by the arisen Primarch Roboute Guilliman were drawn into the Maelstrom, and there they discovered the last of the six original Blackstone Fortresses, now in the hands of Huron Blackheart and his Red Corsairs.



A NEW DISCOVERY

To reach the Blackstone Fortress requires a harrowing journey, navigating to the distant edge of the Imperium through sectors in which heresy and Chaos have taken hold. Yet it is the last leg of the voyage that is most perilous, for there are no warp charts of the silent zone in which the Blackstone Fortress lies, and the light of the Astronomican becomes distorted beyond recognition as it beams further into this dead space. As such, the exact position of the Blackstone Fortress is only vaguely known, for few travellers have managed to locate it, and fewer still have returned.

Those who follow the signals emanating from the Blackstone Fortress may be able to navigate the uncharted tracts of warp space or the vast void expanses that separate it from the nearest stars. At the end of this journey is a sprawling field of debris stretching for millions of miles in all directions – a dense cloud made of the remnants of ancient warships and fragmented battle stations. Where this astral detritus came from and how it came to surround the Blackstone Fortress is a mystery. Some bear insignia from the early millennia of the Imperium, whereas others are branded with Chaos marks, Aeldari runes or

Necron glyphs. But the overwhelming majority are of designs not captured by Imperial records, giving hint to numerous ancient xenos species that vanished long before Mankind took to the stars. The number of these wrecks is beyond counting, but each bears evidence of some great and destructive force that was levelled against them, with enormous holes burnt clean through their hulls, and fuselages crushed as though in the grip of mighty claws.

The wrecks orbit slowly around the Blackstone Fortress, which lies hidden at the centre of this nebula of debris. Newly arriving vessels

dare not travel too close, for aside from the danger of colliding with haphazardly floating wreckage, there is the risk that whatever apocalyptic armaments caused such obliteration could still be operational. Yet there is much to entice those who have made the voyage to the edge of the debris cloud. Amongst the wrecks there are weapons systems, star charts and archeotech unseen elsewhere in the galaxy, and scavenger crews are sent out in small shuttles to pick clean the skeletal remains of the dead ships. But the truly adventurous delve even further into the nebula, wending their way through the floating graveyard towards the Blackstone Fortress itself.



PRECIPICE

Travelling into the nebula requires a vessel small and nimble enough to avoid the colossal debris drifts and eddies of scrap that constantly circulate. There are no maps to guide pilots and navigators towards relatively clear channels – or if such charts do exist, they are guarded closely by those who possess them. But a craft that is able to survive eventually emerges into a sphere of empty space, at the heart of which lies the Blackstone Fortress.

Under the shadow of the monolithic structure there is a small way station. Cobbled together from pieces of scrap and anchored to a solitary node of warp-entangled space, it is called Precipice by its ragtag inhabitants. Upon arrival, each vessel is lashed to one of Precipice's mooring spars, preventing it from being drawn in by the massive gravity well of the Blackstone Fortress, and before being allowed to enter the station an ultimatum is delivered to the crew –

set aside animosities, ancient hatreds and petty factionalism before coming on board, or face annihilation. Such aggressive precautions are a necessity, for Precipice is populated with star-farers from disparate warring races who must be dissuaded from tearing each other, and the station, apart. An ad hoc cadre of the most powerful and influential captains enforce this uneasy truce, though acts of sabotage and assassination are still commonplace, especially when it serves these captains' purposes.

Regardless of its dangers, Precipice is the final port of call for those brave and brash enough to enter the Blackstone Fortress itself. It serves as a bartering point where travellers can buy, sell or steal the equipment and knowledge needed to survive the horrors that lie ahead of them, and a locale where adventurers of every ilk can form temporary alliances for shared survival. It is the last point of reason before plunging into a realm of madness.

– *Rogue Trader Jannus Draik*
Warrant of Trade R38-79N1
Datalog Entry: 11,703

Unless I am mistaken – and I am rarely mistaken – the accounts of a Blackstone Fortresses having been uncovered are true. By means of parley with the various scavenger factions <see datalog entries 11,696c–11,701> I have learnt of a stable port at the centre of the wreckage nebula, and am currently en route to this station of 'Precipice'. Due to the sheer mass of floating debris, it was necessary to leave the *Draikstar* at the nebula's edge, along with the vast majority of my personnel to guard it. I feel rather nostalgic going forth in my shuttle – after all, it was aboard *Vanguard* that I conducted my earliest conquests, expanding the Emperor's domain while enjoying aged amasec.

ENTERING THE DARKNESS

The mechanisms by which the Blackstone Fortress operates are little understood, but there are ways to gain access to its interior. Apertures of varying sizes pock the massive facets of the fortress. Some are large enough to dock a Retribution-class battleship, while others are so small that a human can barely fit through them. Those who venture from Precipice through these apertures may find ways into lightless internal mausoleums scattered with technological treasures of many a forgotten age, or they may simply be obliterated by the abstruse defence systems of the fortress.

The interior of the Blackstone Fortress is a brutalist labyrinth of corridors and chambers. Some of its geometric halls are vast, arrayed with spire-like towers along their length, or dropping away into yawning chasms lit with rivulets of energy. Others are narrow and winding, their acutely twisting floors covered with millennia of debris. Indecipherable control panels created by those dead races that have tried to harness the Blackstone Fortress' power line the floors and walls, and alongside these are remnants of those who ventured inside in ages past, or who were brought within its bounds against their will. Supply crates, desiccated corpses and decaying exploration vehicles are strewn haphazardly throughout the chambers, along with fragmented pieces of once-grand spacecraft. While some of this morbid detritus bears the symbols or biology of known races, most is completely

unrecognisable, either too ancient or too esoteric to be identified. Relics of arcane technology lie clutched in the hands of the ancient dead, or buried amongst heaps of slowly corroding scrap, waiting to be collected by those intrepid enough to find them and pry them free. It is for this archeotech that adventurers set out from Precipice.

The opening closest to Precipice is known as the Stygian Aperture. Capable of docking a handful of small craft, it is said to be the safest and most stable port of ingress yet found. Within the Stygian Aperture are a number of maglev transport chambers that, when entered and activated, descend deep inside the fortress. The operation of these chambers is far from precise. By manipulating the enigmatic rune interfaces that are arrayed across the tetra-form interior of the chamber, travel can be initiated, but dictating

where in the Blackstone Fortress the chamber will go is beyond the ken of any who have thus far set foot inside.

Once a maglev chamber arrives at its destination it falls silent, powering down for an hour, a week or even longer. As such, those on board have little choice but to press forwards, probing their way through the warren-like halls until they find another maglev transport to take them back to the surface. The stranded explorers must keep their wits about them as they plumb the darkness, lest they stumble into a sudden plunging abyss, be scalded to death by an unseen hyperthermal vent, or trigger one of the latent defence mechanisms that are hidden within the various chambers.

Whatever route is taken cannot be mapped, for unlike in the other known Blackstone Fortresses, the

- *Rogue Trader Jannus Draik*
Warrant of Trade R38-79N1
Datalog Entry: 11,707b

<<PREAMBLE> Long-range vox continues to prove fruitless. Until further notice, datalog entries will be stored in *Vanguard's* cogitator banks, to be transferred manually for astropathic relay upon return to the *Draikstar*.>

I understand now the nature of Precipice – it is a cyst inside which the filth of the galaxy has pooled. Within its corroded corridors and makeshift bazaars I have crossed paths with abhumans and xenos who, in a more Imperium-compliant setting, I would have cut down immediately, if only for the sake of propriety. But alas, the dictates of this station <see datalog 11,707a> prevent me from doing so. I have ordered those attachés and bodyguards who have accompanied me thus far to remain strictly aboard *Vanguard*, and have implemented Hostile Territory security settings. Should any of the local scum try to interfere with my shuttle, they shall not live long enough to regret it.

Yet despite the inherent tastelessness of such intermingling, perhaps there is some merit to the arrangement on Precipice. All aboard possess a degree of grit and determination <that is admirable, regardless of their species <REDACT BEFORE TRANSMISSION>>, and a handful of them may even prove useful as temporary allies. I have glimpsed the archeotech taken from the Blackstone Fortress, and over the entire course of my Warrant I have rarely seen objects of such intrinsic value. I must enter, even if it means venturing alongside this crop of undesirables.

internal structure of this creation reshapes itself regularly. Rooms that have been passed through detach from the corridors to which they led, being replaced by occluding walls or simply left as yawning chasms. Similarly, paths are assembled from the chambers that tessellate the craft's unseen dimensions. Why the rooms move and what determines their arrangement can only be guessed at, but those who walk these shifting halls have a dreadful suspicion that the fortress is aware of those inside, and is dictating where they can roam.

The inherent danger and uncertainty of exploring the Blackstone Fortress means that only that boldest and most determined occupants of Precipice ever undertake an expedition. But still the draw to enter is strong. Most of the debris scattered inside is even older and more esoteric than that found amongst the nebula of floating wreckage that surrounds the fortress. It has been theorised that the broken craft of the nebula are drawn in by the Blackstone Fortress' gravity and consumed within the largest apertures, thus providing a form of sustenance. Their remnant pieces are then scattered through the innards of the monolithic space station as its chambers shift. In this way the fortress' halls are always lined with incalculable riches. Furthermore, of those who do venture inside, only a fraction ever emerge. Unwary explorers may find themselves cut off from any route of escape, or suddenly surrounded by rooms laden with defence systems that each promise a uniquely horrific demise. Whatever treasures these unfortunates had gathered before their end also lie ready to be recovered. Yet the most valuable commodity is information on the fortress itself. Scans made by the most advanced craft at Precipice have revealed stable nodes amongst the constantly shuffling chambers – so-called hidden vaults – though what they contain is still unknown. Any data on these vaults or clues as to how to steer the maglev transports towards them are priceless finds.



THE DANGER WITHIN

Every expedition inside the Blackstone Fortress is fraught with peril. Aside from the ceaselessly rearranging architecture and deadly defence systems, there are hostile entities lurking in the darkness. Whilst delving through the halls, adventurers may cross paths with clusters of drone-like sentries, packs of predatory creatures and squads of bloodthirsty warriors. But the greatest danger by far is the incomprehensible sentience of the Blackstone Fortress itself, for the purpose of its existence and the true extent of its power are yet to be discovered.

Some of the entities encountered within the Blackstone Fortress appear to be native to the space station, their form imitating its angular, interlocking structure. But others are creatures from far-flung corners of the galaxy, from savage Ur-Ghuls usually found in the Dark City of Commorragh, to the twisted servants of the Chaos Gods.

As adventurers and hostiles roam the halls, they invariably cross paths. The ensuing firefights are tense and brutal, with distrust and animosity between the explorers temporarily set aside until the common enemy has been eliminated. Fighters dive for cover behind wreckage or duck into trench-like openings in the floors and walls. From there they lay down hails of covering fire while their makeshift allies move to positions of advantage, or attempt to outflank and snipe their foes through gaps in the debris.

The sounds of guns, grenades and bellowed war cries thunder through the dark halls, and those fighters who fall are picked clean after battle's end, their wargear either taken by the survivors or consumed by the folding architecture of the fortress itself.

Perhaps the most terrifying enemies encountered within the Blackstone Fortress are the Chaos Space Marines led by the tyrannical Lord Obsidius Mallex. How long these Heretic Astartes have been entombed within the monolithic space station is unclear, but no trace of a Chaos fleet has yet been seen in the nebula surrounding the fortress. However, fragments of a Heretic Astartes ship have been found scattered through the fortress, and amongst the foul litanies inscribed on these fragments are passages celebrating the Fall of Cadia. The information traders of Precipice have concluded that these

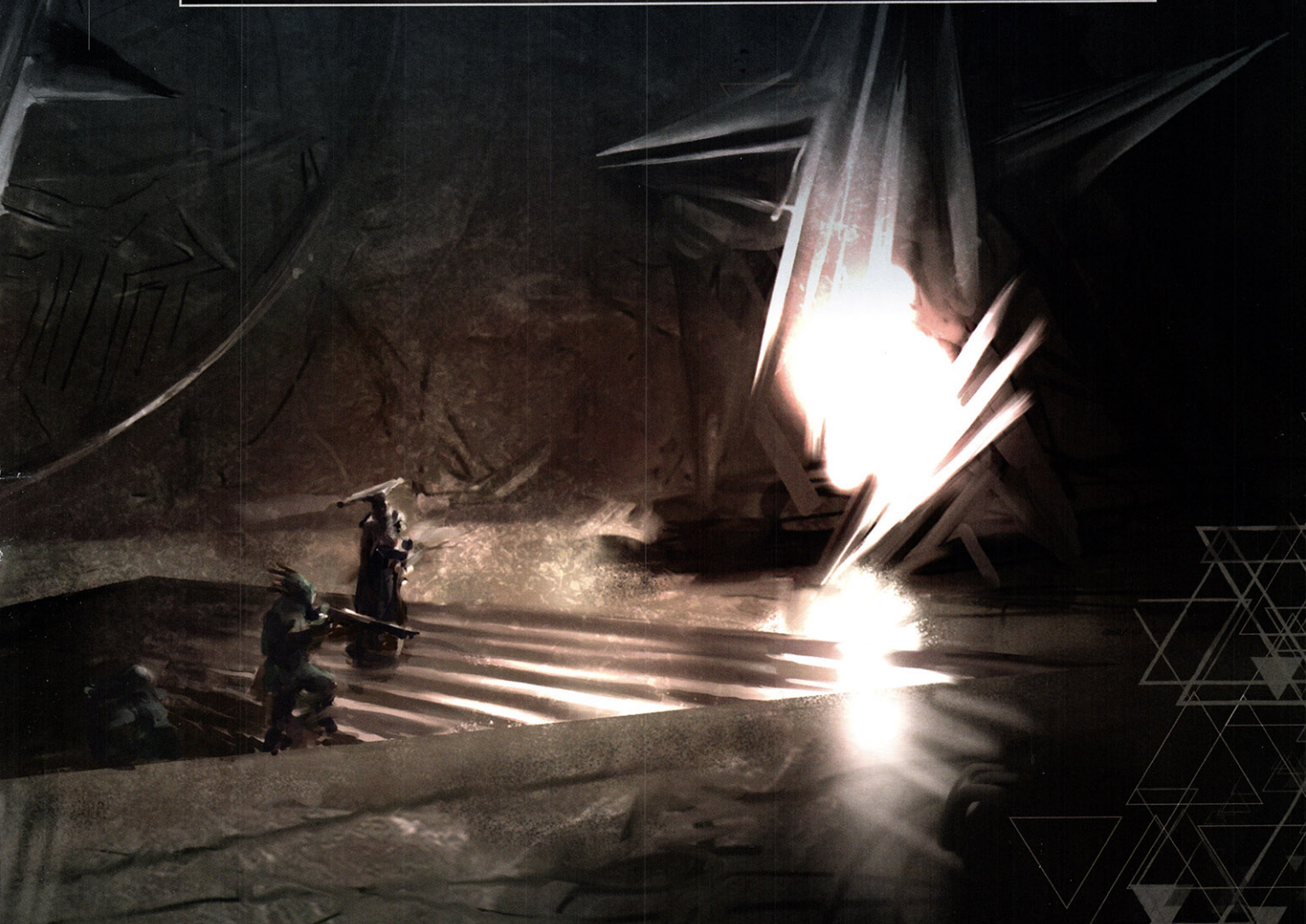
are parts of the Chaos Space Marines' vessel, which was drawn in and devoured by the Blackstone Fortress after the opening of the Great Rift.

Many on Precipice believe the Blackstone Fortress has travelled across space and time, collecting its vile menagerie of creatures. Others think there may be technologies nested amongst the fortress' chambers that allow it to reach out and pluck entities from realspace, the webway or even the warp. What is known is that the Blackstone Fortress steers these aggressive entities towards those who enter its walls, using them like the particles of an immune system to purge intruders. But even more disturbing is the evidence that the fortress may be pitting those within its walls against each other while it slowly awakens, biding its time as it prepares for some as yet unrealised purpose.

*- Rogue Trader Janus Drink
Warrant of Trade R.38-79N1
Datalog Entry: 11,707d*

Preparations for my first expedition are almost complete. I have formed compacts with some of the denizens of Precipice to venture into the fortress together. In each case, our surface motives align closely enough that we can temporarily set aside our mutual mistrust for the duration of an expedition. Some of these individuals are of the Imperial ilk, whereas others are of species that Humanity has deigned to cooperate with at various stages, and with varying degrees of success. These alliances are not robust or elegant, but they are necessary.

Through considerable commerce with the information traders, I have collected the learnings of previous parties of explorers. <<SIDEBAR> The traders in Precipice are not as pliable as those found in other back-sector outposts. I must maintain my wiles whilst aboard.> Firstly, large venturing groups are inviable, as only a handful of individuals can fit in each maglev chamber, and no one has discerned how to direct multiple transports to the same location within the Blackstone Fortress. Secondly, though the internal structure of the fortress is inconstant, there are stable nodes, known in the local parlance as 'hidden vaults', that have not yet been accessed – at least, not by anyone who has returned alive. Thirdly, nothing within the fortress can be trusted. This third observation is part of an almost superstitious belief that the Blackstone Fortress 'sees' all that happens inside its bounds, and that it actively guards its most precious treasures. I cannot yet speak to the validity of this, but I hope that I will soon be able to.



EXPLORERS

To enter the Blackstone Fortress is to invite an inglorious and horrific end, and none who undertake such risks do so lightly. Some seek valuable archeotech that they can sell for an unimaginable fortune, others search for powerful relics lost to their race millennia ago, while others still strive to unlock the cataclysmic power of the Blackstone Fortress itself. But regardless of motive, all must work together if they hope to return to Precipice alive.

JANUS DRAIK

Intrepid and audacious, Janus Draik has travelled far and wide in search of rare commodities to sell to Humanity's ruling elite. As a Rogue Trader, his Warrant of Trade grants him the authority to explore beyond the charted regions of Imperial space and to negotiate agreements with xenos races, so long as such activities serve to strengthen the Imperium. He is a deft duellist, and has slain all manner of creatures over the course of his travels. By locating and exploring the Blackstone Fortress, Draik hopes to unlock the terrifying power of the space station and claim it for Mankind. At the same time, any archeotech he finds that could be sold or used in future pursuits makes a welcome addition to his ship's holds.

ESPERN LOCARNO

An agent of House Locarno – one of the great Navigator Houses – Espern Locarno is a sanctioned Imperial mutant. Like all of his kind, Espern has a third eye capable of both seeing into the immaterium and of unleashing devastating warp energy at those upon whom its gaze is cast. When news of the Blackstone Fortress reached House Locarno, Espern was sent to investigate, for it was believed by the House's logistors that, amongst the wreckage subsumed by the fortress, there could be cargoes from millennia past for which the Navigator House still held contracts. Furthermore, Espern hopes to obtain the time- and space-bending technologies of the Blackstone Fortress itself, which are greatly desired by the star-faring Navigators.

ROGUE TRADER



IMPERIAL NAVIGATOR



TADDEUS THE PURIFIER

As an Adeptus Ministorum Priest, Taddeus the Purifier has spread faith in the Emperor's godhood across the stars. Whether amongst the unwashed rabble of a teeming hive world or fighting alongside the heaving ranks of Astra Militarum soldiery, his words steer Imperial souls towards righteousness, and are backed up by brutal swings of his power maul. More than one planetary governor has been brought low by Taddeus, his winnowing gaze seeing through their finery to detect deep-seated corruption or psychic mutation. In truth, bringing the justice of the faithful to those loftiest of individuals is the one true joy in which Taddeus indulges, for in the pyre-flames of the accused he sees images that he believes to be messages from the God-Emperor. He saw one such image whilst immolating an impenitent Navyman who had spread rumours about the Blackstone Fortress. This vision showed Taddeus that he must travel to the Western Reaches and carry the Emperor's light into the darkness. Now that he has arrived at Precipice, the Purifier sees that there is much righteous work for him to undertake, both in cleansing the heretical inhabitants of the Blackstone Fortress and in cementing the Imperial Creed within the settlement itself.

PIOUS VORNE

Vorne is a missionary in the service of Taddeus the Purifier, having been taken under his wing when she was little more than a teenager. She grew up amongst the refinery clans on the hive world of Gethsemane, and when the Purifier arrived to weed out the rumoured Chaos cults that were fomenting heresy amongst the workers, Vorne watched the priest's actions with open admiration. Seven of her clanspeople were identified as potential heretics, and were lashed to a pyre-stake for purification, but after they had been doused in sacred oils, one slipped his bonds and fled. The fugitive raced into the crowd of onlookers, away from the bellowing Taddeus and straight into Vorne, who pushed the oil-drenched man into an exposed pilot light on the side of an alchomite stack. So intense was the heat of the man's combustion that the skin on Vorne's lips and hands was burnt away, yet still she watched eagerly until the screaming heretic had been reduced to ash. Taddeus saw one like himself in Vorne, and gave her the name Pious, as well as a flamer with which she could continue the Emperor's work. Now, as she heads into the Blackstone Fortress, Pious Vorne seeks to bring righteous fire to those who have not seen the light of the Imperium.

MINISTORUM PRIEST



MISSIONARY ZEALOT



AMALLYN SHADOWGUIDE

As a Ranger, Amallyn Shadowguide is used to operating far from her craftworld home of Biel-Tan. For long centuries she has travelled the webway, the lattice-like sub-dimension that connects distant stars, hunting down the enemies of her people and seeking ways to return the Aeldari race to its former glory. Her craftworld was fractured during a massive battle – ravenous Daemons fought the Avatar of the newly formed Aeldari god Ynnead in a conflict so cataclysmic that it helped tear open the Great Rift. The Daemon hordes were driven back, the enormous spacecraft was damaged beyond repair, and many of the Asuryani souls stored within its Infinity Circuit were lost forever. After receiving word from Biel-Tan's Farseers, Amallyn set out to find the Blackstone Fortress, for they had foreseen that deep within its labyrinthine corridors were millennia-old remnants of Aeldari technology that might be used to restore their craftworld. There are few amongst the Asuryani better suited to this task than Amallyn Shadowguide. Her very name is derived from the Aeldari word *otMensha*, which means 'seeker through shadows', and is borne by those who strive to master the darkness that surrounds them, as well as the darkness within themselves.

ASURYANI RANGER



DAHYAK GREKH

A member of the mercenary species known as the Kroot, Dahyak Grekh is an experienced tracker for hire. Kroot are commonly encountered as auxiliaries deployed by the T'au Empire, and are known as savage, animalistic warriors who devour the flesh of those they kill in battle. Many adventurers on Precipice think that trusting such a bestial creature is tantamount to ripping out one's own throat, but little do they know how crucial the mercenary culture is to the Kroot, and how seriously they take their violent profession. Each new contract fulfilled wins them the means to travel further across the stars, and in this way they are able to absorb the varied genetic traits of those foes they devour. To betray a client would be to jeopardise this way of life, and to stem the flow of consumed flesh that allows their entire species to evolve. Dahyak himself has honed his craft of tracking and slaughtering enemies in multiple war zones, and in service to various client races. He cares not whom he serves, so long as they pay. But in devouring the denizens of the Blackstone Fortress, Dahyak has learnt much of the darkened maze. He has told no one what he has discovered in this way, but now tirelessly searches for sacred Kroot artefacts hidden within the shifting halls.

KROOT TRACKER



UR-025

The Imperial Robot UR-025 is an oddity, even by the standards of Precipice. Clad in thick metallic plating and bearing devastating weaponry, this battle-machine is a highly sought-after ally for those looking to venture into the Blackstone Fortress. Having arrived at Precipice on a dilapidated Imperial junk hauler, it emitted an auto-proclamation claiming it had been sent by Magos-Ethericus Nantcos III as an autonomous data-collection unit, and that it had directives for sanctioned eradication of those who impeded its Omnissiah-given duty. But in truth, the robot is far more ancient than anyone realises. Its origins date back to the Dark Age of Technology, when Mankind built thinking machines that eventually turned violently upon their masters. Known as the Men of Iron, these sentient robots were all but wiped out. Yet UR-025 has persisted over the long millennia, hiding on the fringes of the galaxy and allowing others to believe it is an automatus tool of the Imperium. Unlike the other inhabitants of Precipice, it cares little for the trinkets of xenos races that have been subsumed by the Blackstone Fortress. Instead, it seeks to obtain the technologies of the fortress itself, for in the colossal space station UR-025 sees a kindred being.



IMPERIAL ROBOT

REIN & RAUS

Wily, cunning and unabashedly larcenous, the twins Rein and Raus Gaffar are admired and distrusted in equal measure on Precipice. As members of the abhuman species known as Ratlings, they are comfortable operating on the fringes of society, and are quick to demonstrate that their small statures do not make them easy targets for violence. As far as anyone has been able to tell, Rein and Raus were stowaways aboard a ship that was following the signals emitted by the fortress, and upon reaching the wreckage nebula they 'borrowed' a smaller vessel with which to travel through the debris. No one has been able to figure out if the pair had planned this journey ahead of time or if each leg was simply an improvisation. Regardless, they have proven themselves worthy combatants and explorers since their arrival, with Rein being a crackshot sniper and Raus a nimble acrobat. The gear they bear suggests that they were once part of an Astra Militarum Auxilla regiment, but they have shown no signs that they are operating as part of a sanctioned mission. With light fingers they rifle through the archeotech pulled from the Blackstone Fortress, keeping the best for themselves and selling the rest for a healthy profit.

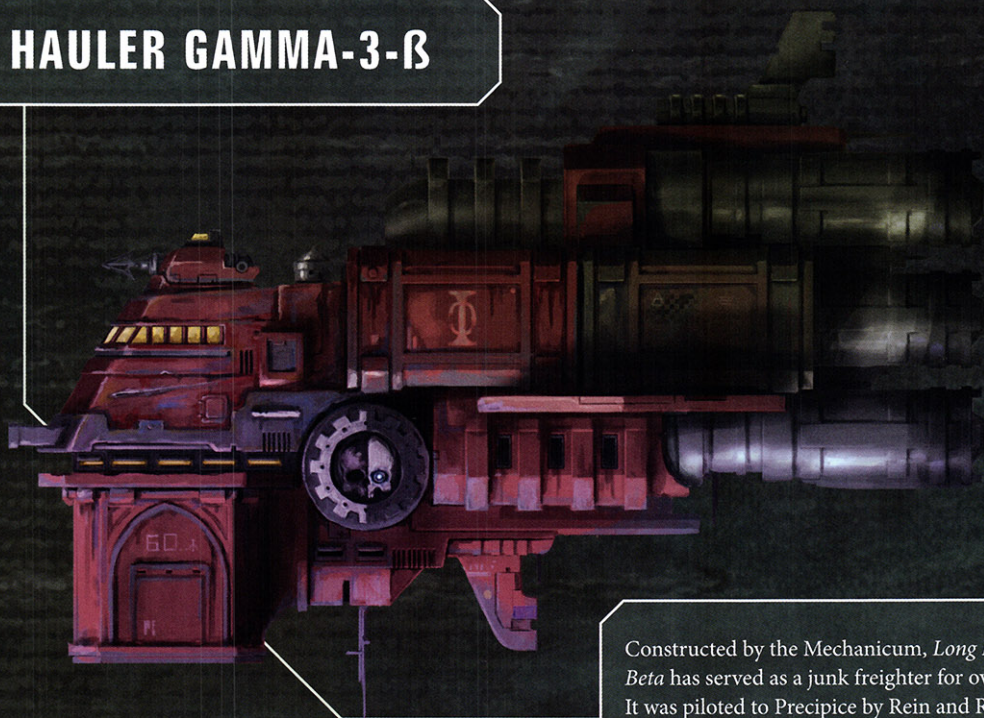
RATLING TWINS



VESSELS OF PRECIPICE

Only those craft small enough to pass through the wreckage nebula ever make it to Precipice. As such, the explorers of the Blackstone Fortress must draw upon what limited resources they are able to bring with them in order to survive, trading amongst each other and leveraging the capabilities of their various vessels to the fullest extent.

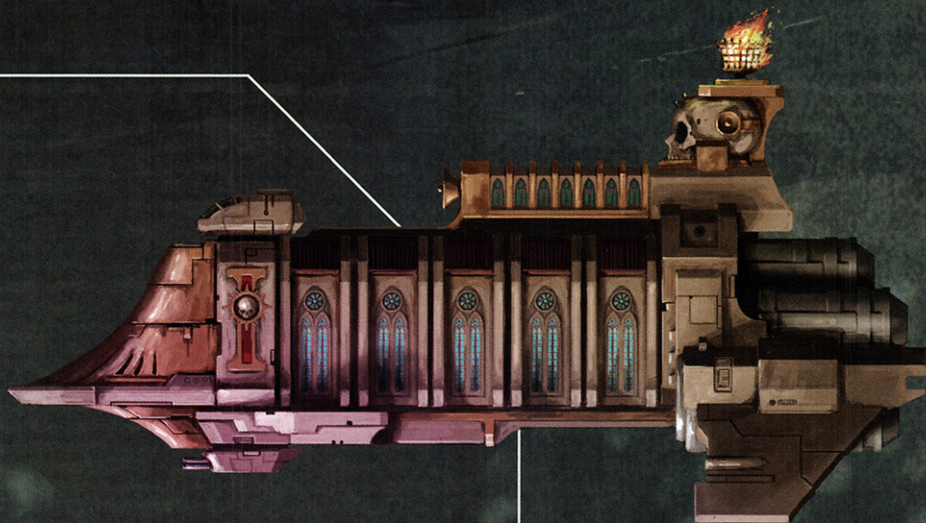
LONG HAULER GAMMA-3-B



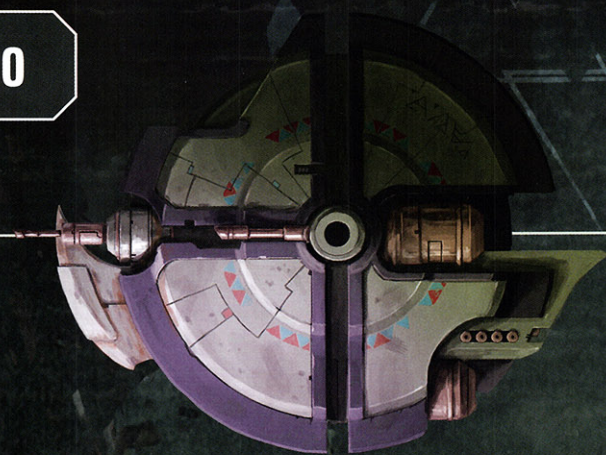
Constructed by the Mechanicum, *Long Hauler Gamma-3-Beta* has served as a junk freighter for over ten millennia. It was piloted to Precipice by Rein and Raus – though how it came into their possession is not clear – and upon arrival at the space station, the Imperial Robot UR-025 emerged from the vessel's cluttered hanger.

CLARION

As a missionary vessel of the Adeptus Ministorum, *Clarion* serves as a mobile cathedrum, complete with stained armaglass windows and infra-wave laud hailers. Its hallowed decks contain all manner of implements that Taddeus the Purifier and his disciple, Pious Vorne, use to ply their craft, allowing them to spread faith in the Imperial cult through fear and excruciation.

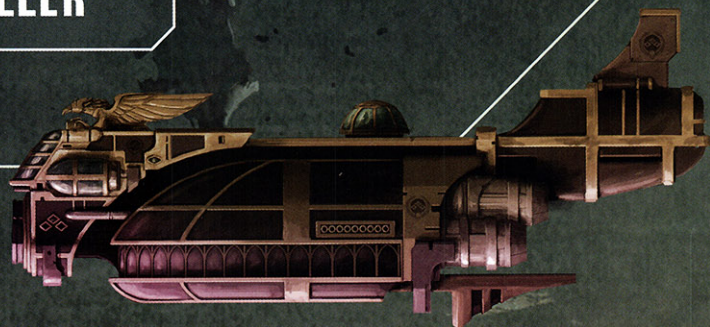


KRAAV'CHA'TO



Belonging to the mercenary tracker Dahyak Grekh, this nimble Kroot vessel was designed for hunting in low-pressure environs and in the upper atmospheres of gas giants. The *Kraav'cha'to*'s decks are littered with grisly trophies, as well as databanks containing details of myriad ongoing contracts.

TRAVELLER



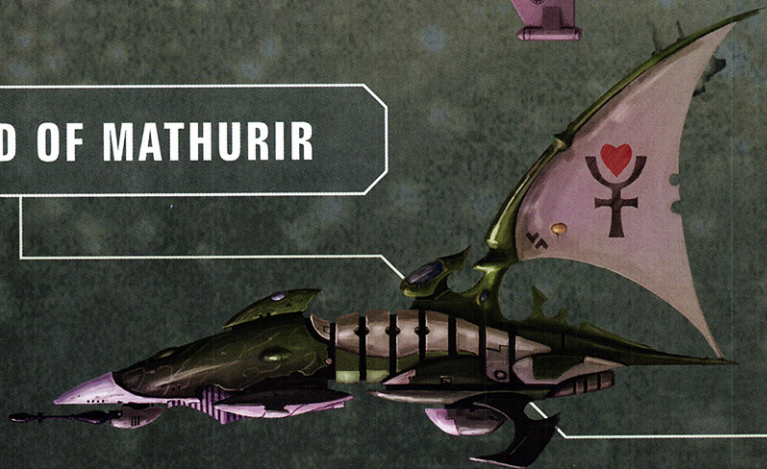
The tactical operations vessel *Traveller* has served House Locarno for many thousands of years, and despite its small size contains an impressive array of communications and warp-manipulation technologies. Its controls are attuned to the psychic signal of its current captain – Espern Locarno – allowing the Navigator agent to pilot the vessel remotely.

VANGUARD



This sleek and manoeuvrable shuttle has been in Janus Draik's possession since he first inherited his Warrant of Trade. A handful of Draik's most trusted attachés have accompanied him aboard *Vanguard*, where they aide him in his exploits and guard his considerable collection of xeno-tech artefacts.

STEED OF MATHURIR



Small enough to traverse all but the narrowest webway spars, yet capable of enduring the difficult climbs of long-lost maiden worlds, the *Steed of Mathurir* is a peerless exploration vessel. Its suite of macro- and micro-navigation equipment has allowed Amallyn Shadowguide to travel far and wide in her search for ancient Aeldari artefacts.

HOSTILES

Hailing from the darkest corners of realspace and beyond, the entities inhabiting the Blackstone Fortress are as varied as they are deadly. They prowl the shifting chambers, herded by the fortress' malefic will towards those who enter from outside, where their inherent brutality is put to its use. Those that fall in combat simply add to the piled detritus that lines the corridors, or else are restored by arcane technologies so that they may continue to maraud.

SERVANTS OF THE ABYSS

OBSIDIUS MALLEX

Obsidius Mallex is the tyrannical Chaos Lord of the warband known as the Servants of the Abyss. He fought in the ferocious naval battles far above the surface of Cadia during the Thirteenth Black Crusade. Aboard his Hades-class heavy cruiser, *Impaler*, Mallex and his warband watched as the *Will of Eternity* crashed into the surface of the world, obliterating the last of the Imperial forces that had defended the planet for a hundred centuries. In the ensuing empyric explosion, *Impaler* was sent hurtling into the warp, where it was pulled along by currents neither natural nor daemonic in origin. It emerged in the Western Reaches of the galaxy, inside the Blackstone Fortress. Warp emergencies into solid objects within realspace usually lead to cataclysmic explosions in which all overlapping matter is utterly destroyed, but by some esoteric means, *Impaler* was melded with the fortress, its grotesquely twisted hulls intersplicing with the internal structures of the colossal host. As the tessellating chambers rearranged themselves, *Impaler* was ripped apart, stranding Mallex and his warband.

"I have seen the destruction wrought by the Blackstone Fortresses. It is my destiny to wield such power. This prison of ours shall soon become my dark hammer, and with it I shall smite the stars."

- Obsidius Mallex, from the throne of Impaler

Now the Chaos Lord rages in the darkness, taking out his fury at being made a captive upon all those who dare enter the boundaries of the fortress. But through his seething anger Mallex sees that there is a great prize to be claimed. It was with the other Blackstone Fortresses that Abaddon wrought such widespread devastation during the Gothic War, and it was with the *Will of Eternity* that the defences on Cadia were finally obliterated. If he could bend the awesome technologies of the Blackstone Fortress to his will, Mallex would become a force of destruction without compare. So it is that he searches for a way to turn his prison into a weapon, striving to control the Blackstone Fortress before Abaddon himself comes to claim this dreadful bounty.

CHAOS SPACE MARINES

The most terrifying of the Servants of the Abyss are the Chaos Space Marines. Like all of their ilk, they are horrific mockeries of the Adeptus Astartes of the Imperium, having fallen to the corrupting influences of the Dark Gods. Over the long millennia, their weaponry and armour have become twisted into nightmarish shapes, and their psycho-indoctrinated sense of duty and honour has been replaced with selfish avarice and unquenchable hatred.



The Chaos Space Marines that were inside *Impaler* when it reemerged from the warp within the Blackstone Fortress now serve as bodyguards to their lord, Obsidius Mallex, shadowing him as he searches for a means to awaken the ancient edifice and harness its apocalyptic power for himself. When interlopers aboard the vast structure are encountered, the Chaos Space Marines ruthlessly attack them on sight, blasting their enemies into bloody chunks with a cruel efficiency born of untold centuries of warfare. Even Mallex does not know how many of his Chaos Space Marines survived their battleship's demise and are now scattered throughout the Blackstone Fortress' shifting corridors, for the structure seemingly strives to keep the Servants of the Abyss divided. This irks the Chaos Lord greatly, for not only does it deny him the full strength of his warband, but it allows the more ambitious Chaos Space Marines to seek out for themselves the arcane secrets of their prison. As they delve deeper into the Blackstone Fortress' chambers, many of these abhorrent transhuman warriors hope to acquire power enough to slay Lord Obsidius Mallex and usurp leadership of the Servants of the Abyss.

TRAITOR GUARDSMEN

Soldiers that once served in the regiments of the Astra Militarum function as slaves and worshippers for the Servants of the Abyss. Swayed by promises of power beyond imagining, and twisted in spirit by the litanies of heretical demagogues, these Traitor Guardsmen scream praises to the Chaos Gods as they wage war. Those most blessed by the Ruinous Powers bear mutations in their flesh, with teeth growing into cruel fangs or eyes glowing with baleful light. They see the Chaos Space Marines under whom they serve as gods – proof of the immortality that could be theirs if they are worthy. Though at times entire regiments fall to the insidious taint of Chaos, those of the Servants of the Abyss comprise multiple platoons and deserter squads from various war zones. They are united only by their choice to pledge themselves body and soul to the Chaos warband, rather than being butchered in defence of the Imperium. Inside the Blackstone Fortress, the Traitor Guardsmen are formed into squads and driven into battle, both by their Chaos Space Marine overlords and by the fortress itself. Then, with overwhelming weight of fire, they obliterate those who defy the will of their dark masters.



CHAOS BEASTMEN

Brutishly strong and filled with savage fury, beastmen are among the most deformed species of abhumans, bearing horns, hooves and matted manes of fur. As such, they are severely persecuted throughout the Imperium, and on many worlds they are simply hunted down and slaughtered. In those regions where their existence is tolerated, they are indoctrinated into self-loathing, being told that they must atone for their miscreation through unquestioning service to Humanity. They are treated little better than servitors or beasts of labour, and are put to work in the most dangerous environs. When called to battle, they are armed with simple weapons and herded into war zones as shock troops or cannon fodder. But despite their feral appearance, beastmen are quite human in their reasoning and intelligence, and understand all too well the injustices that they must endure. It is little wonder that many succumb to the lure of Chaos, embracing their mutations as gifts from the Dark Gods and turning their savagery upon their pitiless Imperial taskmasters. The taint of Chaos warps these creatures' minds, augmenting their inherent ferocity and strength, and leading them to seek out new heretical masters to whom they can swear allegiance. Unlike many other battle-thralls of the Servants of the Abyss, the Chaos Beastmen in the Blackstone Fortress welcome their imprisonment, for within the rearranging chambers they have found a home that is even more twisted than they are, and where their murderous instincts have allowed them to thrive.

ROGUE PSYKERS

The psyker mutation is perhaps the most dangerous genetic divergence of Humanity, but also the most valuable to the Imperium. By manipulating the flows of energy that emanate from the warp, a psyker can channel bolts of arcane power through their weapon, create wards against incoming projectiles, or will into being any number of other reality-bending manifestations. Yet each time they draw upon this power they place themselves and all those around them in unimaginable peril, for they are piercing the veil that exists between realspace and the horrors of the immaterium. Citizens of the Imperium with the psyker mutation are judged by the Inquisition, and should they show anything less than a will blessed of iron they are executed without mercy or hesitation. Even those who are judged strong-willed enough to be sanctioned may still succumb to a horrendous fate. A momentary lapse in concentration can see a sanctioned psyker wracked by their own manifestations, imploding into a ball of writhing flesh or devoured by ravenous Daemons that spill forth from within their mind. But some are warped slowly over time, their abilities becoming enhanced as the taint of Chaos seeps further into their souls, until eventually they give themselves fully to their whispering patrons in the warp. These Rogue Psykers will seek out warbands with which to align themselves, and those in league with the Servants of the Abyss now ply their witch-craft in the halls of the Blackstone Fortress.

NEGAVOLT CULTISTS

Despite the vigilance of the Imperium, cults of Chaos-worshipping humans arise on many worlds. These cults take different shapes – some venerate the Ruinous Powers through cannibalistic sacrifices, others by the spreading of virulent diseases, and others still by sowing confusion and fear amongst those who would defend against an imminent invasion. Negavolt Cultists express their heretical devotion by despoiling machinery, corrupting the function of sacred technologies through daemonic invocations and abstruse rituals. Such cults are often found on planets controlled by the Adeptus Mechanicus. The Chaos worshippers rise up to slaughter their Tech-Priests overlords, taking their most holy war machines so that they may be transformed into roaring Daemon Engines. Negavolt Cultists wire themselves with empathic-resonance coils – perverse batteries that are charged by the cultist's own pain and hatred. At full capacity, these spinally fused energy cells scream and thrum as they cast off showers of iridescent sparks. From the coils, arcs of warp-infused energy are sent coursing through dendritic appendages into the cultist's electro goad, where they release bursts of crackling power when a target is struck. An anarchic electric field also builds around those dendrites that the cultists implant in their skulls, creating an illuminating halo of lightning. The Negavolt Cultists in thrall to the Servants of the Abyss delight in trying to rip apart the machinery of the Blackstone Fortress, as well as any unsuspecting adventurers they come across.

STRONGHOLDS

Amongst the twisting recesses of the Blackstone Fortress, the Servants of the Abyss have managed to find several strongholds – stable conglomerations of chambers in which they can muster. Unlike the smaller rooms that are constantly reconfigured into different shapes, each stronghold retains its chasm-like structure, and is shifted through the fortress' interior as an immutable whole. The reason for which these fixed complexes exist is unknown, but the further Obsidius Mallex roams inside the fortress, the more he learns of their true purpose. Within the strongholds he found shards of hyper-dimensional material, which the Chaos Lord believes to be keys capable of unlocking some other, undiscovered chamber. One of these keys Mallex has mounted in the hilt of his thunder hammer, and around the others he has stationed heretical warriors to serve as guards while he searches for clues as to what the keys will unleash. So it is that many of the Servants of the Abyss lie in wait within the strongholds, brooding over their imprisonment, dreaming of the atrocities they will commit when they escape, and listening to the telltale echoes of maglev transports that alert them to new prey that has entered their domain.

DWELLERS IN THE LABYRINTH

The Servants of the Abyss are a terrifying presence within the Blackstone Fortress, but they are far from the only entities that stalk the shadows. As pioneers from Precipice explore further into the fortress' chambers, more and more strange creatures from across the galaxy are encountered. Some are well known for their horrifying cruelty, and others are unknown to all but the most ancient beings.



UR-GHULS

Ur-Ghuls are troglodytic predators whose speed is matched only by their savagery. Native inhabitants of the webway – the sub-dimensional lattice that exists between realspace and the warp – they are kept as pets and guard-beasts by the elite of the cruel Aeldari faction known as the Drukhari, and are often brought out during high-society functions so that they may eviscerate helpless captives for the entertainment of guests. Ur-Ghuls are completely sightless, but with quivering rows of scent-pits they lock onto their prey, hunting unfortunates down in absolute darkness and shredding their flesh with powerful claws. There are conflicting theories amongst the inhabitants of Precipice as to how the Ur-Ghuls made their way into the Blackstone Fortress, but there is absolute consensus regarding the threat they pose.

SPINDLE DRONES

Of all the entities encountered within the Blackstone Fortress, none are as ubiquitous as the insectile sentinels known as Spindle Drones. They skitter through the corridors in tightly packed groups, tirelessly searching for newly accumulated detritus and cutting any foreign materials they find into smaller and smaller pieces using pulses of energy. If Spindle Drones encounter intruders they follow the same protocols, becoming steadily more aggressive as their enemies fight to defend themselves. By all accounts, Spindle Drones appear to be formed of the same substance as the Blackstone Fortress, and their trianguloid forms mimic the shifting shapes of the chambers they inhabit. In-depth analysis of these metallic creatures has proven difficult. When destroyed, their bodies are quickly reabsorbed by the interior facets of the fortress, and efforts to extract neutralised Spindle Drones have proven completely fruitless, with maglev chambers remaining inert whenever a drone corpse is brought on board.



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British Cataloguing-in-Publication Data. A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library. Pictures used for illustrative purposes only.

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