

THE WH40K FLUFF BIBLE

>>The Imperium

+++Overview of the Imperium+++

The **ADEPTUS MECHANICUS** or Tech-Priest are the guardians of Earth's ancient knowledge. The Adeptus Mechanicus owns and administrates the factory planet Mars, whose vast orbital workshops turn out the majority of the weapons, spacecraft and other technologically sophisticated machinery used in the Imperium. The Adeptus Mechanicus is as much an arcane cult as a scientific body, and its knowledge goes beyond mere technology into the realms of techno-arcana. The **ADMINISTRATUM** is responsible for assessing and levying tithes, distributing Imperial resources, and countless other administrative functions. It is the largest of all the departments of the Adeptus Terra. Its members are for the most part scribes and petty officials, the hereditary slaves of a galaxy-spanning bureaucracy. The heart of the organisation lies within the Emperor's Palace, a vast complex whose cavernous vaults extend far below ground. The Administratum is probably the most powerful organisation in the entire Imperium. It is divided into many departments, offices and subordinate organisations.

The **ADEPTUS TERRA** is also known as the Priesthood of Earth, or more simply as the Adeptus. It consists of many millions of dedicated servants and religious followers whose duty is to interpret and enforce the Imperial will. It is the Adeptus which actually controls the Imperium, including its armies and fleets. The Adeptus Terra is divided into many departments and sub-departments, some of which operate so secretly that their existence is unknown outside of their own membership - only the principal departments are shown here.

ADEPTUS MINISTORUM. To countless billions the Emperor is nothing less than a god to whom they devote their entire lives. Over the aeons this faith has spawned a vast and powerful organisation devoted to his worship - Adeptus Ministorum, more often known as the Ecclesiarchy, after its chief high priest, the Ecclesiarch. The Adeptus Ministorum is a very powerful organisation with its own crusading armies in the form of the Adeptus Sororitas and Fratrises.

ADEPTUS CUSTODES. The Emperor's Guard or Custodians are the palace guards of the Emperor, and their duty is to protect the Imperial Palace. As the Imperial Palace covers such a large area of the planet the Custodians act as a defensive army. Only a select inner corps of three hundred, called the Companions, actually serve the Emperor as personal bodyguards.

ADEPTUS ASTRA TELEPATHICA. The job of the Adeptus Astra Telepathica is to recruit and train psykers for service throughout the Adeptus Terra. The organisation's most important role is to train Astropaths. The title of Astropath is an abbreviation of Astro-telepath it refers to a psyker capable of sending a telepathic message over interstellar distances. The vast distance between the stars means that technological forms of communication are useless. A psychic message sent through the warp is not necessarily instantaneous, but it is sufficiently quick to be a practical means of communication. Only Astropaths have the power to send and receive psychic messages over interstellar distances.

+++The Imperium Now+++

Over ten thousand years ago the Great Emperor of Mankind ascended to the Golden Throne of Earth. Of the wars he waged to get there, of the countless agonies of battling worlds, there is no record. Only the Emperor remembers - if indeed even that strange and ancient creature can recall those distant times.

The ascent of the Emperor marked the end of a long era of human history, an age typified by inter-human warfare and a gradual decline of the acculumated knowledge of millennia. This was the Age of Strife. The high point of scientific achievement had occured thousands of years before, in the yet older age known now as the Dark Age of Technology. Through the Dark Age of Technology and the Age of Strife, mankind has come to the present age - that of the Imperium.

In many respects it is a time of superstition, in which a great and unfathomable technology has been enslaved to the forces of mysticism and madness. To the ordinary humans of these times, the peasants in the fields and the warriors amongst the stars, scientific thought represents an abhorrent perversity; a corruption of honour and religious virtue. Even to those few humans who deal with the material of technology, the science and the magic have become largely inseparable; the warp engine must have runes upon its side, the laser gun requires the blessing of the Gods of Battle. This is a universe in which the gods, mysticism and magic are real. For this is a time of great change within humanity itself, a time when more and more humans are developing powers and a vision far beyond those of their ancestors. Humans developing these abilities are known as psychics, or psykers, and by many less flattering names - the most common being that of witch. Psykers are men and women who have the ability to transcend the normal laws of space, placing them in touch with great universal forces which lie far beyond the understanding of their kin. Their gifts defy explanation; telepathy, telekinesis, illusion, and countless others. Many ordinary humans attribute these powers to a divine origin. Some psykers claim their powers enable them to tap forces which he under the control of entities existing outside of the real universe - beyond normal time and space. Others seek a rational explanation for these phenomena - but this is not a rational age and they are few and their voice is weak.

+++NOTE ON LANGUAGE+++

The common language of the Imperium is represented by English, proper names have been rendered in an anglicised form. Many of the titles of ancient institutions and organisations are presented as Latinised English (such as the Adeptus Terra). This represents an older tongue, itself a development of Twentieth Century languages, not necessarily Latin as such.

This older tongue is known in the Imperium as "Tech", being a version of the language in which technical rituals and ancient works are recorded. This developed during the Dark Age of Technology (in fact a golden age from the point of view of science - it is only dark in the minds of the men who now fear it). It derives from the common tongue of the time, an assimilation of English, European and Pacific languages which developed over many centuries in the American/Pacific region. This was the universal medium of written record until the Age of Strife, and was spoken as a first language by many and as a second language by almost everyone. Its idioms and vocabulary now appear archaic and mystic, many of its words have acquired religious significance over the years. It is the language of the Tech-priests and of forbidden books.

The common tongue of the Age of the Imperium is spoken as a first language on almost all civilised planets, and is accepted as a second language on planets within Imperial control with the exception of some medieval and feral worlds. This is a bastardised version of Tech, combining additional elements from several of the oriental languages of ancient Earth. Over the millennia it has changed greatly, and now bears almost no resemblance to the tongues from which it derived. Although a common language, it varies fiom planet to planet (and even from region to region), so that it is not always easy for two characters to communicate if they are from different worlds.

Medival, feral and worlds suffering from long periods of isolation may have several indigenous languages derived either from Tech or one of the ancient Earth tongues. It was quite common during the Dark Age of Technology for worlds to be settled by small communities of 'isolationists'. These eccentric groups were often self financed and their journals unrecorded, many were of racial

minorities attempting to recreate a sense of national identity away from the overpopulated Earth. Some of these groups made a deliberate attempt to revive long dead or moribund languages, perceiving them as a source of national identity and communal strength.

+++NOTE ON THE TECHNOLOGY IN THE AGE OF THE IMPERIUM+++

Except on the occasions where a technical explanation or description was felt useful to an understanding of the rules, such explanations have generally been avoided. The book contains few descriptions of how specific items are used or function - it is enough within the context of the game that the item has the effects attributed to it. This has been a deliberate policy throughout the rules. The main reason for this is simply that the Age of the Imperium is not a technically inclined age, to have included descriptions of 'head-up displays', 'computer links', etc, would have given the wrong impression entirely. This is an age where problems are solved by brute force and ignorance, where dangers are either too gross or too unthinkable to elicit any other response. The other reason why technical description has been avoided is that the Age of the Imperium lies more than forty thousand years in the future - at a stage in history when those head-up displays and computers are about as innovative as stone circles. What scientific knowledge persists from the Dark Age of Technology is far above and beyond anything we can imagine from the perspective of the Twentieth Century. That understanding lies only with a select few - the Adeptus Mechanicus - the Tech-priests of the Imperium. Even their knowledge is somewhat debased, and the popular image of technology can be compared with that of witchcraft in medieval times. Those who come into contact with technology use it with reservations and a reverence that are almost religious. The Space Marines, for example, treat their equipment and armour as if it were imbued with a will of its own - a fine chest-plate, well looked after and constantly maintained may reward its wearer by saving his life; whereas a Marine who neglects his equipment may be struck down by a leaking suit or malfunctioning weapons. Such is the will of the Gods.

While it is impossible to speculate with any certainty on the technical developments of the next forty millennia, it has obviously been necessary to make assumptions during the construction of this game. The greatest assumption has involved the creation of a broad history and a universe populated by a variety of dangers. The people of the far future are mentally very different from those of today - they have a way of looking at things in which twentieth century ideas of efficiency and morality are irrelevant. Their technology reflects both their past (an age of discovery and achievement) with their future (an age of danger and survival).

+++TRANSMISSION SYSTEMS+++

Electricity formed the single most important form of transmissible energy for a very long time, and still plays a role in the Imperium. It is one of the primary motivating forces in nature, and has applications which make it ideal as an interface between the biological and physical worlds. The most significant advance in the field of electronics was the development of Stacked Atomic Chains - or 'stacks'. Atoms within a small piece of material are arranged in rows and patterns, forming the basis for molecular level circuitry. Using this technique miniaturisation reached its ultimate form - so that few devices have to be any larger than necessitated by controls or aesthetics. Stacks use an extremely low voltage, depending on perfect refining techniques for their raw materials, and perfect simulation during operation. The natural electricity radiated by a human would destroy an unprotected stack based system.

Photon lines are an extremely refined development of the fibre optic principle. Flexible hair-fine strands made from ceramic based materials are used to transmit laser light signals to photon-powered actuators. A single strand can handle a lot of information, but most systems are so complex they require a bundle of cables to function.

Phased Crystals use crystal technology to transmit a signal - although they provide no power. The conductive material is crystalline, exploiting the way in which a chain of crystals change shape

when subjected to varying heat/pressure or energy fields. Phased crystals are the chief components in monitoring devices, and act as regulators of other systems.

Hydroplastics transmit power directly by pressure, or activate other systems by the same means. Hydroplastic lines of a suitably small bore are highly efficient, yet technically simple, means of powering a system. Bore diameters are on the molecular level. Hydroplastic actuators (small motors which transmit energy into physical movement) are perhaps the most common type.

Sucrosol is the usual abbreviation for Sucrose based solution. It is a synthetic blood designed to feed cultured bio-tissues by means of osmotic pressure. Sucrosol is used by all mechanisms incorporating bio-engineered parts, including robots. It is usually white.

Radio signal is essentially the same as in prior ages, although equipment now has the ability to utilise far narrower wave bands.

+++GENERATION SYSTEMS+++

Crystal Batteries are based on specially engineered crystal structures with the ability to absorb energy modifying their crystalline form in the process. The absorbed energy is released slowly as the material's structure reverts back to its original form. Units of such crystals may be recharged almost indefinitely. Some units can be recharged by heating (even exposure to daylight), whilst the most powerful are designed to hold an electric charge and must be recharged from an electric generator.

Plasma is the purest form of energy it is possible to generate - essentially the component material of stars. It is completely ionized matter consisting of free sub-atomic particles maintained at incredibly high temperatures. Plasma must be transmitted along armoured coils and contained within a magnetic field. Plasma is little used in the Age of the Imperium, the safety margins necessary for its containment are too tight. Regarded as old fashioned, it is still used to power steam or photon based generators and is used for space drives.

Conventional - on most worlds electric or photon power is generated by wind, tide, photo-cell or by burning something. On many other remoter worlds machinery is powered directly by wind, steam, combustible fuels or good old animal power. Isolated settlements make the best use of local resources.

+++MOTORS AND ACTUATORS+++

Hydraulic actuators rely on hydroplastic pressure to power components. These are commonly used in robotic systems and to power sub-systems on vehicles, in buildings, etc.

Electrically Motivated Fibre Bundles are made from a fibre that contracts under the influence of an electric charge, replicating the actions of living muscles. They form the chief components of bionic parts, and are used in many robots. Powered armour and Dreadnoughts use this technology almost exclusively, as it is far more efficient and faster than equivalent hydraulic or mechanical systems - it is also difficult to produce and therefore rare.

Gravitic Reactors are powered from a surrounding magnetic field - such as a planet. They have the ability to counteract gravitational affects, and form the basis for gravity based motors, and suspensors. The technology used in their manufacture belongs to the past. Fortunately a vast reserve of raw material still remains on Earth, from which gravitic reactors can be made utilising conventional technology. Once this store of material is used up, however, further production will be impossible.

+++CONTROL SYSTEMS+++

The actual appearance of equipment is as variable as the populations of the different planets. With over a million worlds in the Imperium, local tastes and materials will inevitably produce a riot of

different forms. Some worlds favour an archaic pattern of instrumentation, believing that the arrangements of buttons and levers form part of a runic pattern itself important to proper functioning. Other worlds prefer to mimic the higher technical achievements of their ancestors, utilising the more advanced (although no more effective) pure crystal or holographic control systems. When it comes down to it, all are forms of pushing a button, and are equally effective. Only if characters encounter a system radically different from one they are used to will problems arise.

Archaic controls are basically buttons, levers, switches and dials set into a panel and monitored by video, digital or dial display. This is the sort of thing anyone from the Twentieth Century could easily understand and use.

Pure Crystal Technology and stacked atomic chains have no visible components - control panels often take the form of either black slabs of material or transparent sheets like glass. Held by suspensors, an inactive control panel could appear as a floating pane of glass or slab of stone - the same panel could be recessed into floor or ceiling and might float into position by vocal command, radio-signal, pressure sensors, presence detectors, etc. A panel is activated by coded radio-signal, voice or simply by touch. An active panel displays information visually like a vid-screen. Its equivalent of buttons are differently coloured lights which are touch or heat sensitive.

Holographic Projection envelops the user in holographic images somewhat a three-dimensional wrap-round vid-screen. Activation is usually by presence, or by any of the methods used for crystal technology - so the operator simply sits in a control seat to activate the 'panel'. The projection can be manipulated to provide monitoring or control functions. Projectors sense the movement of the user's eyes and limbs and translate these into instructions - the user only has to press imaginary buttons! This is the most specialised type of tactile panel, being almost impossible for the uninitiated to use. The slightest gesture will change the entire set-up, and unique arm/hand/finger and eye movements form the basis of the operating procedure.

Mind Impulse dispenses with any sort of panel or control gear, allowing the user to control and monitor a system by thought alone. These systems are technically complex and producing them is difficult. Consequently they are rare. Their most common application is in Dreadnought suits: some spacecraft employ mind impulse links but this is not usual. Such devices require considerable training to use at all, and a great deal of practice if they are to be used efficiently. The physical component is a headring which picks up and amplifies the wearer's instructions. A cruder, but equally effective, version is the spinal tap. This is engineered into the wearer's spinal cortex and works in the same way as the headring but is difficult to remove without causing physical or mental damage.

+++SKINPLANTS AND ELECTOOS+++

A development of crystal technology is its use for personal ornamentation. Many races apply paint or tattoos and within the Imperium the practice is common. This is true of all levels of society, from the lowly city-scum of the hive-worlds to the most sophisticated of the Adeptus Terra. Amongst government servants and employees of the Navigator families these marks serve as identification as well as ornament. Devices are also used as secret signs by governmental and anarchist agents, psychic covens and pirates. Tattooing is commonly achieved using materials and technology of a very ancient kind - although the inks used can be of any colour (including fluorescent) and can be removable, temporary or degenerative when exposed to light, laser light, heat, etc.

Skinplants are sophisticated tattoos - very sophisticated. The miniaturisation possible using crystal technology makes it possible to create a functioning device between layers of skin. The device cannot include mechanical components or utilise large amounts of power. The most popular application of this idea is to power and control an electrically sensitive tattoo. So, any citizen with sufficient credit can have a device or logo on their forehead which actually lights up and flashes! This can be either controllable, light-sensitive or a permanent fixture. The subcutaneous wristwatch is a standard way of carrying the time - light pressure on the wrist activates the digital display beneath the skin. A character could even go to the lengths of having an entire limb or his whole body glow if

he wanted! A light emitting patch on the palm will illuminate a small area within 10 cm and is popularly known as the 'thief's light', providing sufficient light to pick locks, operate switches, etc. Electoos also utilise crystal technology, but involve a lot more work and a great deal of skill to create. An inert layer of conductive material is inserted beneath the skin, sometimes it is injected and allowed time to form before the process can continue. Crystal stacks are built up on this film and waste material is dissolved out. The Electoo can then be programmed to function as any control or monitoring device. On Earth everyone carries an electoo containing personal details, credit ratings, security grades and details of social record - these act as police files and automatic credit facilities. Sensors at building entrances read the details of every electoo carrying individual that passes them - so a constant record can be built up of anyone's movements. Similarly when an individual buys anything, a till-sensor automatically modifies the credit rating of the electoo accordingly. The system is also used throughout the Adeptus Terra and on some imperial worlds either generally or within specific social levels. As electoos are invisible they are ideal for carrying secret messages - information is coded so as to be almost useless except to the intended recipient. A character carrying a Electoo need not be aware of the fact, and certainly wouldn't be aware of its contents. Electoos carrying secret messages can be split between several people and only work when joined.

Electografts are a special form of electoo engineered directly onto the recipient's cerebellum. This involves cutting away a portion of skull and creating the electoo directly on the brain tissue before (usually) replacing the section of cranium or covering with synthetic material. An electrograft reacts with the brain to alter a creature's memory, personality and knowledge. Many of the Imperium's technological secrets are passed on by this means, and it is certainly a quick and easy way to learn how to speak new languages, operate machinery, etc. On the other hand, interference with the mind tends to cause personality disorders, problems with memory recall and occasionally total mental breakdown. Once inserted an electrograft can be reprogrammed almost indefinitely, although repeated re-use accelerates the degenerative process.

+++STANDARD TEMPLATE CONSTRUCTS+++

During the Dark Age of Technology humanity travelled throughout the galaxy, founding new colonies and exploring new worlds. Many of these colonies failed to establish themselves, others were lost, whilst a few grew into independent civilisations with distinctive cultures. Most however, established a subsistence economy and simply stopped. In such an environment the impetus for change was very low; everything the citizens needed was at hand, their new world supplied them with food, and the store of knowledge brought from Earth enabled them to maintain a high technological base without a technological society. In part this was a result of the Standard Template Construct system carried by every colony.

The heart of the STC system was an evolved computer program designed to provide construction details for the colonists. Its prime function was to enable the colonists to build efficient shelters, generators and transports without any prior knowledge and using almost any locally available materials. The user simply asked how to build a house or a tractor and the computer supplied all the necessary plans - in short it was idiot proof. Many humans attribute the entire Orkish civilisation to early STC systems - but the truth will never be known.

The Age of Technology ended in inter-human war and anarchy. The STC systems that had helped to build it either lapsed into disuse or decayed so that they became increasingly unreliable and quirky. On some worlds they were maintained, but most suffered damage by enthusiastic software specialists or subsequent jury-rigging. Hard copies of the information they contained survived much longer, and were frequently copied and passed down from generation to generation. Today, in the Age of the Imperium, the familiar designs of the STC are still discernable in the shapes of vehicles, spacecraft and buildings. The Adeptus Mechanicus on Earth make it their business to collate and utilise STC material - it is their equivalent to a holy text, a font of all knowledge (which is exactly what it was intended to be).

One result of the STC system and its pivotal place in human development is that many worlds now utilise designs and machinery of a similar type. Of course, the millennia have wrought changes in the basic utilitarian devices proscribed by the STC, but many humans adhere religiously to the old designs. STC designs were intended to be able to cope with anything - by the standards of the day they were rough and ready, big and brutish, hard to damage and easy to repair. Because they were intended for use by unqualified people their power-plants were based around commonly obtainable materials, employing steam power, wind power, water power and combustion engines. High-tech material was described too (although rarely used) and designs were provided for full-scale nuclear power-grids and fission processors. However few people understood these, and the need for power was supplied quite easily by conventional means. Consequently hard copies were rarely taken and gradually written texts became lost or hopelessly distorted.

The weapons, vehicles and much of the equipment described in this book have their roots in the STC system. Fighting vehicles often look like tractors and prime movers because that's exactly what they were copied from! STC designs can be produced in almost any material; wood, plastic, concrete, steel, plastic, etc, and can be replicated on almost any world that has raw materials of some kind. Uncorrupted STC systems are unknown and after so many years will probably remain so. Nonetheless, finding such a system is regarded by many Tech-priests as their ultimate goal - a sort of quest for the holy grail. Legends surround the existence of lost, functioning STC systems, but whether they have any basis in truth is anyone's guess.

+++The Imperial Fleet+++

Practically all inter-stellar travel is administered through the priesthood, who sanction routine journeys and direct craft to suit their purposes. There are a few independent ships capable of interstellar flight but these are very rare indeed. The fleet moves cargo and personnel from system to system, according to the dictates of imperial need. The fleet also has routine duties to perform, such as patrolling frontier worlds and scouting for alien intrusion. In all, the fleet numbers many thousands of ships, and the Imperium has a considerable capacity to build and operate spacecraft.

+++IMPERIAL ARCHITECTURE+++

Much of the fighting in the wars of the Horus Heresy has taken part in and around cities, refinery complexes, and similar groups of buildings. Thanks to the Standard Template Construct, buildings of several common types are constructed on most Imperial worlds using locally available materials. Using Standard Template Construct means that the appearance of a building is determined by its function rather than the materials of which it is constructed. According to the resource base of the planet in question, this can be stone, brick, wood, coral, volcanic ash, compacted inorganic waste or any of a hundred other materials. Thus, buildings of more or less identical appearance may be found throughout the Imperium, regardless of all considerations other than function.

ADMINISTRATUM

The complex organization of the Adeptus Ministratum, or Administratum, is responsible for the administration of the whole of the Imperium; it manages over a million inhabited worlds. Planetary government buildings, records offices, taxation centers, and many more are controlled by the Administratum; they are usually distinguished by the sign of the Imperial eagle over the main door. Many bloody assaults and valiant defenses have taken place in and around urban and planetary government buildings; they are natural command posts, and the fall of the Administratum normally indicates the fall of the city. This building is often the attacker's primary target.

AUDITORIUM

Most Imperial cities have at least one auditorium, where the local populace assemble at great rallies organized by the Administratum and the Inquisition. A visiting dignitary, such as an Inquisitor or a

Space Marine commander, will often be requested to lead such a rally. It is common practice to use the main auditorium - if it still stands - to announce the 'liberation' of a city by one side or the other.

CASTRA EXERCITUS

According to the provisions of the Codex Exercitus, every Imperial world has a duty to raise and maintain its own planetary defense force. Additionally, each city or world forms part of a precinct where Imperial laws are enforced by the Judges of the Adeptus Arbites. One or more barracks will be found in most Imperial cities, providing accommodation, training areas and armories for the forces they house. Much fighting has centered around these strongholds.

CHAPEL

Chapels are found throughout the Imperium, and this is a typical example from a world of medieval or higher technology. On many worlds which have fallen to the forces of Horus, chapels have been desecrated and torn down; on some Traitor worlds they have even been turned over to the feral-world cults favored by the Warmaster and his followers. In such a case, the Inquisition normally demands the chapel's complete destruction.

CELLARION

No world is an island within the Imperium; each gains something from the rest of the galaxy, and each must pay its way. The worlds of the Imperium provide foodstuffs, machinery, minerals and many other things according to their resources. Few Imperial cities are without vast warehouse complexes where the goods are collected ready for shipment to other areas and worlds, and where incoming goods are placed ready for distribution.

CENSORIUM

Countless clerks and officials labor on a million worlds for the Administratum, most of them confined to dark offices in grim, towering administrative blocks. These buildings house vast quantities of information on their worlds; population, economy, levels of production and taxation, resources, industrial and agricultural quotas - the whole of the world is recorded, filed, indexed and updated by an army of bureaucrats. The valuable data in the Censorium can make it a prime target.

GENERATORIUM

A city or industrial complex requires vast quantities of energy, and power supplies are a favorite target for attacking forces. The nature of a generator will vary from world to world. Fertile planets often use organic or fossil fuels, while fusion grids and plasma reactors are common on industrialized worlds. Solar generators and geothermal energy are also used where local conditions permit. These power sources, and the secrets of their operation, are jealously guarded by the Adeptus Mechanicus.

GENETORIUM

Most planets in the Imperium maintain a gene-pool of plant and animal species for terraforming, agriculture, resource management and other purposes. Native species are studied with a view to assessing their usefulness elsewhere, and introduced species are bio-engineered to adapt them for use in local conditions. The scientists of the Adeptus Mechanicus who run these establishments also monitor the genetic purity of the planet's population, and cooperate with the Inquisition in their task of rooting out mutation and other undesirable traits.

LIBRARIUM

During the terrible wars of the Age of Strife, untold quantities of knowledge were lost. And preserving what was left became a holy task shared by the Administratum and the Adeptus Mechanicus. In many of the larger cities of the more advanced Imperial worlds an imposing Librarium building will house thousands of books and records, and make them available to those Imperial servants and citizens whose rank or privilege entitles them to access.

MANUFACTORIUM

Although much technology was lost during the fifteen centuries of the Age of Strife, the Imperium is by no means technically backward. Industrial complexes across the galaxy produce billions of items, from clothing to plasma bombs. All of these installations are closely controlled by the Administratum and the Adeptus Mechanicus, and it is not uncommon for the workers in a factory to be completely unaware of the end product of their labors. The occupation or destruction of a Manufactory or other industrial complex can deny precious resources to the enemy.

MAUSOLEUM

For the vast bulk of the citizens of the Imperium, death is not the end of their service to the emperor. They are quickly forgotten by everyone except the record keepers of the Administratum and their bodies are recycled into foodstuffs, fertilizers, and other useful products. More prominent members of society may receive the honor of entombment in an Imperial mausoleum, where the masses may read of their deeds and be inspired by their example. With its halls of entombed heroes, a Mausoleum can become the focus of a fanatical defense, and its destruction can deal a severe blow to the defenders' morale.

RESIDENTIAL

The population of the Imperium is vast, and only the Administratum has the means to begin to estimate it. The bulk of this population lives in cities, ranging from the huge complexes of the Hive Worlds to the smaller garden cities of the more advanced agricultural worlds and the grim tenements of the industrial worlds. While worlds and cities may differ, the residential blocks follow a limited number of standard patterns laid down by the Standard Template Construct.

Living space in the cities varies widely, according to wealth and social standing. Most people live in residential blocks of one kind or another, but the living space permitted to an individual can range from a spacious luxury apartment to a cramped and filthy cubby-hole with barely room to turn around. According to the type of world on which it is found and the status of its occupants, a residential block can house a few dozen or several thousand.

+++Worlds of the Imperium+++

There are over one million worlds in the Imperium, all of which are inhabited by humans or human descended creatures such as beastmen and squats. The imperial administration may choose to consider these mutations as human or otherwise. In any case, they are all citizens of the Imperium - although citizenship confers no rights, only responsibilities.

The worlds of the Imperium are scattered throughout the galaxy; they are not confined to a specific area or territory. The distances involved are vast, and many human worlds will be inaccessible, or have been so in the past, due to warp storms or governmental apathy. For these reasons the Imperium includes a vast variety of cultural and technological levels. Planetary governors and other Imperial Commanders always maintain a fairly high level of personal technology, but the worlds they run may be inhabited by primitive savages, or overrun by mutants and native creatures. The worlds of the Imperium can be classified into the following broad categories:

Agricultural worlds are little more than farming planets on which a sizable part of the surface is given over to producing food for other, less fertile, worlds. They tend to be sparsely populated. The Imperial Commander of such a planet has the added responsibilities of protecting his harvests and meeting his quotas. Inter-commander rivalry often results in enemies attempting to destroy or steal crops or meat animals, often blaming raids on pirates or bandits. Such petty rivalries are of no concern to the Adeptus Terra - who only demand that quotas are met and conflict contained.

Civilised worlds are by far the most common of all the types of settlement in the Imperium. The people inhabits urban centres supplied by the planet's own natural resources and agriculture. These worlds are self-sufficient, and have reasonable, but not excessive, populations. The social and technological base varies from world to world, although access to fully-developed technology is usually possible. Although these planets are civilised - in that their inhabitants live in cities - the humans that inhabit them are as bound by superstition, mysticism and barbarism as are many others in the Imperium. In the cities, sophisticated urbanities pray to the same gods and incant the same rituals as dull peasants in isolated vffiages. For urban warriors and technological barbarians, rationality and science are as abhorrent as to the most hide-bound rural farmer.

Death worlds are planets on which the native flora and fauna has evolved into naturally aggressive and dangerous forms. These eco-systems are finely balanced between continual destruction and lightning-fast reproduction. Humans can, and do, live on these worlds, but it is a never-ending struggle. On many death worlds it is as if the entire bio-mass of the planet were consciously

motivated against human settlement - concentrating forces against intruders to destroy them. Death worlds are not usually inhabited unless there is some good reason to do so - such as outstanding mineral wealth.

Feral planets are worlds which have reverted to savagery, either because of neglect, a naturally inadequate ecosystem, or long isolation. Human groups roam the surface as wandering hunters, using primitive tools and weapons - these people have a barbaric and aggressive view of life that makes them ideal material for the Legiones Astartes. Imperial commanders on such worlds tend to live as isolated 'gods', perhaps in a single civilised city inhabited by outsiders, mostly military staff and their families. Apart from recruiting for the Space Marines, and keeping a check on emerging psykers, the Commander will usually leave his subjects alone.

Hive worlds are distinguished by vast, continent-spanning cities, often built high into the sky and deep below the ground. Their populations are enormous, and almost all food needs to be imported. A hive world rendered temporarily inaccessible through warp space will suffer a devastating famine within a very short space of time. It will become a vast catacomb of lunatics driven to excesses of anarchic, urban savagery by starvation and claustrophobia. Hive worlds are dangerous, being too large to monitor safely, and their citizens are typically unbalanced, if not utterly crazed. It has been known for the Adeptus Arbites to cull these planets in order to bring their populations down to manageable levels.

Industrial worlds are given over to industrial processes such as manufacturing and mining. They are only sparsely populated, as most work is carried out by machinery and robots. Most industrial worlds are developed only for mining and, even then, a planet must be extremely mineral-rich if the effort is to be justified. Normally, manufacturing of goods takes place on ordinary, inhabited planets, because the costs and hazards of inter-stellar flight are considerable.

Medieval worlds are feral planets in which a level of medieval technology has been reached, and the culture has stabilised. Imperial Commanders of such worlds will often stand aside from their subjects, and may even remain aloof in orbital space-stations or on a nearby moon. Medieval worlds are self-sufficient, but are of little use to the Imperium. The true position of their place in the universe may constitute something of a culture-shock to the inhabitants, a factor which makes them poor material for imperial service - although selective recruitment into the Space Marines is possible. Control of psykers has to be maintained - but this can be achieved in a clandestine manner; by infiltrating religious and social bodies, or by more blatant means such as kidnapping and assassination.

Paradise planets are worlds of outstanding natural beauty and abundance. Rather than develop all of these planets, some are retained in an almost completely natural state and used as recreational bases for imperial servants. On such planets, warriors may train their minds and bodies for war, studying arcane battle-philosophy and practising martial arts.

Research stations are recently inhabited, often newly accessible planets in the process of being assessed for development and full settlement. To this end, they initially become research stations, small farming centres, experimental settlements, test mines, etc. Mostly they are just wilderness - a whole planet awaiting exploration.

+++The Adeptus Mechanicus+++

Mars is the planetary realm of the Adeptus Mechanicus, the Home and Domain of the Tech priests of the cult mechanicus. The red planet is acclaimed as one of the wonders of the Galaxy, the Workshop of the Imperium, the forge world, the maker of ships, and the guardian of secrets. It is the Adeptus Mechanicus who furnish the technical knowledge of the Imperium, preserve the scientific secrets of former times, and who explore the new sciences of the 41st millennium.

The Cult Mechanicus

The Cult mechanicus, or cult of the machine, acknowledges the Emperor as Master of Mankind but Does not recognise the authority of the Imperial cult or the Ecclesiarcy. Instead the Adeptus Mechanicus follows its own dark and mysterios strictures.

According to the adeptus Mechanicus, knowledge is the supreme manefestation of dvinity, and all creatures and artifacts that embody knowledge are holy becasue of it. The Emperor is the supreme object of worship because he comprehends so much. Machines which preserve knowledge from ancient timnes are also holy , and machine intelligences are no less divine than those of fleash and blood. a mans worth is only the sum of his knowledge - his body is simply an organic machine capable of preserving intellect.

The Adeptus Mechanicus controls the entire governmental, industrial and relicious affairs of Mars. In its broadest terms , the population is divided into two parts . The Greater mass of martians are worker slaves called servitors. Servitors are not really fully human, but half man, half machine creatures whose minds have been partially programmed to perform specific duties. The servitors are slaves to the ruling priesthood of tech priests who form a heirarchy of technicians, scientists, and religious leaders. Tech priests provide the Imperium with its engineers and technical experts.

- Fabricator General
- Ruling Cult Members the Tech Priests
- Magos
- Logos
- Genitor
- Artisan
- Ordinary Cult Members the Tech Priests
- Electro Priest
- Rune Priest
- Transmechanic
- Lexmechanic
- Servitors

Fabricator General

The Leader of the Adeptus Mechanicus is the Fabricator General of Mars. He is a High Lord of Terra and also the head of the Cult mechanicus in his capacity as the magos mechanicus.

Magos

The Magos is the master of technological achievement. There are many divisions such as Magos Technicus, Magos Metallugicus, Magos Alchemys, Magos Physic, Magos Biologis, etc...

Logis

The Logis is the logistician, an analist and a statistician. His purpose is to predict future trends and make forecasts about expediture and needs. They are regarded as prophetic figures.

Genetor

Genetors are Genetic Scientists. They are very common amongst the Adeptus Mechanicus and often accompany Imperial Forces involved in the Exploration of new worlds.

Artisan

Artisans or Constructors , design machines, buildings, space craft, weapons and military hardware. They controll the vast labour force of the servitors.

Electro Priest

The Electro Priests are the fanatical cult warriors of the Adeptus Mechanicus. They travel on board spacecraft and support th tech priest warriors in battle. The Electro Priest turns himself into a crackling fount of electrical energy, destroying everything he touches before he collapses from the strain.

Engineers

Engineers are highly trained agents of the cult Mechanicus and they are often assigned to duties in the Imperial Guard or other parts of Adeptus Terra

Rune Priest

The Rune Priest scribes runes and chants liturgies over machines as part of the Cult ritual of initiation. He is trained in the arcane branches of scientific lore such as intuitive mechanics,

speculation, , and improvisation. They are famous for their lateral thinking, which may be called upon when strict logic and standard procedures fail.

Transmechanic

These are Technicians or service engineers who specialise in communications technology. Like the engineers, they are often assigned duties in other Imperial Organisations.

Leximechanic

Their purpose is to compile and rationalise data so it can be entered into a central computer repository. They can work with computer speed and accuracy, assembling battlefield reports, economic statistics , planetary reports, and so forth, they may be assigned duties throughout the Adeptus Terra.

Servitors

Servitors are mindless slave machines of living flesh and metal creatures with no individual mind who obey their programming without question. Servitors make up a huge bulk of the Martian population, there are many kinds from heavy mini cyborgs to holomats (holographic recorders). The most severe punishment for a criminal is to be turned into a servitor: mind wiped and reprogrammed to perform some rudimentary function. Ex wrongdoers wear a brass plaque round their necks proclaiming their crime as a warning to all who would cross the tech priests of Mars.

Mars

The planet Mars has changed enormously since man first set foot upon its barren and arid surface. In the early 22nd century it became the first planet to be terraformed. It was given an atmosphere and its deserts were turned to fertile soil. However agriculture was never very important to Mars - its main source of wealth lay below its surface in the form of gems minerals and metal ores.

Once terraformed, Mars was settled by industrial cartels and their workforces, and soon became the first hive world. Mars became a centre for industrial production and research, and its very name has become synonymous with technical expertise and scientific advancement. Mars became the hub for further space exploration throughout the solar system.

Today Mars has evolved into the workshop of the Adeptus. Its factory hives produce the bulk of all technical equipment used by the Imperium. Space craft and other large specialised constructs are fabricated in orbital factories that spin around the equatorial belt. Ships of the warfleet Solar are based in these huge floating docks, and other craft from all over the Imperium visit what are the largest man made objects in the entire galaxy.

As the first hives ever built, the Martian factory hives are ancient and all are at least partially ruinous. Some areas are well maintained, and there are many new areas of building. Areas that are no longer used are simply left to rot.

A journey through the internal travel tubes would take a person from extremes of new construction to ancient industrial wastes. The travel lines weave between shining new building piles with their nets of steel bracing like rigging of a sailing ship, passing into older darker zones where broken condensation traps spill their vaporous contents and enmesh speeding tube liners in a perpetual fog. Wastelands cover vast parts of the cities , deserts of broken plasteel slabs and twisted girders, with the occasional solitary tower pointing purposelessly towards the pink Martian sky.

The Titan Legions

Mars endured long centuries of isolation while anarchy tore at the ancient world of Earth. When the Emperor drew Mars back into the fold of the united Imperium, it had long since become a society very different to that of Earth's. One of the most important and enduring differences was the development of huge fighting machines known as Titans. These vast constructions were unlike anything ever seen on Earth, massive humanoid shaped weapons of destruction powered by fission reactors and bristling with mighty cannons. On a world as barren as Mars the Titans could stride effortlessly over the hostile landscape where mere troopers would be engulfed in the poisonous wastes of the choking dust of the Martian deserts.

A Titan is a gargantuan land-battleship powered by advanced technology. Its armored carapace is capable of withstanding heavy damage whilst its armaments can level whole cities. The Titans are one of the most potent weapons in the arsenal of the Imperium. Within each Titan a crew of dozens or even hundreds of individuals scurry about their tasks, propelling, refueling and maintaining the giant machine, manning its mighty weapons and guiding it over the battle field.

The Crew of a Titan

When the Emperor led mankind on the Great Crusade the Titan Legions of the Adeptus Mechanicus marched alongside the Space Marines. As the Imperium Expanded the Adeptus Mechanicus took many worlds for themselves, planets which they settled and turned into Mechanicus forge worlds. These became bases for the Titan Legions throughout the galaxy, so that today the Titan Legions are spread throughout the Imperium, where they defend the scattered forge worlds of the Adeptus Mechanicus.

The Quest For Knowledge

The Adeptus Mechanicus is driven by the quest for knowledge. This quest takes many forms, including research and exploration, but the ultimate embodiment is the search for the ancient STC systems.

STC systems were created during the scientific high point of Dark Age of Technology. During this time thousands of human colonies were founded on distant worlds. Many of these colonies failed to survive, some were lost, and of those that survived most only achieved a subsistence level economy. Yet almost all of these colonies managed to retain a high level of technology thanks to a huge base of computerised information carried from Earth. This massive computerised databank was known as the Standard Template Construct (STC) system.

The STCs are often said to embody the sum total of human knowledge. This is probably true as far as technological accomplishment goes. Although most colonists required little more than designs for agricultural machinery, programs were included for all sorts of advanced constructions such as nuclear power grids and fission reactors. However, the early colonists' needs were simple and were met by conventional energy forms and relatively low level technology.

Today there are no known surviving STC systems, and only a very few examples of first generation print-out on some worlds information about the ancient STC is regarded as holy and design copies are guarded as secret and sacred texts, housed in the inner sanctums of temples.

For thousands of years the Adeptus Mechanicus has pursued all information about STC. It is their lost bible, holy grail and cup of knowledge. Any scrap of information is eagerly sought out and jealously hoarded. Any rumour of a functional system is followed up and investigated.

By their efforts much information has been retrieved or can be reconstructed by the vigorous analysis and comparison of copies. Yet the most technically advanced knowledge eludes the Adeptus Mechanicus, for the early colonists were mostly simple folk whose needs were practical. Only rarely did anyone bother to take copies of the theoretical and advanced work which the STC contained.

+++Adeptus Custodes+++

The Adeptus Custodes forms the Emperor's inner guard whose duties are to serve and protect the Master of Mankind. A continuous rota ensures that there are always several hundred of these select warriors action within the palace, as well as a small elite of guardians who never leave the Emperor's side. Their uniforms are traditional but effective, leather breeches and boots with a long black cloak over naked torso. Their helmets are ancient works of art; all-enclosing and tall they impart a threatening, impersonal appearance as well as providing a battery of protective equipment and communicators. The weapons carried by these guards look very much like spears or spear-guns, but are in fact lasers built to resemble the traditional and symbolic guardian-spear which has long association with the Adeptus Custodes and which appears on their banners, badges and other regalia. The guards themselves never leave Earth, and only rarely leave the imperial palace where their duties lie - their place is by the Emperor's side.

+++The Adeptus Arbites+++

The Adeptus Arbites are the keepers of the great book of Judgement, the legal code of the imperium, painstakingly collated over the centuries and embodying every decree passed by the high lords of terra as the millenia pass the great book grows heavier . Indeed it has long since expanded beyond the confines of being a single volume. Its most ancient decrees are written upon parchments of human skin, enscribed in unknown tounges by nameless functionaries of a forgotten age.

The Adeptus Arbites are commonly called the Judges and their organisation represents the martial arm of the priesthood - the soldiers and police of the Adeptus Terra. Although planets are mainly self- governing and self-policing this arrangement sometimes breaks down, or proves unsatisfactory for one reason or another - rebellious Commanders may be tempted to plot treason against the Imperium, or rivals may overstep the bounds of petty feud. There is still an important role for a universal law-enforcing agency, and the Judges fill that role ruthlessly. Their duties usually fall between those of the Assassins, who may be obliged to deal with a single troublemaker, and the Army, which would be called in to wage outright war. Without mercy and utterly dedicated, the Judges are feared throughout the galaxy - for they are the agents of a harsh law, where failure and incompetence are crimes, and the only punishment is death. Judges are empowered to act as judge, jury and executioner - citizens have no rights, only members of the priesthood or Inquisition could claim anything so elaborate as a trial. Judges work from their headquarters on Earth, but their very nature takes them all over human space (and beyond). Often a small Judge squad might be placed upon a planet to work with an Imperial Commander (sometimes to keep a close watch on his activities). Their uniforms are basically black leather breeches and jacket, with extra padding at the elbows, knees and shoulders - this helps to emphasise their already considerable bulk. Heavy gloves and boots protect the hands and feet, whilst the head is encased within a simplified and practical version of the helmet worn by the Adeptus Custodes. The uniform conceals an undervest of mesh armour, although some Judges may wear carapace or even powered armour instead. A cloak is worn as part of the full uniform but is often discarded in action. Always carried and displayed prominently is the Judge's badge - his symbol of office and power. Standard weaponry comprises of either a laspistol or bolt pistol, the ammunition for which is carried around the waist.

+++The Assassins+++

The very size of the Imperium means that planetary government is frequently left to its own devices, often for centuries. The imperial administration may call in perhaps only every ten or twenty years to collect taxes or tithes. Sometimes even this becomes impossible due to warp storms, or pressing business elsewhere. As a result planetary government sometimes breaks down, or a planetary governor may start to think he can do without the protection of the Imperium, sometimes standard anti-psyker routines are allowed to slip, and imperial taxes are forgotten. Bringing wayward planets back into the imperial fold can be achieved in many ways. Outright war is one (much favoured) method, extermination is another. At the other end of the scale it may sometimes be beneficial to court a governor by diplomatic means, perhaps support his rivals or infiltrate anti-government, pro-imperial organisations. If a planet can be restored to the Imperium by clever diplomacy an expensive, troublesome and destructive war will be avoided. Imperial agents are fully versed in all the tricks of diplomacy, including clandestine ones such as bribery, popular agitation, economic sabotage, terrorism, torture, murder and assassination.

The Assassin is one of the most useful of these diplomatic agents. His job is simple, he is there to eliminate key individuals among the opposition. Sometimes a rebellion centres around a single personality, and a planet can be brought to heel by that person's death or disappearance. If done cleverly, a rebel leader can be quietly slain and replaced by an exact duplicate. Assassins may even provide such a duplicate themselves, as they are able to change their physical appearance using the shape changing drug polymorphine. Assassins are masters of disguise, and can assume

almost any human shape as well as that of some aliens. They are trained to use the protective black syn-skin, the synthetic skin layer that protects the Assassin from the environment as well as feeding sense enhancing chemicals into his body.

Assassins are recruited from the feral worlds as infants and undergo ten years extensive training at the school of Assassins on Earth, from then on they continue to live at and operate from the secret headquarters of the Assassins said to lie somewhere on the imperial planet. This is one of the Imperium's better known 'secret' divisions of the Adeptus Terra. Here the prospective Assassin is put through a decade of gruelling tests, receiving psychic implants to heighten senses and strengthen resolve, as well as sub-muscular acoustic surgery to enable him to survive the use of the shape-altering drug polymorphine. Every Assassin must master the weaponry and equipment of his trade, he must know how to drive and maintain all kinds of vehicle from a bike to a spaceship, he must be a technological expert, and he must have professorial knowledge of the Imperium's history, organisation and languages. This is a tall order by anybody's standards, and not all young recruits survive their training.

Navigators are sometimes recruited into the Assassins and there is a 5% chance of an Assassin being a Navigator.

Organisation. The Assassins are based at their secret headquarters somewhere on Earth. Their leader is the Master of Assassins, a mysterious figure, never seen by ordinary members of the priesthood, but rumoured to have personal access to the High Lords of Terra, if not the Emperor himself. His loyalty to the Emperor must be beyond doubt, for he single-handedly controls an organisation that could feasibly topple even the Imperium should he so wish. The organisation includes a number of ancillary staff, as well as Astropaths, Navigators and other servants. Although not Assassins as such, these characters live entirely within the organisation, and have no contact with the outside world. The Assassins themselves are stratified into Lord Assassins who are no longer involved directly in their work, but plan, organise, research and watch over missions for the younger Assassins. The bulk of Assassins are unranked, although some are obviously more experienced agents than others.

Equipment. Assassins have access to all equipment. Jokaero digital weapons are much favoured, polymorphine and syn-skin are almost mandatory. Armour is not usually worn because it is inappropriate to most of the situations in which an Assassin operates. Where needed, armour is available.

Camaru, and Her Two Companions

A typical Assassin. Camaru was taken from her parents at the age of three, and now only vaguely recalls her early life amongst the stone-age hunters of the Cristo system. Distinguishing herself amongst her fellow would-be Assassins, she quickly progressed to the full status of a trained Assassin, undertaking her first mission at the age of sixteen. She was part of a three-man hit squad aboard an imperial transport.

Their mission was to make sure the craft disappeared, taking with it certain junior members of the priesthood suspected of being under alien domination. Thanks to Camaru's quick thinking and fast reactions, all three of the Assassins managed to escape the spacecraft once it was discovered that a Vampire was on board and all the crew were under its evil influence. Taking to a life raft only moments before exploding a melta-bomb, the trio drifted helplessly in space for almost a month before being picked up. Only self-induced hibernation saved their lives. Camaru is tall, well muscled and, like all Assassins, extremely strong and athletic. She is pictured here as she appeared before the rebellious Lord of Okku, a treacherous Imperial Commander who was selling his subjects to the Ork stellar-slavers for personal wealth. The Lord of Okku did not benefit from the meeting, his tongue cut from his head, he was the last Okkurian to be sold to the Ork slavers. Camaru wears black syn-skin, around her waist she has wound a scarlet sash concealing a knife, bio-scanner, communicator, sufficient phials of polymorphine for 3 uses, syn-skin solvent, and a garrotte. She carries ten Jokaero digital weapons (1 on each finer); 3 flamers, 3 needlers and 4 lasers. The needlers are all loaded with deadly poison. Around her head Camaru wears a white scarf secreting yet another garrotte.

+++Venenum Assassin+++

The Venenum Temple of the Officio Assassinorum emphasizes the use of poisons and non-technical weapons to kill their foes. They use poisoned swords, daggers, and projectiles fired from weapons using highly-compressed air to be silent. They are masters of disguise and stealth, and they are masters at hand to hand combat. They are especially chosen for agility and their ability to stay totally silent when needed but also to have the ability to mimic the mannerisms and characteristics of others.

The Venenum temple stresses subtlety and cunning. The silent kill is always the best kill. The unknown Assassin is always the most effective Assassin. They shun weapons that cause noise or that leave easily traced evidence. They strike from the unknown and they disappear again into the unknown.

All the Assassins of the Venenum temple are trained in the use of Polymorphine, and only the Callidus approach their mastery of this drug. The Venenum Assassin may masquerade as any humanoid they choose, from a beautiful woman to a crippled old man, to aliens such as Orks and Eldar. They are the masters of disguise and mimicry. In addition to Polymorphine, they use a range of implants created by the Medicus Adeptus of the Imperium to change their size, shape and physical appearance. They also have implants that will allow them to mimic the sound and speech patterns of those they are replacing. It is only when they are injected with Polymorphine that these implants react to stimulants within the drug and transform the Assassin to mimic the encoded shapes needed to take the place of those they choose to replace.

The Venenum Assassin will be landed behind enemy lines to take the place of a trusted underling of their intended target, and then they will only reveal themselves when they attack their target at the crucial moment of battle.

+++The Adeptus Astra Telepathica+++

The Adeptus Astra Telepathica are commonly known as Astropaths - their role within the Imperium is one of communication. As the Imperium is so vast the only practical means of communication is by telepathy, and telepathy over interstellar distances can be achieved only by the Astropath. Psykers are vigorously controlled by the Imperium, some may escape detection, but the vast majority are fated to serve the Imperium in one way or another. Many are given up to the Emperor as sustenance, whilst countless others are executed because they are too dangerous to live. The remainder are recruited into the imperial organisation in some way, but only a tiny proportion of the very best are judged strong enough to survive without some form of psychic protection. So psykers can be found throughout the Adeptus Terra, the Inquisition, the Legiones Astartes, the army and the fleet. However, over 90% of psykers in imperial service are members of the Adeptus Astra Telepathica, known commonly as Astropaths. Astropaths are created from those psykers who have considerable powers, but who are not mentally strong enough to withstand the attentions of psychically attuned warp creatures. Were they simply allowed to develop without interference they would quickly find themselves in serious trouble, endangering the rest of humanity as well as themselves. However, the Imperium has a use for them. An Astropath is an Astro-telepath, an individual capable of communicating with others of his kind over vast interstellar distances. In the Age of the Imperium, where worlds are light-years apart, this is the only practical means of communication. For this reason the network of Astropaths is very important to the Imperium, and every spacecraft, research station, outpost, etc, has its own Astropath. Even small planets need

hundreds of these useful servants, while large worlds may have thousands and Earth itself is home to tens of thousands.

All Astropaths undergo a special process which moulds their powers and at the same time strengthens them against psychic danger. This is called the soul-binding ritual and only the Emperor has the power to perform it. It takes place in the great palace, where the psykers are led before the Emperor one hundred at a time. Knelt before the Emperor they must endure several hours of agony whilst the Emperor uses his powers to reshape their minds - mingling a little of his immeasurable power with their own. Unfortunately, the Emperor's mind is so powerful that not all candidates survive the ritual. Some are driven insane, and all have their personalities altered to some extent. The raw energy of the Emperor's will also has another effect, so powerful are the forces involved that many of the more delicate nerves can be damaged, especially the optic nerves. Consequently all Astropaths are blind, whilst many may also lack any sense of smell, touch or hearing.

SPECIAL:

1 An Astropath is psychically strengthened to withstand the attentions of warp creatures. Most of the psychically parasitic creatures can only warp into normal space through a non-protected psyker. This is indicated in the creature's description. Astropaths are psychically protected and thus cannot be utilised by creatures in warp space. They can, however, still be harmed by psychic attacks made from normal space.

2 Astropaths are blind but have a form of near-sense which allows them to sense normally visible objects within 20 metres. Up to this distance they may shoot, fight etc. normally.

Organisation

The Adeptus Astra Telepathica is a vast organisation whose central administrative core is based upon Earth. It exists purely to serve the needs of the Imperium, its leaders have no task to perform other than ensuring the network operates as smoothly and efficiently as possible. Because of their very nature, Astropaths often work in cooperation with the other branches of the Adeptus Terra, the Inquisition, fleet, army and Imperial Commanders. Every priesthood temple would have its own staff of Astropaths, relaying and receiving the messages of their masters, gathering and disseminating information throughout the galaxy.

Equipment

Astropaths carry no equipment as a rule - their ability to use most types of equipment is hindered by the fact that they are blind, but they do carry a long white stick or staff. One of the abilities gained during the soul-binding is near sense - an awareness that allows the Astropath to detect nearby objects, to sense (if not exactly see) the world about him. Some Astropaths have mechanical eyes connected directly into their brains, but this is not common - few Astropaths have the money or influence to restore their sight.

Uniforms

Astropaths wear a hooded robe or habit, belted at the waist. Personal possessions are kept in a sling bag, often ornamented with religious motifs. The colour adopted by Astropaths as a symbol of their status is green, although a robe will often incorporate several shades of the colour, ranging from pale near-grey to almost black. **Astropath Abilities.** Astropaths have psychic abilities in exactly the same way as other psykers. In addition they have between 1 and 5 other abilities conferred during the soul-binding. Astropaths always have the Astrotelepathy ability with a 50% chance of having 1-4 other abilities as shown on the following chart. Note that many of these abilities relate to spacecraft and warp travel. They are given here to illustrate the sort of powers available to these powerful psykers.

Astrotelepathy

This is an extremely long-range telepathy that permits Astropaths to receive and transmit messages over distances up to 50 thousand light years. The use of this ability is successful only 50% of the time. Messages are often distorted or lost.

Locate Warp Gate/Portal

This ability allows the Astropath to locate the position of any warp gate/portal within 10 light years. Within warp space this ability can be used to locate warp portals through to real space 10% of the time. Otherwise the ability is always successful, assuming a gate/portal is present.

Psychic Beacon

An Astropath with this ability is able to broadcast a psychic beacon similar to the Astronomican but far less powerful. The range of the signal is a 10 light year radius around the position of the Astropath. Within this sphere of space a Navigator can guide a ship even without access to the Astronomican, beyond the galaxy for example. The ability cannot be used from inside warp space, so an Astropadi on board a spacecraft is unable to provide a signal (although if two ships were making alternate jumps it would be possible for each to derive coordinates from the other).

Warp Space Trail

This ability allows an Astropath to place a psychic homer into the mind of a member of a spacecraft crew. It doesn't matter which crewman is affected, the victim wouldn't even be aware of his predicament. The homer can only be placed from a short distance away (up to 1000 kilometres in clear space, but as little as 10 kilometres in a busy spaceport). Once placed the homer lasts for 5-10 days and its signal can be detected within 1000 kilometres by the Astropath. If during this time the ship makes a warp jump the Astropath will be able to sense its destination. Of course, to successfully trail a ship through warp space the trailing craft must remain within 1000 kilometres in real space, otherwise the signal will be too weak to follow.

+++Navigators+++

Navigators are mutants of a very special kind, and although their appearance can vary a great deal they always have the power to navigate through warp space. Although this is a psychic ability, navigators never have other psychic powers and are no more vulnerable to psychically attuned warp creatures than any normal human. The origin of navigators goes back to the Dark Age of Technology, to a time of genetic experimentation when many kinds of mutants were engineered to fulfill roles envisaged by their creators. Whether navigators were created deliberately or by accident matters little in the Age of the Imperium, they are a fact of life and an important resource.

The mutation is a consistent one and is passed down from generation to generation. The gene is only transferable when both parents are navigators, so navigators tend to intermarry, forming a number of powerful and influential navigator families. These families are mostly resident on Earth. There is no imperial control over navigators, and many pursue civilian careers as traders. Most gravitate into the ranks of the imperial network however, for these families have a long history of service to humanity. Many past Masters of the Adeptus Terra have come from their ranks, and they occupy positions throughout the Imperium as members of the priesthood, Inquisition, army, fleet, etc. It is in the fleet that their powers can be put to full use, working aboard spacecraft as warp pilots.

The physical appearance of navigators can vary a great deal, although families tend to resemble each other. Some are identical to ordinary humans and cannot be told apart. However, there is a tendency for navigators to be tall and spindly, and their flesh may have a peculiar transparent quality which is rather disturbing. Eyes may be extremely large and may lack the iris, while other facial features are often small and under developed. Hands and feet can appear ridiculously large and are frequently webbed. Body hair is commonly absent altogether. Only an extreme form of navigator would exhibit all of these characteristics, but most have some traits.

As well as the standard personality types, navigators may also be Space Marines.

Navigators never have psychic powers.

Organisation. Navigators are more of a sub-species than an organisation, and they can be found throughout the Adeptus Terra and other imperial bodies. However, each family is very close (and often very large), and different families are often allied by marriage. As such the family organisation can be very important - and a navigator may feel entitled to call upon a relative to 'pull a few strings' where possible. Conversely, some families are deadly rivals and open hostilities (away from Earth) are not infrequent.

Equipment. Navigators are individuals, and the equipment they carry will reflect their personal fortune and success as much as anything. Navigators from the more influential families would be on

the whole more wealthy and better equipped. Those in imperial service would be equipped accordingly of course.

Navigators wear civilian clothes, but, as they spend a great deal of time in space, often wear a sealed suit. Their weapons reflect their environment too - powerful blasting weapons could easily damage a spacecraft and are generally avoided. The most convenient weapon to carry, and thus a weapon typically used by the navigator, is the laspistol. Navigators are not usually fighters by inclination.

A Typical Navigator. The lot of the independent navigator is typified by our friend Lustram Locarno. Lustram has been travelling the spaceways for a decade. Although only 27 he looks far older (years of deep space travel often causes premature ageing). Like most spacers he wears a sealed suit, the helmet of which is fully equipped with auto-senses. He packs a standard laspistol in a conspicuous holster, and another one less obviously tucked into his right boot. His remaining boot is home to a knife. Aside from the communicator built into his helmet, he has another in one of his suit pockets.

+++Rogue Traders+++

The Rogue Traders fulfill a vital role within the Imperium as freelance explorers, conquistadors and merchants. A Rogue Trader is a trusted imperial servant, he is given a ship, a crew, a contingent of marines and carte blanche to roam the worlds beyond the Imperium.

The Imperium is a vast, scattered realm, extending over almost the entire galaxy, impinging itself upon the more compact areas of alien settled space. The Imperium contains a million inhabited worlds, but even this is but a tiny fraction of the galactic whole. Then there is the eastern fringe, the remote area of the galaxy where the Astronomicon does not reach, and where the only human settlers are renegades or pioneering groups whose ancestors were forgotten millennia ago. Most of the galaxy remains unexplored, unknown and dangerous.

The potential of new worlds, alien civilisations and unimaginable resources has stimulated the growth of free-ranging imperial agents known as Rogue Traders. Licensed and equipped by the priesthood, the Rogue Trader is free to explore the far regions of the galaxy, the areas where the Astronomicon does not reach, and those areas within its range as yet unvisited. Rogue Traders have even attempted to cross the void of inter-galactic space, but over such distances even the Astropaths' powers of communication are useless, and whether such missions have succeeded is unknown. Operating in isolation from the central authority of the Imperium, the Rogue Trader must decide how to react to alien cultures, new discoveries and threats. If he judges a race potentially dangerous he may attempt to destroy it, or gather as much information about it as he can so that others may do so. If he decides a race may be of use to humanity he may attempt to make contact and establish relations. If merely technologically or minerally rich, a planet may be plundered, and the Rogue Trader will return to Earth laden with the treasure of space; alien artifacts, rare and precious minerals and undreamed of technology.

Needless to say, the Rogue Trader requires a fair compliment of spacecraft, troops and other staff if he is to complete his mission. His total responsibility may extend to a dozen spacecraft, often huge, lumbering cargo vessals crammed with a small army, a full crew of technicians and volunteer settlers to establish colonies on new worlds. Most important, however, are the fighting troops, for it is they who will have to deal with any potential threat.

Profile. Rogue Traders are individuals who have reached a position of power within the imperial hierarchy. They come from the ranks of the Adeptus Terra, the Inquisition, army or fleet - a few are influential civilians, amongst whom the navigator families are the most famous. Politics sometimes obliges this course, for free of imperial command the Rogue Trader is also conveniently out of the way, beyond the centre of real power. Rogue Traders have a reputation as outcasts, many are people whom the priesthood deems better kept at a safe distance; vociferous Space Marines leaders, influential Navigators, liberal-minded Inquisitors and rebel Imperial Commanders. A Rogue Trader is an experienced individual.

Rogue Traders are frequently possessed of psychic powers, 30% are psykers compared to 5% of normal human characters. Non-psychic Rogue Traders may be Navigators, there being a 5% chance of this.

Organisation. The Rogue Trader works under instruction from the priesthood - but his is a wide one. Furthermore, once contact with Earth has been lost, the Rogue Trader is effectively independent.

Equipment. Equipment can be of any type, often alien or otherwise unavailable within the Imperium. In battle a Rogue Trader would typically appear in powered armour and some sort of armour energy field. Weaponry carried at all times would be at least one pistol weapon, usually a bolter, and a power sword or chainsword. Digital weapons are regarded with high favour too. A Rogue Traders personal equipment is likely to be extensive. The equipment aboard ship would include almost all possible things, including vehicles.

A typical Rogue Trader. Jan Van Yastobaal enjoyed a successful career in the Administratum before reaching the supreme position of High Lord of Terra. It was old age that finally spurred this tireless warrior into the outer galaxy, where he quickly gained a reputation of being particularly successful at finding and plundering alien worlds. His suit of powered armour is worn underneath a sleeveless tabard. His helmet is moulded into a horned skull. He carries a stasis field and refractor field defences, and his weaponry includes a bolt pistol, autopistol, laspistol, power sword and three Jakaero digital weapons (1 each of laser, needler and flamer). Additional equipment includes a communicator, bio-scanner, nose filters, photochromatic eye drops, an immune injector, infra-vision contacts, chemicals for the Jakaero needler, a rad-counter, a stimulant chemical, a sys-skin applicator and sufficient chemical for 3 uses, 3 suspensors and web solvent.

Retinue. Rogue Traders do not take to the empty voids of space alone - each commands a small fleet, a contingent of warriors, settlers, and all manner of support personnel. With them go supplies to last for several years, vehicles, prefabricated research stations, housing, transport, weaponry, etc. A typical retinue would be an entire company of Space Marines (100 warriors) plus two companies of ordinary imperial troops all with the standard vehicles and auxiliary equipment.

>>The Galaxy of the 41st Millenium

+++Worlds of the Galaxy+++

The galaxy is a vast spiral, ninety thousand light years across and fifteen thousand light years thick, containing four hundred billion stars. Only a fraction of the stars have habitable planetary systems, and only a tiny fraction of these have been investigated by humanity or any other spacefaring race.

The initial human colonisation of the galaxy lies in the distant past, separated from the present by twenty thousand years of regression and rebuilding. Human worlds are scattered throughout the galaxy but their distribution is not even. The greatest density of human worlds is in the galactic west, close to Earth. In the galactic east, in the area known as the Eastern Fringe, human worlds are few and often far apart.

Many human worlds benefit from mutual contact and a comparable level of technology. Others have become primitive and barbarous, often as a result of periods of isolation. New human worlds are being discovered all the time, and there remains an unknown number which have been isolated and forgotten for hundreds, if not thousands, of years.

THE IMPERIUM

Stellar empires cannot really be reckoned in terms of the spatial areas they occupy, but only in terms of the star systems under their control. The Imperium is the largest such empire in the

galaxy. The million or more worlds that lie under its dominion are spread throughout the entire galaxy with the exception of the Eastern Fringe. It extends to the limits of the Astronomican, the beacon which its fleets rely on for navigation. Of course the Imperium does not control all of the star systems within this vast area, nor even the majority of the inhabited systems within its borders. The galaxy also contains many alien races ruling smaller empires of their own.

The Imperium is ruled from Old Earth. It is governed by a vast bureaucracy known as the Adeptus Terra sometimes referred to simply as The Priesthood. The Adeptus Terra governs the Imperium in the name of the Emperor of Humanity, the Undying Master of Mankind.

Most of the information about spaceships and space travel in this article refers to the fleets of the Imperium. For more information on the vast, complex and fascinating Empire of Man, see the Warhammer 40,000 rulebook.

THE EASTERN FRINGE

The Eastern Fringe lies beyond the Astronomican and so beyond the easy reach of Imperial forces. It is known to contain human planets settled in ancient times as well as many alien worlds. Some of these planets have populations which are feral or barbarous but many shelter highly advanced cultures. Most worlds are self-governing or belong to small independent human or alien empires. Agents of the Imperium are continually exploring the Eastern Fringe, spying out dangers, recruiting allies, and fighting wars beyond the borders of the Imperium itself.

THE EYE OF TERROR

The Eye of Terror lies on the edge of the galaxy to the north-west of Earth. It can be plainly seen as a swirl of stars swirling very much like an eye. The Eye of Terror is also the centre of a huge and dangerous warpstorm. It is in fact one of the few places in the galaxy where real space and the warp actually overlap. Following the wars known as the Horus Heresy which were fought at the dawn of Imperial history, rebel forces allied to Warmaster Horus fled into the Eye of Terror after their defeat at the hands of the Emperor and loyal human troops. Their descendants still rule the Eye of Terror. Their prolonged contact with the warp and its inhabitants has changed them utterly: they are no longer human nor wholly sane. They remain amongst the most deadly enemies of the Imperium and humanity.

WILDERNESS SPACE

Most of the stars in the galaxy remain unexplored. Whole areas of the galaxy are embroiled within warpstorms and are therefore inaccessible from other areas. Other stars are simply remote and await mapping and codification by the Imperial exploration teams. These largely unknown zones are known as wilderness space or wilderness zones. As warpstorms abate, old wilderness areas are explored, uncovering ancient human settlements as well as alien races and empires. Wilderness zones are spread throughout the galaxy.

ALIEN WORLDS

Humanity is but one of many races in the galaxy. However, none are so widely distributed or so numerous as humans. Most occupy only a single world or a small group of worlds. The majority of aliens are comparatively primitive, peaceful or powerless, and of little interest to humanity. Only a few alien races are powerful, aggressive and possess technology which rivals that of the Imperium. Of these, the most common are the Orks, Eldar and Tyranids.

ORKS

The Orks are the degenerate descendants of a once-sophisticated spacefaring race. They are brutal and warlike, but retain some of the technological knowledge invented by their forebears. Orks are naturally anarchic and aggressive, fighting constantly amongst themselves as well as against other races. Ork worlds are spread throughout the galaxy in a similar way to those of humans, testifying to a past age of superior technical knowledge.

Ork Warlords represent a constant and dangerous threat to humanity. Individually they control only a few ships, but there are so many of these petty tyrants that the Imperium is in constant danger from their raids. Their craft are crudely designed and constructed but effective for all that and easily a match for Imperial ships of a similar size.

ELDAR

The Eldar are an ancient race that live on giant spacecraft called Craftworlds. These Craftworlds drift through space at sublight speeds. The Eldar travel through space by means of an intricate system

of warp gates and tunnels, closed routes through warp space leading from a Craftworld to either a point in space or a planet. Some gates are quite small and allow an Eldar to literally walk from his Craftworld to another part of the galaxy. Other gates are large, and every Craftworld has at least one warp gate that is large enough to enable spacecraft to enter. It is by this means that Eldar ships travel between the stars - they have no warp drives in the human sense.

TYRANIDS

The Tyranid hive mind is an alien entity, a great creature that is formed from countless billions of creatures, a mind that is many linked minds. The Tyranids have travelled to the Imperium in a hive fleet from an unimaginably distant galaxy. The hive fleet is a great dark swarm of many millions of individual spacecraft, each a gigantic living thing, a creature fashioned from organic tissue by means of sophisticated genetic manipulation of which the Tyranids are masters.

The Tyranid Hive Mind hungers for fresh gene-stocks that can be used to create new bio-construct creatures and organic machines. Their own galaxy is exhausted, its creatures long since absorbed into the Hive Mind, their flesh turned to machine like purposes or discarded as useless. The Imperium, with its countless billions of humans and other creatures, offers the Tyranids an almost inexhaustible supply of flesh and genes which will invigorate the hive mind and enable it to embody itself in new forms.

The hive fleet has reached the outer part of the Imperium and the entire south-eastern spiral arm of the galaxy now lies under its dominion. A thousand human worlds have already fallen to the invader, their populations consumed or enslaved by the Tyranids.

Now the Imperium prepares for war. The weapon shops of Mars turn out ever-more potent machines of death, new spaceships sail from the shipyards of Necromunda, Space Marine chapters muster their fleets and begin the long battle to counter the hive fleet, the vast resources of the Imperial Guard gradually swing into action as millions of men prepare to embark on a war for humanity's very survival.

INTERPLANETARY TRAVEL

Hereditary rulers called Imperial Commanders govern the worlds of the Imperium. The Imperial Commander holds his planet on behalf of the Emperor. In return for his oath of loyalty and regular planetary tithes, he controls the planet as if it were his own. The Imperial Commander is free to administrate and defend his planet as he sees fit. Most worlds maintain fleets of interplanetary spacecraft - ships built to operate within their home system and lacking the warp engines needed for travel between stars.

Interplanetary ships are common on all technically advanced worlds. Even on medieval and feral worlds the planet's governor and his associated staff and warriors would have access to such spacecraft - the general population would remain either ignorant of or completely in awe of spacecraft and technology.

The Imperial Commander of each system administers interplanetary shipping. Some Imperial Commanders keep a tight leash on all space travel, others are far more lax and allow independent bodies to organise and maintain spacefleets to serve the system. Similarly, while some Imperial Commanders police their systems very thoroughly, others find it impossible or impractical to enforce controls on independent operatives. Some Imperial Commanders undoubtedly collude with anarchic and piratical organisations, trading off the control of planets or asteroids, mining or transport rights, or even defence and policing concessions, in return for personal profit. These Imperial Commanders may maintain that this is the only way they can control their worlds.

Each planet is responsible for its own defence. Imperial Commanders are obliged to build ground-based defences, spaceports, and what defence fleets that can. The number of weapons and ships in any individual system will vary, depending on the enthusiasm of its governor as much as the possible danger. In addition to ships under the control of the Imperial Commander, planets lying in vulnerable positions or having a history of trouble may also have an Imperial Fleet base. Although Fleet ships are independent of those of the Imperial Commander, both would be ready to meet an emergency. Fleet ships may also be stationed in one system so that they can patrol a number of nearby star systems.

+++Galactic Civilisation+++

Despite the use of faster than light warp drives, the enormous size of the galaxy means that it remains almost entirely unexplored. Even the Imperium of Man, by far the largest of all stellar empires, contains a very small number of the galaxy's stars. New star systems are constantly being discovered and investigated along with their native creatures, natural resources and alien civilisations. Even so, there is no possibility of humans exhausting the galaxy's potential to provide new worlds for habitation and exploitation.

The spiral arms of the galaxy contain recent stars and gas clouds where new stars are born. It is within these arms that the majority of the galaxy's habitable worlds lie, between ten and forty thousand light years from the galactic centre. Earth lies approximately 30 thousand light years from the galactic core in the main western spiral arm.

Not all human-settled worlds are global conurbations like the Earth. Some are relatively sparsely settled. Different worlds have different social structures, different economies, and different levels of technology. The same is true of alien worlds, although as most aliens are less mobile than humans their worlds tend to be self-supporting and less specialised.

IMPERIAL COMMANDERS

Worlds belonging to the Imperium are ruled by a planetary governor called an Imperial Commander. The Imperial Commander may be appointed and replaced by the ruling body of the Imperium, the Administratum, but in almost all cases he is a hereditary ruler whose family was appointed to the governorship hundreds or thousands of years ago. The Imperial Commander is a feudal ruler. He holds his world for the Imperium - in return he must meet his feudal obligations.

These obligations vary from planet to planet depending on the arrangement made when the ruling family was installed. Common to all these conditions are certain obligations. Imperial Commanders must always help and co-operate with Imperial officials and Inquisitors. They must maintain the rule of the Imperium over their domain. They must provide troops for the Imperial Guard as required by the Departamento Munitorium. They must control psykers within their domain and provide a levy of psykers for the Adeptus Astra Telepathica. And they must pay the tithes set by the Administratum. In other respects Imperial Commanders are free to govern their worlds exactly as they please.

ISOLATIONISM

A major factor in the social, economic and technical development of human and alien worlds is the relative isolation of each solar system. Interstellar travel is not rare, but the vastness of the galaxy means that most worlds are distant and sometimes difficult to reach. The continual threat of warpstorms sometimes results in worlds being cut off for indeterminate periods of time and sometimes for good. In the Imperium, interstellar shipping remains the preserve of the Adeptus Terra. Imperial Commanders ultimately rely upon the Imperium for external contact. Due to all of these factors most settled worlds are insular. Their inhabitants may well acknowledge the existence of the Imperium, but this is hardly apparent in their daily lives.

TYPES OF SETTLEMENT

Civilised Worlds

The majority of human and advanced alien worlds may be described as civilised - although the term refers to their urban landscapes rather than to any pretence of social decorum. These are worlds with large but balanced populations centred in large cities. They are self-supporting worlds where factories turn out the majority of their needs, and carefully managed farms produce sufficient food to feed the inhabitants.

Agricultural Worlds

These are little more than farming planets where most of the world's surface is given over to producing food. The food they produce is shipped to the hungry hive worlds and the technological materials they require are imported in return. These worlds are difficult to protect from food pirates and interstellar raiders. It has been known for rival Imperial Commanders to raid and steal grain and cattle barges from each other. The resulting skirmishes sometimes break out into hill-scale war.

Industrial Worlds

These are factory planets given over to manufacture or mining. They are sparsely populated as most functions are accomplished mechanically. Only worlds possessing quantities of rare material are really worth developing in this way. Like agricultural worlds, they are difficult to defend.

Hive Worlds

Hives are huge urban conglomerations which can stretch across continents and which may reach miles into the sky. A planet may comprise many individual hives divided by areas of polluted waste - in some cases the world is completely built-up forming a single planet-wide hive. Hive worlds have huge, unmanageable populations and rely upon constant recycling to produce food. Such planets are usually rife with anarchic and destructive forces and as a result provide the richest source of fighting men for the Imperial Guard.

Medieval Worlds

Many re-discovered human worlds have regressed to a social and technological status usually described as medieval. When these worlds are absorbed into the Imperium they do not change much. There is little point in bringing technology to a society which is getting on perfectly well without it.

Feral Planets

Feral planets contain long-isolated populations where society has declined into complete savagery. Feral planets have a technological basis which is sub-medieval and often stone age. The Imperium regards the populations of such worlds as harmless but useless. The worlds may be explored and exploited for mineral wealth or settlement potential, in which case the natives may have to be controlled or exterminated.

Death Worlds

These are planets which are simply too dangerous to support human settlement. They vary a great deal in type. Typical worlds may be world-wide jungles which harbour man-eating plants and carnivorous animals, or barren rockscapes strewn with volcanoes and wracked by nuclear storms. These worlds are impossible to settle but must be properly explored which necessitates the provision of outposts and other facilities.

Research Stations

Worlds which contain no significant sentient population are often used by research units where dangerous experiments can be conducted into new aspects of technology. Perhaps the most common type is a Breeding Unit where local wildlife undergoes domestication and evaluation for food potential.

PLANETARY DEFENCE

Each planet is responsible for its own defence. Imperial Commanders are obliged to build ground-based defences, spaceports, and what defence fleets that can. The number of weapons and ships in any individual system will vary, depending on the enthusiasm of its governor as much as possible danger.

In addition to ships under the control of the Imperial Commander, planets lying in vulnerable positions or having a history of trouble may also have a Fleet base. Although Fleet ships are independent of those of the Imperial Commander, both would be ready to meet an emergency. Fleet ships may also be stationed in one system so that they can patrol a number of nearby star systems.

Ships built by Imperial Commanders are pure interplanetary craft with no warp drives. Fleet patrol ships would of course be interstellar ships with warp drives but they'd also have many small interplanetary ships operating from the launch bays built into their hulls.

In times of war or danger, fleet ships from all over a sector may be diverted from their normal duties to form a Battlefleet. Rarely is it necessary to divert ships from other sectors, nor would it be worth moving vast numbers of ships just to defend a solitary world. A common Imperial ploy is to let a world fall, knowing that it can easily be retaken once sufficient craft can be mobilised. This is not a popular tactic with the populations of such planets, but spacecraft are valuable and difficult to replace whereas humanity is prolific.

SUB-STELLAR SHIPS

The vast majority of spacecraft in the Imperium are sub-stellar ships which travel only within the confines of their own star system. The laws governing the ownership and operating of sub-stellar ships are the concern of the Imperial Commander of each system. The Imperial authorities take no great interest in what happens on this, galactically-speaking, tiny level.

Sub-stellar ships divide into many kinds, from warships to industrial craft.

Warships

Most space warfare centres around planets, installations and other important targets within a solar system. It is therefore sensible to maintain sub-stellar craft in the proximity of vulnerable systems. These craft may be Fleet vessels operating out of a fleet base, or they may be vessels belonging to the Imperial Commander of the system.

Cargo Ships

If a system has several inhabited planets it will need cargo ships of one kind or another. These may be owned and run by the planetary government or by private individuals, cartels or companies. Most systems would have both government-controlled and privately-owned craft.

Industrial Ships

These include all manner of ships used for maintenance, manufacture and mining, owned by governmental or private groups in the same way as cargo ships.

Research Ships

Very few systems are fully explored - there are always parts of a solar system which are uninvestigated. The exact nature of research or exploration varies from system to system. A common ship of this type is the mineral prospecto which investigates potential mining areas.

Space Stations

It is not always possible to build bases or docking facilities on planets or asteroids, so space stations may be constructed instead. These are huge craft which provide all the facilities normally available on a planet.

Beacons

Beacons are small space stations. They serve three functions. Firstly they act as navigational beacons by broadcasting a local signal. Secondly, they monitor passing spacecraft, sending information regarding size, course and registration signal. Thirdly, they act as emergency refuges where the crews of crippled ships can survive until they can be rescued. Beacons usually have a small crew, although some are entirely automated. The position and number of beacons in a system varies from none at all to hundreds.

+++Interstellar Travel+++

Without space travel mankind would have died millennia ago in the poisoned desolation of earth's sterile deserts. Today, interstellar spaceships form a frail lifeline enabling humanity to survive amongst the stars. The defence of the Imperium, trade, communications and transport are each dependent upon interstellar travel and ultimately upon interstellar spaceships.

Interstellar spaceships are equipped with warp drives enabling them to travel between the stars. A few of these craft are owned by Imperial Commanders, Navigator families or other independent organisations or individuals. The vast majority belong to and are controlled by the Administratum, the administrative branch of the Adeptus Terra. All legally operating human ships, whether owned by the Imperium or not, are registered and policed by the Administratum.

THE WARP

An understanding of interstellar travel requires some knowledge of the warp. The material universe is just one aspect of reality. There is a quite separate and co-existing immaterial universe. This is commonly known as the Warp or warpspace, also known as Chaos, the otherworld, the ether, the empyrean, the void and the immaterium. The study and exploitation of the warp is the aim of warp technology, the most important achievement of which is warp travel.

Warpspace may be explained in terms of an endlessly broad and infinitely deep sea of raw energy. This energy carries within it the random thoughts, unfettered emotions, memory fragments and

unshakeable beliefs of those who live in the material universe. In this sense it is the collective mind of the universe itself. It would be overly simple to claim that this is all there is to the warp, but the image is a useful mental tool which helps us to understand it.

THE PRINCIPLE OF WARP TRAVEL

A spacecraft drops into the warp by activating its warp engines. As a ship leaves the material universe it enters a corresponding point in warp space. The ship is then carried along by the tides and currents of the warp.

After travelling in this fashion for an appropriate time, the ship uses its warp engines to drop back into real space. Because the material universe and the warp move relative to each other, the ship reappears in a new position several light years from its starting point. This process is called a jump or hop and the process of entering or leaving warp space is known as a drop or shift. Journeys are undertaken in short jumps of up to 4 or 5 light years. Longer jumps are unpredictable and dangerous. The tides of warp space move in complex and inconsistent patterns and ships attempting longer hops often end up wildly off course.

this limitation to apply to all warp travel then humanity would not have spread throughout the galaxy as it has. It is misible to make long jumps of many light years by steering a within the warp itself - sensing, responding to and exploiting its currents and thereby directing the craft towards corresponding point in the material universe. Only the wige human mutants known as Navigators can pilot a craft through the warp in this way.

Some people are sensitive to the movements of warp space. They can, for example, sometimes tell that a spacecraft is approaching even 'before it drops back into the material universe. This human sensitivity to the warp is not generally well developed. However, in a minority of people this sensitivity is far more finely tuned. These people are known as psykers and they are able to consciously control and use the energy of the warp to affect the material universe. Navigators are powerful psykers of a specialised kind who can use their powers to steer spacecraft in the warp.

THE ASTRONOMICAN AND THE WARP

The Astronomican is a psychic homing signal centred upon the Earth. It is powered by the continuous mental concentration of thousands of psykers. The Astronomican cannot be detected in the real universe but only in the warp. It is by means of this signal that Navigators can steer their spaceships over long distances.

The Astronomican's signal is strongest close to Earth and gets increasingly weaker further away. It extends over a spherical area with a diameter of about 50 thousand light years. Because the Earth is situated in the galactic west, the Astronomican does not cover the extreme eastern part of the galaxy. Nor is the extent or strength of the signal constant - it can sometimes be blocked by localised activity within the warn itself. Such activity may be compared to the hurricanes or storms of a terrestrial weather system and is known as a warpstorm. Warpstorms may be so had, and so long-lasting, that entire star systems are isolated for hundreds of years at a time.

A warpstorm not only obscures the signal of the Astronomican, it is also dangerous for spacecraft travelling nearby. No spacecraft can venture within a warpstorm and expect to survive, although there are tales of miraculous escapes and of ships being thrown tens of thousands of light years off course. Warpstorms are not the only dangers within the warp. There are sentient energies and other immaterial life-forms that inhabit it: creatures formed from (and part of) the shifting stuff of the warn. Few are friendly and many are hostile. They are known to mankind as daemons.

TIME DISPLACEMENT

The time differences between real space and warp space are quite drastic. Not only does time pass at different rates in both kinds of space, but it also passes at very variable rates. Until a ship finishes its jump, it is impossible for a ship's crew to know exactly how long their journey has taken. Time passing in real space is referred to as real time. Time passing on board a spacecraft is referred to as warp time. For example, a 100 light year jump will seem to take from 234 to 934 hours to a spaceship's crew, but between 3 days and 3 weeks will have passed in real space. These times do not include journey times out to and from jump points on the edge of the star systems. It takes from days to weeks of travel at sub-light speeds to reach a drop from the spaceship's starting planet, and a similar time to re-enter the destination system.

The Imperium is approximately 75 thousand light years from edge to edge. A journey of this length would take between 75 and 300 days in warp time, and between 6 years and 40 years real time.

WARP NAVIGATION

Once a spacecraft activates its warp drives it is plunged into a dimension very different from our universe. It is convenient to imagine warp space as consisting of a relatively dense, almost liquid, energy which is devoid of stars, light and life as we know it.

Once within warp space a ship may move by means of its main warp drives, following powerful eddies and currents in the warp, eventually reaching a point in the warp corresponding to a destination in real space. The most difficult aspect of warp travel is that it is impossible to detect the movement of warp space once a ship is in the warp. The ship can only blindly carry on, its crew trusting that it is going in the right direction. The longer a ship remains in warp space the greater the chances of encountering some unexpected current that can turn it unknowingly off-course.

Navigation of warp space can be achieved in two ways: the calculated jump and the piloted jump.

All warp-drives incorporate navigational mechanisms. When the ship is in real space, these monitor the ever shifting movements of the part of the warp corresponding to the ship's current position. By observing these movements in the warp it is possible to calculate a course, corrective manoeuvres, and approximate journey time to a proposed destination. Calculation relies on the assumption that the 'warp-currents' observed from real space don't change significantly during flight. This method is known as a calculated jump. It is not safe to make a calculated jump of more than four or five light years at one go. The longer the jump, the greater the chances of a significant change in warp current movement.

The second, and more efficient, form of warp-navigation is the piloted jump. This method relies upon two factors: the human mutants known as Navigators and the psychic beacon called the Astronomican. The Astronomican is centred on Earth and is not only controlled by, but is directed by, the psychic power of the Emperor himself. The Astronomican is a beacon that, because it is psychic, penetrates into warp space. A Navigator on board a ship in the warp is able to pick up these signals and can steer a spaceship through warp space, compensating for current changes as he does so. A piloted jump can safely cover a far greater distance than a calculated jump. 5,000 light years would be the normal maximum jump, but longer jumps have been made.

IMPERIAL SPACESHIPS

The whole structure of the Imperium is founded upon the craft that transport its armies and officials across the galaxy. It is the fleets that carry vital food to the starving hive-worlds, and which bring technology and equipment to the agricultural planets. Without its fleets the Imperium would soon collapse and humanity would perish in many parts of the galaxy.

Interstellar craft may be privately owned but most operate on behalf of one of the Imperial organisations. Of these, the Imperial Fleet is the largest, numbering tens of thousands of warships and hundreds of thousands of cargo vessels of varying sizes. In addition to its spacecraft, the Fleet maintains military spaceports, space stations, mining and factory ships, various orbital research stations and countless unmanned orbiting spaceships that serve as early warning, exploration and research satellites.

So vast is the Imperium that the Fleet is divided into five main sections, each functioning as an independent administrative unit (although they co-operate whenever it's necessary). Most of the higher levels of Fleet command come directly from the ranks of the Priesthood - principally from the Administratum. The overall fleet commander is also a High Lord of Terra and resident on Earth.

The Priesthood also maintains a small number of its own ships. Some of these reside permanently on the Imperial planet, whilst others are scattered throughout the galaxy, transporting Imperial servants on missions of the greatest importance or secrecy. A further corps of ships lies under the direct control of the Adeptus Arbites, the Judges, to be used for transportation and war.

The Space Marines have their own interstellar transports and battlefleets. Although not large in numbers these are manned by the most ferocious and highly-trained warriors in the galaxy. Each Space Marine chapter has sufficient ships to act as a spacebound home base, including equipment transports and landing craft. Space Marine Commanders are at liberty to purchase craft or capture enemy craft and use them how they will. Individual chapters use their own colour schemes and markings and their ships are immediately identifiable.

Other interstellar craft form a minority. The small exploratory fleets of the Rogue Traders may number as many as two hundred ships at one time, but are scattered beyond the fringes of human space. Other Imperial organisations, such as the Officio Assassinorum, also have access to interstellar craft, but the details of these ships are well-guarded secrets.

Interstellar ships in private hands make up a fairly small fraction of the total. In addition there are space stations, mines and factory craft also owned by individuals, corporations or mercantile families but these are a rarity. As far as interstellar travel is concerned, the Imperium is all-powerful and ships not controlled by the Imperium are only permitted to exist because their owners are co-operative and useful.

The most noteworthy privately-owned ventures are the great mercantile families of Navigators. Even the largest of these owns a relatively small number of craft, but in terms of real wealth this represents a huge investment. Most of these ships are ancient - family possessions nurtured and maintained over die millennia - but they are generally large and well built.

THE SEGMENTAE MAJORIS

The Imperium is divided into five fleet zones known as the Segmentae Majoris. Although intended for purposes of fleet administration and shipping controls, the Segmentae have evolved into administrative divisions of the Adeptus Terra.

All shipping is supervised within the jurisdiction of one of the five Segmentae. Each Segmentum has an orbital headquarters called a Segmentum Fortress which forms the base of fleet actions within the Segmentum. The Segmentum Fortress is controlled directly by a high-ranking official of the Administratum known as the Master of the Segmentum.

Zone Segmentum Fortress

Central Segmentum Sola Mars

North Segmentum Obscurus Cypra Mundi

South Segmentum Tempestus Bakka

East Ultima Segmentum Kar Duniash

West Segm&ntum Pacificus Hydraphur

Sectors

Each Segmentum is divided into sectors. The size of a Sector varies according to local demands and stellar density. A typical sector might encompass 7 million cubic light years, equivalent to a cube with sides almost 200 light years long.

Sub-Sectors

Sectors are divided into sub-sectors, usually comprising between 2 and 8 star systems within a 10 light year radius (some may encompass more systems - others only 1). This size is governed by the practical patrol ranges of spaceships. Because sub-sectors are divisions of worlds (rather than volumes of space) there are vast numbers of star systems within each sector which do not fall within a sub-sector. These are referred to as inter sectors - and are commonly known as wilderness zones, forbidden zones, empty space and frontier space. Inter-sectors may contain gas or dust nebulae, inaccessible areas, alien systems, unexplored systems, uninhabited systems and uninhabitable worlds.

THE FLEET

The Imperium's interstellar ships comprise merchant vessels, warships, civil craft and several other specialised types. These are organised into specific fleets: merchant fleets, warfleets, and civil fleets. Each of the Segmentae Majoris has its own merchant, civil and warfleets. So for example, the Warfleet Solar is the Warfleet of the Segmentum Solar, the Merchant Pacificus is the merchant fleet of the Segmentum Pacificus, the Civilis Tempestus is the civil fleet of the Segmentum Tempestus and so on.

THE MERCHANT FLEETS

The combined merchant fleets comprise almost 90% of all interstellar spacecraft in the Imperium. Each fleet is based in one of the five Segmentae Majoris, and its administrative staff operate from the Segmentum Fortress. For example, the Solar fleet is based on Mars, while the fleet of the northern zone -the Segmentum Obscurus - is based on Cypra Mundi. Although these fleet bases are huge ports equipped with docks, shipyards and repair facilities, their main function is to

administrate the fleets operating within their area. Only a small proportion of ships ever travel to the Segmentum Fortress where they are theoretically based.

Each merchant ship serves its fleet under an arrangement called a merchant charter. Not all charters are the same - some confer more power and responsibility to the ship's captain than others - but all types take the form of a feudal oath sworn to the fleet authorities on behalf of the Emperor. A captain may not register his vessel with the fleet authorities until this oath has been sworn and a record of it entered at the Segmentum Fortress for that zone and on the Segmentum Fortress on Mars.

CIVIL FLEETS

Although the vast majority of interstellar spacecraft are part of the merchant fleets, there are several thousand ships registered to individuals, families or trading cartels. All privately owned interstellar craft operate along routes licensed to them by the fleet authorities responsible for shipping within that Segmentum. These route licences must be bought, and must be renewed after a fixed time, usually a hundred years. This means few privately-owned ships like to risk the effects of time dilation on long journeys. A licence may run out before the ship has completed its journey!

Civil fleets vary in size from a single vessel to several dozen. One of the largest is that of the Navigator family Redondo, numbering 47 registered interstellar ships. Most ship owners have only a single vessel.

+++The Astronomican+++

The Astronomican is the psychic homing beacon that allows Navigators to traverse warspace. It is the duty of the Adeptus Astronomica to maintain the Astronomican. To this end the organisation recruits a proportion of the young psykers collected by the psychic levy of the Adeptus Astra Telepathica. This is the main source of recruitment for the Adeptus Astronomica and consequently the vast majority of its senior members are psykers. A smaller proportion of its staff are not psykers, but are drawn from the ranks of those slave-families which have provided menial workers for the Adeptus for thousands of years.

The Adeptus Astronomica is a small organisation based in a remote complex known as the Forbidden Fortress. Uninvited access to the Fortress is not permitted - even Judges and Inquisitors must seek permission before they can enter.

The Forbidden Fortress is built in a sheltered crag near the tip of a vast mountain range in a land once known as Nepal. To outside appearances the mountains remain unchanged by the hand of man but in fact the Forbidden Fortress extends deep down into the rock and throughout the entire mountain range.

The leader of the Adeptus Astronomica is the Master of the Astronomican. His task is to oversee the organisation and to represent it on the Senatorum Imperialis as a High Lord of Terra. The object of the Adeptus Astronomica is to teach and train young psykers so that they can serve in the Astronomican.

The organisation is really a vast teaching institution controlled by a class of older members known as Instructors. Some Instructors are accorded the title High Instructor and entrusted with the guardianship of certain aspects of the organisation's teaching. Its day-to-day affairs such as maintenance and provisioning are taken care of by a body of administrative functionaries.

Young psykers are initiated as Acolytes. They are taught how to control and use their powers in much the same way as psykers taken by the Adeptus Astra Telepathica, but in addition they are introduced to the Lore of the Astronomican. They learn the value of their lives, study philosophy and are gradually brought to an inner understanding of the universe and the nature of the warp.

Only those who achieve this mystic state can become members of the Chosen, those who will give their psychic energy to the Astronomican. The rest, those whose studies fall short of this ideal, remain within the organisation and become Instructors or are absorbed as administrative functionaries of the Forbidden Fortress.

THE CHOSEN

The pinnacle of an Acolyte's existence is to be selected as one of the Chosen. This is a considered a great honour. The Chosen are regarded as occupying a unique and rarefied level of existence far beyond that of the Instructors or even the Master of the Astronomican. The Chosen's head is shaved and he wears yellow robes and the scarlet badge of the Chosen. The rest of his life is spent in prayer and contemplation, until he is called to serve in the Chamber of the Astronomican.

THE CHAMBER OF THE ASTRONOMICAN

The Chamber of the Astronomican is a huge hollow sphere carved from a single mountain peak. Its outward form is a giant dome, the lower half of the sphere being buried under the rock. Ten thousand multi-tiered seats cover the entire inner surface of the sphere. Each seat faces the very centre of the sphere where a raw ball of psychic energy dances in space.

This ball of energy is created by the Chosen as they release their powers into the Astronomican. In this way their psychic power is drained into the energy-ball and then through the warp, directed by the mind of the Emperor himself. As the energy of the Chosen is drained away they slowly fade and die. The average psyker lasts for about three months - about 100 die every day and their places are taken by new Chosen.

+++Stellar Fleets+++

The Imperium's interstellar ships comprise merchant vessels, warships, civil craft and several other specialised types. These are organised into three specific fleets: merchant fleets, civil fleets and warfleets. Each of the Segmentae Majoris has its own merchant, civil and warfleets.

So for example, the Warfleet Solar is the warfleet of the Segmentum Solar, the Merchant Pacificus is the merchant fleet of the Segmentum Pacificus, and the Civilis Tempestus is the civil fleet of the Segmentum Tempestus.

SEGMENTAE REGISTRATION

All interstellar spacecraft are registered as belonging to one or more of the Segmentae fleets.

Registration allows a ship to be identified, and permits the fleet authorities to record and administrate shipping within each of the Segmentae.

A ship which is not registered in a Segmentum may only travel to that Segmentum with the special permission of the fleet authorities. This is purely an identification measure. An unidentified and unregistered ship is assumed to be hostile, and would be attacked and destroyed.

MERCHANT CHARTERS

Each merchant ship serves its fleet under an arrangement called a merchant charter. The different types of charter are described below. They all take the form of a feudal oath sworn to the fleet authorities on behalf of the Emperor. A captain may not register his vessel with the fleet authorities until this oath has been sworn and a record of it entered at the Segmentum Fortress for that zone and on the Segmentum Fortress on Mars.

Hereditary Free Charter

This is the most coveted and most highly honoured form of captaincy. It is also the most ancient. A hereditary free captain nominates his successor, and that successor swears the oath of allegiance and thereby becomes the new captain of the ship when its current captain dies or retires.

The captain is 'free' in that he may trade freely within the Segmentum where his fleet is based.

Many of these old captaincies are based in all five of the Segmentae Majoris. Although the hereditary free captain is theoretically an Imperial servant, his obligations are few. The ship may trade where and how it pleases within the confines of its charter.

Hereditary Charter

Hereditary captains may pass their ships to favoured, or related, successors as described above.

As well as inheriting a ship, the captain inherits a route or routes, and can only carry cargo and passengers along this route. Some routes are more profitable than others and so are more highly regarded.

Free Charter

Free captains are appointed to command individual vessels by fleet officials. They are usually established fleet officials themselves, having worked their way up the ranks to a position of responsibility. Free captains may trade as they wish within the Segmentae, except they are usually forbidden from trading along established routes. Instead, they roam the less-densely populated sectors, areas where regular services are either not needed or would be too costly to run.

Fleet Charter

A fleet captain is appointed to his position in exactly the same way as a free captain, but plies fixed routes like the hereditary captain. This is the least prestigious level of interstellar captaincy, and is also the least secure. A fleet captain may be deprived of his command and given a shore posting at anytime, his ship reassigned to someone else.

A Typical Charter

A typical example of a merchant charter is the cargo ship *Amaranthus* which has been captained by the Sorensen family over the last nine thousand years. It is one of the oldest ships in the Merchant Ultima fleet, with a hereditary free charter registered in the 32nd millennium. The ship has undergone several major rebuilds since that time, the last being two hundred years ago. The Sorensen family has amassed a considerable fortune in its time, and now owns a number of interstellar craft.

CIVIL FLEETS

The civil fleets contain privately-owned interstellar craft operating along routes licensed by the fleet authorities. Civil fleets usually bid for route licences as they come up, the route going to the fleet prepared to pay the most for it. This system enables the Imperium to maintain routes which, for whatever reason, it finds inconvenient to service from its own craft. It is also a good way of raising revenue. As well as route voyages, the fleet administration also issues one-off licences for single trips. Many of the smaller fleets manage to survive entirely in a hand-to-mouth fashion reliant upon one-off licences.

Exactly who captains a civil ship is entirely up to the owners. In many cases the owner is the captain. With the larger fleets, the owners appoint a captain who is effectively an employee.

FLEET ORGANISATION

The three fleets of each of the Segmentae Majoris are organised and administered by the fleet authorities in that Segmentum. This organisation is part of the Administratum -the great bureaucracy of Earth and government of the Emperor. The officials of the individual fleets are responsible in their turn to Segmentae fleet officials, who are responsible to the administration of the Segmentum as a whole. The highest official in each Segmentum is its Lord Commander and of these the Lord Commander of the Segmentum Solar is the foremost, often taking his place as one of the High Lords of Terra.

The following list briefly outlines the important ranks in the organisation of a Segmentum's warfleet (often also known as the naval fleet).

Warfleet Commander

The highest ranking of the military officers is the Warfleet Commander. He is in charge of the entire naval contingent of a Segmentum, numbering many thousands of warships. There are only five Warfleet Commanders, one for each of the Segmentae Majoris. They rank equally, although command of the Warfleet Solar is generally regarded as the most prestigious position.

The Warfleet Commander formulates the naval fleet strategy throughout the entire Segmentum, overseeing repair schedules, supervising construction programs and ensuring the general space-worthiness of the fleet. His personal staff is divided into armament, maintenance, design, construction and a thousand other working committees.

Space Commanders

Under the Warfleet Commander are individual Space Commanders responsible for naval operations within each sector. The Space Commander is based at the Sector Fortress, along with other sector-level administrative staff of the Administratum and other branches of the Adeptus Terra. He must answer not only to his naval superior, the Warfleet Commander, but also to the Adeptus Sector Commander in overall charge of the sector.

The Space Commander has direct command of a portion of the Segmentum's warfleet. A typical command comprises about 50 interstellar ships, although the number would obviously vary

depending upon the needs of the sector. Fifty ships is very few when you consider that a typical sector has between 30 and 40 thousand stars forming a cube with sides approximately 200 light years long!

These warships are divided up into patrol vessels, ships on permanent station in one star system and the reserve fleet. The reserve fleet is usually stationed at the Sector Fortress.

Group Commanders

Group Commanders are in charge of a portion of a sector's fleet. They are sometimes based around the Sector Fortress or, more often, on one of the permanently-manned docking stations in one of the sub-sectors. Group Commanders are responsible for patrolling and keeping order within sub-sectors and inter-sectors around their base.

A typical command consists of a sub-sector base, non-combatant staff and a couple of squadrons of ships. One squadron is usually a patrol squadron, while the other is held in reserve to meet specific threats.

Group commanders often serve as Battlefleet Commanders when the need arises. The Battlefleet is a temporary force, summoned to meet a single crisis or defeat a particular enemy. It usually consists of spaceships from only two or three neighbouring sub-sectors at most. The Battlefleet Commander is generally the most senior of the Group Commanders whose warships are involved in the battle.

Squadron Commanders

A Squadron Commander is in charge of a squadron of spaceships. He is also a ship Captain and leads his squadron from the bridge of the ship he commands. A typical squadron might be three spacecraft of which the Commander's ship is one.

While the Battlefleet Commander dictates the overall tactics of the force, the Squadron Commander's task is to make decisions about the formation and manoeuvres of the spaceships he leads.

Captains

Captains are in charge of individual ships. In terms of fleet organisation, they are the lowest ranking officers - on their own ships, they are absolute commanders. On a spaceship that is vast beyond belief, crewed by tens of thousands of men and women, the Captain's position is one of huge prestige and honour. To the spaceship's crew, far distant from the higher organisation of the fleet, their Captain is the voice of the Emperor and the symbol of supreme power in their ship-bound lives.

ILLEGAL SHIPPING

The Imperium is large - large enough to hide in if you really want to! The Administratum has a great deal of control over interstellar shipping one way or another but, even so, there are illegally-operating interstellar craft. These ships are owned and operated by unregistered merchants, smugglers and even by pirates. They are taking a grave risk, because any unregistered ship is automatically assumed to be hostile by naval forces.

All illegal ships are at a considerable disadvantage compared to registered vessels. Navigators are, on the whole, loyal citizens. They are also quite rare. Interstellar travel without a Navigator is relatively slow because the maximum distance a ship can jump is only four or five light years compared to five thousand. There are navigators who will work on board illegal ships, but they are few and far between. The vast majority of illegal interstellar shipping is therefore locally-based, usually operating within a group of close sub-sectors or from peripheral inter-sectors.

UNREGISTERED SHIPS

There are many reasons why a captain may be tempted to run an illegal ship. Planets all have local laws governing what can and can't be imported and exported. Some planetary governments also charge an import duty or have complex quarantine laws. The cargoes and passengers of official ships are always carefully checked and recorded. Many routes are the property of hereditary captains or are operated exclusively under a fleet charter.

There are all sorts of people, including Imperial Commanders, who may wish to circumvent one or other of these obstacles. Even registered ships may be tempted to break the law occasionally if the price is right, but they run a far greater risk because their craft are very easily identified and traced. A typical unregistered ship operates out of a hidden supply dump near the solar-system's jump point. It would be foolish for the captain to bring his ship into the solar system itself, so cargoes are

ferried to the supply dump by sub-stellar ships. The location of the ship's dump must be kept secret, and it is often necessary for a captain to change the base's location every few months. An Imperial Commander may take a lax attitude to illegal shipping if it suits his purposes to do so. The illegal trader's greatest enemy is treachery!

PIRATE SHIPS

Interstellar pirate ships operate in a similar way to unregistered traders, but their intentions are far more sinister. Few Imperial Commanders will tolerate pirates in their System, so most pirate bases are within otherwise uninhabited Systems. Some pirates operate exclusively against registered shipping, others are indiscriminate in their choice of victim. Pirates and unregistered traders often collaborate, sharing information and sometimes using the same facilities.

A pirate's usual mode of operation is to lie in wait just inside a system's jump point. If the target is leaving the system, the chances are that any accompanying sub-stellar craft will have turned back by now. The pirate leaps upon the craft, aiming to board and remove the cargo before the ship jumps. Although a pirate could attack and destroy a cargo vessel, little would be accomplished doing so.

ENEMY RAIDERS

Mm are interstellar craft belonging to enemy forces. Of ~m, exactly whose enemy they are depends on whose side m Ut on! Imperial Commanders are prone to quarrel with their neighbours. In these quarrels one side may be prepared to hire illegal ships, even pirates, to attack and destroy a rival's shipping. Such fights are common, but are directed mainly against sub-stellar craft belonging to the foe. It would be extremely stupid for an Imperial Commander to attack Imperial fleet vessels - to do so would invite immediate and uncompromising retribution. Needless to say, mistakes do happen, and Imperial Commanders often find themselves on the wrong end of an Imperial Planetary Assault unit.

The other enemy raiders encountered by Imperial fleets are those of alien races, foremost amongst which are the Orks, Eldar and Tyranids. Most battles with aliens are relatively small-scale conflicts with only a few spaceships on either side. Sometimes a major war will break out with large battles fought between powerful fleets. The war may spread across several neighbouring star systems and might take years or decades to resolve.

By far the largest war currently underway is against the Tyranid Hive Fleet Kraken. The Tyranid fleet threatens every race in the galaxy as it literally consumes the populations of the planets it conquers in its insatiable progress. Already the south-eastern arm of the galaxy has fallen to the Tyranids.

Also within the category of enemy raiders are the Chaos fleets. These are manned by the Traitors who fled to the Eye of Terror at the end of the great civil war known as the Horns Heresy. For ten thousand years, the degenerate remnants of those banished from the Imperium have fought a constant war against mankind. They regularly launch raids into Imperial space and, less frequently, larger invasions.

+++Warfleets+++

Each of the five warfleets serves within one of the Segmentae Majoris and is responsible for protecting shipping within it.

Most space battles take place around installations or planets, most of which can be defended efficiently by means of sub-stellar craft and planet-based defences. Even so, it is impossible to provide total defence for every Imperial world. The warships of the Imperial Fleet are highly mobile and extremely potent weapons, able to gather to meet large threats where necessary.

Warship captains are Imperial servants like their merchant brethren. However, all warship captains are appointed by the administrative officers of the Segmentum, and have no rights of ownership regarding their vessels. The organisation of the fleets is far more rigid than that of the merchant fleet, with a hierarchy similar to that of the land-based armed forces of the Imperium.

BATTLEFLEETS

Imperial space is so vast, with so many star systems and areas of Wilderness Space to be patrolled, that even the many thousands of spaceships in the warfleets must be spread thin, with

individual ships and squadrons set out on their own assignments. The Imperium cannot maintain permanent fleets ready to respond to invasion or rebellion. Nor would it make sense to do so - it would take so long for a fleet to get from its base to the war zone that the enemy would surely have moved on by the time it arrived.

Instead, temporary battlefleets are gathered together whenever they are needed. Warships within a relatively small area are summoned to join the Battlefleet. It is rare for ships more than 50 light years from the battle zone to be included in the fleet and more commonly only those within 10 or 20 light years are summoned. Even with ships this close to the battle, it will take at least days and more often weeks for them to arrive.

Only during the very largest of wars, lasting for many decades, does the Imperium bring battlefleets together and dispatch them en masse to a warzone. Such a war is currently underway in the galaxy's south-eastern spiral arm. Here the Tyranid Hive Fleet Kraken is inexorably advancing, conquering and consuming the planets in its path. A massive campaign involving millions of men, thousands of ships and whole chapters of Space Marines is being fought against the Tyranid invasion. Fleets are being mustered in all the Segmentae to begin the long journey to the warzone. The journey will take decades in some cases and many of the crew will never see the battles they are heading towards - but the Imperium knows all too well that in mere decades the Tyranid threat will be as strong as even

ENEMIES OF THE IMPERIUM

The battlefleets of the Imperium must combat many enemies -Ork raiders, Eldar pirates, the Tyranid Hive Fleet and other alien invaders. It must also fight forces from within the Imperium itself. Most of these battles are small-scale and involve only sub-stellar craft in skirmishes with smugglers, brigands and rebels. But occasionally larger conflicts occur when whole systems or groups of systems must be brought into line. Sometimes these systems- have their own fleets and the Imperium must send its largest battleships and cruisers to crush the enemy. In these circumstances an Imperial Battlefleet will be facing an enemy containing ships exactly like its own - the enemy will also be using ships like Gothic Cruisers, Firestorms, Dictators, Cobras and so forth. These rebellions most often happen when an area of the Imperium is cut off by a warpstorm.

Warpstorms are common occurrences and systems frequently lose contact for a few years - when the storm passes, contact is re-established and little has changed. Sometimes storms last for decades, even centuries, and systems that are cut off for this long can stray far from Imperial authority. Once the warpstorm has died down and travel to the system is feasible again, the Imperium may be rebuffed by an independent federation or find itself in the midst of a local war. A Battlefleet will be assembled to return the system to Imperial control and Imperial spaceships will find themselves facing ships that perhaps once served alongside them in other wars.

It is also not unknown for squadron or fleet commanders to rebel and turn against the Imperium. using the awesome power they command to carve out their own petty empires on the fringes of Imperial space. The most infamous rebellion in the Imperium's long history is that of Warmaster Horus when fully half of the Imperial forces turned against the Emperor and mankind was divided in a terrible civil war. Only the death of Horus himself and the banishment of the rebels to the Eye of Terror brought peace to the Imperium. Even now, a constant vigil is kept around the Eye of Terror where the Chaos fleets remain, often launching small raids and occasionally major incursions into Imperial space.

SPACESHIPS OF THE IMPERIUM

Most spaceships are old - open space, the most hostile environment to man, preserves the plastics and metals that spacecraft are made from. Space gives them with the power to endure through generations of men. The Imperial fleets number many thousands of ships, the majority of which are at least a thousand years old. Some are as old as the Imperium itself, a full ten thousand years. A very few claim a pre-Imperial origin. It is difficult for those born under the claustrophobic sky of a planet to appreciate the great dignity which is inherent in all old spacecraft.

The spaceships of the Imperium are vast constructions that take many decades to build. Each craft represents a huge investment of time and resources. But once completed, fitted out' armed and commissioned, a spaceship continues in service for centuries, even millennia. After that, it may be refilled. modernised, reconstructed and live on practically indefinitely. Barring a major accident or

destruction in battle, a ship is immortal like a great city, its population and fabric existing in a constant state of decay and renewal.

Throughout this time there is a constant process of rebuilding and renewal. Hulls are damaged by battles, asteroid storms and the ravages of the warp. Mechanical parts inevitably wear down. Electrical components fuse. Engine housings crack or melt under the immense pressure and heat created by plasma and warp drives. To combat this constant process of decay, every interstellar spaceship has a maintenance crew of hundreds or thousands of dedicated craftsmen, continuously striving to repair and refit the ship. Inside a large Imperial warship there are factories and workshops, huge forges and plasma furnaces, even small refineries and ore smelting plants to provide raw materials for the work of reconstruction.

Interstellar spaceships are powered by plasma and warp drives. Plasma drives are used to move through star systems at sub-light speeds. They burn with the fierce energy of a star, converting their fuel into a super-heated gas plasma to create the immense thrust needed to propel these gargantuan craft through space. As a large interstellar spaceship moves out of orbit towards the edge of a star system ready to jump into the warp, the fiery arc it traces across the night sky can clearly be seen from the planet it's leaving. It appears to be a great comet streaking through the heavens - on many worlds, the arrival or departure of a spaceship is read as an omen, a divine harbinger of joy or doom.

Warp drives are altogether more esoteric and terrifying understood by few even among a spaceship's crew. When the spaceship reaches the jump point at the edge of the star system it's leaving, its plasma drives are turned off and its warp drives engaged. These hurl the spaceship out of real space and into warp space, propelling it through the warp to a destination light years away. If a spaceship's warp drives were switched on while it was still within a star system, the huge rent in the very fabric of space that they create would be catastrophic for the population and planets of the system. The spaceship itself would be torn apart as the massive pull of the star's gravity reacted unpredictably with the energies released by the warp drives.

Fully one-third of a spaceship can be taken up by its engines with their huge thruster ports, cavernous combustion chambers, generators surrounded by massive protective cladding and the miles of pipes, tunnels, corridors and ducts needed for the control mechanisms, fuel supply and access by service crews.

The living areas of a spaceship contain the thousands, often tens of thousands, of men that serve aboard. These areas are often built up from the ship's hull into huge domes and spires that rise hundreds of metres into space. On some ships, they seem like the heart of a mighty city, immense towers rising to touch the stars, their sides glittering with lights bridges spanning the void between them. On others they resemble a gigantic cathedral, the towers colonnaded and sculpted. Vast carved figures of legendary heroes recede into the darkness of space - huge horned gargoyles leap and leer from the highest pinnacles in mockery of the tenors of warp space - golden domes blaze with the light of stars.

On freighters and merchant vessels, the rest of the ship is taken up by holds containing the ship's precious cargo. On warships this space is filled by the colossal power generators that drive their weapon systems. These towering structures hum and crackle with the monstrous energies bounded inside. They are housed within deep shafts which disappear from view into a darkness that is broken only by the crackling blue arcs of lightning which leap from the generators. When a laser battery is fired with a titanic unleashing of energy, its power well is filled with a furious roar. In battle, a warship echoes with the thunder of its weapons, its decks shuddering with the recoil of their furious discharges.

+++The Galaxy+++

The Imperium of Mankind is spread across almost the entire galaxy and consists of more than a million worlds. Although this is a huge number of planets it is as nothing when compared to the immense size of the galaxy. The Imperium is actually spread very thinly across space: its worlds

are dotted through the void and divided by hundreds, if not thousands of light years. It is therefore wrong to think of the Imperium in terms of a territory which extends across the galaxy. The truth is far more complex. Within the galaxy are countless alien civilisations, many Ork empires, and vast areas occupied by the Tyranids or given over to Chaos. Most of the galaxy remains unexplored. Who knows what secrets lie undiscovered amongst the stars? Undoubtedly there are other advanced civilisations, lost human colonies, and the ruins of long dead races waiting to be explored. The pattern of human settlement throughout the galaxy undoubtedly owes much to the nature of space travel. All interstellar travel is undertaken using power warp drives which launch a spacecraft into the alternative dimension of warp space. Within warp space a ship can cover the equivalent of many thousands of light years within a relatively short time, dropping back into real space far away from its starting point. Because of the unpredictable and turbulent nature of warp space, some parts of the galaxy are harder to reach than others. Some zones are eternally isolated by violent currents of movement within warp space. Other areas are difficult to get to or can only be reached during periodic lulls in the warp. More bizarre still, some part of warp space act like power vortices, pulling or sucking helpless spacecraft to their doom. Only the spacecraft of the Imperium can fully exploit the medium of warp space to travel from one side of the galaxy to another. Other races, such as Orks, can only travel short distances through the warp and this limits the size of their individual empires and prevents them becoming united. It is only this factor which enables the Imperium to function as a whole.

THE TIDES OF THE WARP

The reason why spacecraft of the Imperium can move quickly over the entire galaxy, while other races suffer more restricted and slower spaceflight, is a combination of three factors. The first is the maintenance of the ancient technology by the Adeptus Mechanicus - the Tech Priests of Mars who preserve the lore of ancient science on the behalf of the Adeptus Terra. Without the technological advantage of efficient warp engines it would be impossible for the Imperium to defend its scattered planets. The second factor is the existence of human mutants known as Navigators - a race apart which traces its origins to uncertain times of the Dark Age of Technology. Only a Navigator can pilot a ship within warp space. His swollen cranium houses a mind which is attuned to the tides and currents of the warp, enabling him to guide his ship through warp space to its eventual destination. Other races must rely upon guesswork and endless corrective manoeuvres to travel even short distances through the warp.

The third factor which makes warp travel possible is the immeasurably powerful psychic beacon called the Astronomican. Broadcast by a choir of psykers from Earth, the Astronomican reaches out through warp space, guiding spacecraft to their destination. Only a Navigator can sense the guiding light of the Astronomican, and only he can follow its psychic signal. It is the Astronomican which allows a Navigator to use his powers to the full; without it not even the most powerful Navigator could pilot his ship over the immense distances which separate the worlds of the Imperium.

PERILS OF THE WARP

Warp space is an alternate dimension composed of energy as opposed to physical space of the material universe. There are dangers within the warp which can wreck spacecraft and carry them off course, unexpected turbulence, warp storms, and loops that can trap a ship for eternity. These dangers, though considerable, are nothing compared to the greater and unimaginable dangers that lurk in warp space.

To understand these dangers it is important to realise two important facts about the nature of the warp. Firstly, warp space is composed entirely of psychic energy. It is this psychic energy which a human psyker draws upon to use his powers, to send telepathic messages hurtling through the warp from world to world, or to propel a psychic bolt of energy against a foe.

Secondly, warp space is not empty but inhabited by many strange and dangerous creatures, the most dangerous of which are the Great Gods of Chaos and their legions of daemons.

Daemons lust after the flesh and blood of living creatures. They want only to destroy mankind, to drag the souls of men back to their shadowy realm, to obliterate the material universe and engulf it within the energy of warp space. Fortunately this is not easy to accomplish. Daemons cannot exist for long in the material universe and they need to find psychic gateways in order to leave the warp. Such gateways exist but they are rare. The most vulnerable gateways of all are the mind of

psykers. A psyker's power open up a path between reality and the warp, a path which a daemon may find and follow to the mind of the psyker himself.

Such are the dangers of the warp - at once a boon and protector, and an unimaginable horror. Without the ability to travel throughout warp space the Imperium would certainly collapse and mankind would fall victim to the thousand perils that threaten to destroy it. Without psykers the whole system of astro-telecommunication would be non-existent, and it would be impossible to guide the Imperium's armies and fleets against its many enemies. For these reasons at least warp space is essential to the Imperium's very existence. Yet at the same time warp space harbours terrors so great, dangers so profound, that much of the Imperium's efforts are spent in combat against them.

+++The Link between the+++ +++ Warhammer World+++ +++and the 40k Universe+++

In the incalculably distant past, the World was visited by the starfaring race known as the Old Slann. Their degree of scientific advancement caused some of the species they met with to worship them as gods, while others reviled them as demons. The Old Slann performed many scientific experiments on the World, and although the knowledge of their presence is lost in the present day, many of the races which inhabit the World found their origin in these experiments.

The Old Slann travelled by means of interdimensional gateways, spanning the distances between the stars by travelling through "warpspace," a parallel dimension which connects all points in the material universe. One of their first tasks upon arriving on the World was to set up a pair of gateways, one at each pole of the planet, to allow them to come and go as they pleased.

Warpspace, however, was not an empty void, but was composed of a form of power wholly alien to the material universe. It was inhabited by entities who were equally alien. As their great ships travelled through Warpspace the Old Slann protected themselves with powerful enchantments, but eventually something went wrong.

Precisely what happened can now only be guessed. Perhaps the protective enchantments broke down, or the beings that lived in Warpspace found some way to overcome them. Or perhaps the gateways broke down under the strain of the magical forces that cycled continually through them. Whatever the cause, the gateways collapsed. Both poles were destroyed, and permanent dimensional tunnels were created between the World and the void of Warpspace.

Among the matter sucked through into the World is warpstone, a substance formed of the condensed and solidified essence of Chaos. Warpstone dust rained down upon the World at the time of the catastrophe, twisting many races into strange and horrible shapes and leading to the creation of many new species. Seven thousand years later, the battle between Law and Chaos still rages across the face of the World, with most of its mortal inhabitants caught helplessly in the middle. The dimensional openings at the poles change constantly, shrinking with the ascension of Law, and growing as Chaos gains the upper hand. All the while, a constant stream of raw Chaos floods through from the void.

For millennia, the tide of Chaos has ebbed and flowed across the face of the World. The worst incident in recent history was the great Incursion of Chaos 22 years ago, when Norsca was completely overrun and the Chaos hordes ravaged the northern parts of the Old World.

This tide is, however, only a single aspect of Chaos. And in warpspace, the primal void of Chaos, the beings of Chaos still wait and spread their taint across the Imperium and the universe. Warp creatures hover around the vulnerable psykers of humanity, seeking a path into existence through an unprotected mind. Every psychic is a potential gateway from the void of the Warp, an unwitting agent of Chaos to be filled with a terrible power. Only the vigilance of the Emperor's Inquisition protects humanity from the threat within itself.

And even within the Imperium there are the foolish and weak-minded who turn to the darkness. By embracing the power and the horror of Warpspace, all that they desire will come to pass...

The Warhammer World is bound by storms of magic so that it remains isolated from the other worlds of the human galaxy. Elsewhere, the forces of the Imperium tenaciously fight the influences of Chaos, so that the open aggression of Chaos Champions and their forces is restricted to zones not controlled by the Imperium. On worlds where Champions of Chaos attain daemonhood or death there are monoliths to their memory just as on the Warhammer World. Cosmic monoliths are tablets, flat stones, or death caskets that float through space itself. They can celebrate a Champion whose mortal life ended while battling an engagement between space fleets. Often they orbit a world, transmitting their inscriptions to passing craft or projecting their image directly into spaceships.

Space Hulks are huge space wrecks that float through space, often phasing in and out of the warp, appearing and disappearing in unpredictable and mysterious ways. They usually comprise [sic] many wrecks fastened together, and are inhabited by a variety of deep-space creatures who use the hulks to travel the galaxy. The forces of Chaos sometimes use the hulks themselves, and many are so large that they are virtually worlds where conflict between rival Chaos Warbands and other inhabitants are inevitable. Chaos monoliths are built to Champions who die or attain daemonhood on these space hulks. Imperial Marines raiding a space hulk often find these monuments to Chaos still intact, a shuddering reminder of the omnipresence of the Chaos threat

+++DANGEROUS PLANTLIFE+++

CATACHAN BRAINLEAF

This plant is unusual in that it is possessed of what appears to be animal-like intelligence, albeit of a fairly low, instinctual level. The plant itself is a small tree, not particularly conspicuous amongst the other flora of Catachan, the plant's home planet. What makes this plant remarkable is its ability to detach its leaves, which are capable of flying through the [air] for many meters, propelled by a wing-like undulation. Each leaf is a macro-cell, and part of the plant's overall intelligence. Equipped with rasping hooks and intrusive nerve bundles, a leaf aims to attach itself to a living creature, injecting fibres which grow throughout the host's nervous system until it becomes a mere tool of the plant. Whilst incapable of high intellect, a Brainleaf can direct its victims in a sensible and rational way, enabling them to use weapons and equipment...

CREEPERS

Creepers are plants possessed of an animal-like ability to move their long, sinuous limbs. This response is not consciously exercised, but is a basic reaction to the presence of animals. A likely victim will be seized, dragged towards the immobile main part of the plant and crushed to death by its powerful limbs. There the body will quickly rot, dissolved by powerful enzymes secreted from the trunk.

GAS FUNGUS

This is a fairly widespread type of fungus, occurring in various unrelated but essentially similar forms throughout the galaxy. It generally appears as a mushroom and is often quite large and may reach over 2 meters in height....Should an animal approach too closely (6 meters) the fungus releases a store of poisonous gas. This store is built up within the plant's tissues and once released takes several hours to regenerate. The gas persists for about an hour, leaving the fungus unprotected only for a short time. The gas itself is deadly although the specific toxicity varies from species to species.

SPIKER

The Spiker is one of the most dangerous plant forms in the entire galaxy. A Spiker can be of any size, but tends to be man-sized, about 2 meters tall and upright. They have a vaguely cylindrical shape, and are covered with a thick layer of hair-like leaves, out of which protrude countless thin, sharp spikes. These spikes are what make this plant dangerous. Piercing the skin of an animal, they release a genetically intrusive chemical that literally starts to reform the victim's body tissue into that of a Spiker. A human taking a spike in the arm will soon find his arm become hairy and

immobile, and within a short time his whole body will be covered in spikes. Although the victim remains mobile for some time, the physiological changes destroy the mind, so that the victim wanders aimlessly. Eventually all mobility is lost and another Spiker will have been created.

+++The Galaxy, Space Travel+++ +++and The Astronomican +++

The galaxy contains some four hundred thousand million stars of various types. Of these only a fraction are presumed to have habitable planetary systems, and only a fraction of these have been investigated. Most are situated within the spiral arms between ten and forty thousand light years from the galactic center.

The very size of the galaxy means that, despite the use of faster than light warp drives, most of it remains unknown. Even the human controlled Imperium, by far the largest and most widely distributed of all stellar empires, contains only a tiny fraction of the galaxy's stars. New worlds are constantly being discovered and investigated, along with their attendant civilizations, creatures and resources. Even so, there is no possibility of either humans or aliens exhausting the galaxy's potential to provide new worlds for habitation and exploitation.

Warp space is the medium through which faster-than-light spacecraft travel between the stars. It is, in a sense, an alternate reality or parallel dimension in which the laws of time and space are different from those of our own universe. Movement within warp space bears a distinct relationship to distance traveled in normal space, and this relationship can be manipulated to make faster-than-light travel possible. It is not strictly true to say that distances in warp space are 'shrunk' compared to those of normal space. A more accurate analogy would be to think of warp space as a dense fluid medium which is subject to constant movement, currents, undertows, etc. This is not perceptible in warp space itself of course, because the fluidity is only relative to our own reality. A spacecraft can exploit this phenomenon by entering warp space, allowing itself to be shifted along by its natural flow, and then re-entering normal space a distance away from the starting point. A metaphor commonly used to explain how warping works is that of the fast flowing stream. The stream represents warp space, moving rapidly along its motionless banks, representing real space. A leaf dropped into the water upstream will move along, floating on the surface of the water. The leaf does not move relative to the water, but is merely carried by it until it lodges at some point downstream from its original location. This is a useful metaphor as far as it goes, but it must be remembered warp space is far more complex in its movements than the linear stream, for it can move in all sorts of convoluted and bewildering patterns. Spacecraft are also able to make corrective movements in warp space and can enter or leave warp space at a chosen moment. Even so, warp travel is never totally predictable, either in its duration or eventual destination.

Warp Storms

Warp space is an extremely volatile medium, and can represent a dangerous one for spacecraft within it. Occasionally, the normal current movements of warp space become amplified into raging storms of savage and destructive ferocity. Such storms may last for only a few moments, or they may last for many years. At best, a warp storm might throw a ship off course or delay it, at worst a warp storm can make warp travel impossible in some parts of the galaxy. Storms are constantly forming and dying down, at any time at least 10% of the galaxy's solar systems will be inaccessible because of storms. Half of these systems are cut off for less than a year, but many remain isolated for many years or even centuries. Indeed, some systems have always been isolated, and show no sign of becoming otherwise.

The Human Navigator

Unlike the closely packed empires of other races, the Imperium is flung wide across the entire galaxy, its worlds are often hundreds if not thousands of light years distant. Normally it would be impossible to maintain such a vast area of space as a single political entity. What makes it possible to do so is the existence of human Navigators. Navigators are a sub-species of humanity

some of whom resemble humans so closely that they are indistinguishable, others are so physically alien that the relationship is hardly apparent. All navigators are capable of entering a trance-like dream state in which they are able to mentally steer a spacecraft through the medium of warp space.

Under the intuitive guidance of the Navigator, a ship is able to traverse distances of tens of thousands of light years in a single jump. Perceived journey time is 1-4 days per thousand light years, equivalent to 1-6 months of real time. Even so, a journey from one edge of the galaxy to the other would take between 85 and 510 months of real time. For these reasons, worlds remain self-governing even within the Imperium.

The Astronomican

In order to guide their spacecraft through warp space, Navigators require a signal to steer by; a sort of real space reference point which can be perceived from warp space. As only psychic signals penetrate both real and warp space, this signal has to be a psychic one. Some psychics are capable of broadcasting a short range signal of this type (10 light years) but the principal signal is centered upon Earth and is called the Astronomican. Further details about the Astronomican and the psykers who maintain it (the Adeptus Astronomica) are discussed later. For the moment it is only important to bear in mind that the Astronomican permits navigators to utilize their powers. The range of the Astronomican is far greater than 10 light years although it is not infinite. Warp storm activity can also affect the total range, but about 50 thousand light years is the usual distance. As the galaxy has a diameter of about 85 thousand light years, with Earth approximately 30 thousand light years from the center in the galactic west, this means that the Astronomican does not cover the eastern fringe of the galaxy at all. The Astronomican marks the effective boundaries of human space: human groups existing beyond it are rare, isolated and comprise an unknown quantity.

+++Navis Nobilite+++

The Navis Nobilite - also known as the Navigator Houses - is an institution which predates the Imperium by many thousands of years. It is the most ancient of all human organisations. It was founded sometime in the Dark Age of Technology and survived through the Age of Strife to the present day.

Over this period of approximately 30,000 years, the fortunes of the Navis Nobilite have constantly waxed and waned, but its power has never been broken. Today it thrives as a vital part of the Imperium.

The Navis Nobilite is divided into many individual Houses or Great Families. Each House is a large related family, but it is also a literal house, a fortified mansion where the House leader - or Novator - lives together with his immediate kin and retainers. This mansion is regarded as the seat of the entire Great Family, even though it is only the hereditary ruling family that lives there.

The Great Families of the Navis Nobilite are uniquely composed of a particular form of human mutant called a Navigator. The mutation is not a spontaneous or natural one, but rather the result of genetic engineering conducted in the distant past during the earliest history of the Navigator Houses. This engineering created the Navigator Gene that distinguishes Navigators from ordinary humans.

The gene itself can only be preserved by intermarriage, as it is lost when a Navigator breeds with an ordinary human. This factor has led to the development of the closely-related Navigator families.

NAVIGATORS

The genetic creation of Navigators has a single purpose: to endow a human with the ability to steer a spacecraft through warp space. Only Navigators can do this - no other human or machine has the ability to navigate warp space in this way. It is this ability that allows human spacecraft to travel so quickly compared to alien craft.

Without Navigators to steer its ships, the Imperium would quickly fragment into thousands of separate stellar empires, each only a few dozen light years across, whose spacecraft would be obliged to use tiny and dangerous blind jumps to cover interstellar space.

The physique of Navigators is unusual. The feature which distinguishes all Navigators is the Third or Warp Eye situated in the centre of their forehead. Nearly all young Navigators traditionally work in space as pilots. Over the years they gradually increase their familiarity with the warp and their powers become stronger.

This mental maturation may take as many as fifty or a hundred years of space flight, but as Navigators can live for three or four hundred years this is not a great proportion of their lives. As they grow more experienced they also change physically. The white and iris of the Third Eye gradually vanished leaving a single black pupil. The eye itself hardens, and the eyelids shrink leaving a single staring orb.

Often the Navigator continues to grow more massive as he ages and his ribs enlarge, becoming prominent as internal gills develop in the chest cavity.

THE HEIRS APPARENT

The most powerful Navigators in each of the Great Families are called Heirs Apparent This signifies that they may one-day contend for the position of Paternova, the ruler of all the Navis Nobilite. The Paternova may come from any of the Great Families and from any social level within them.

The Heirs Apparent are usually the oldest Navigators, although not all develop in this way and some Navigators live out their entire lives without undergoing the physical changes described.

The Heirs Apparent are often bitter rivals who will even go as far as to try and eliminate each other if they get the chance. This sometimes leads to protracted personal vendettas or even family feuds between two Navigator Houses. The Adeptus Terra is fairly tolerant of minor skirmishing of this kind, although open hostilities between Houses are discouraged as much as possible.

Unfortunately, this keen rivalry sometimes draws Heirs Apparent into marginally unlawful or even outright illegal practices. Their personal ambition makes them vulnerable to all sorts of dangerous influence, from collaboration with aliens to dealings with the daemonic. These deviants are a minority - most Heirs Apparent conduct their rivalries without courting such dangers.

THE PATERNOVA

The Paternova is the leader of all Navigators and the most powerful of all his kind. The Paternova may live for up to a thousand years. When he dies all the existing Heirs Apparent begin to change - they begin to grow even larger and stronger. Their gill structure becomes fully functional allowing them to survive in hard vacuum as well as underwater or in normally poisonous environments. Most important, they start to fight.

They are drawn to combat with each other, building up a pitch of aggression that eventually overrides all other considerations. As Heirs Apparent are killed those who survive change even more until finally only one remains alive. It is this vastly changed and extremely powerful individual who becomes the new Paternova.

The Paternova lives in the Palace of the Navigators which lies on Earth in the centre of the zone held by the Navis Nobilite. Following his accession, the Paternova never leaves the palace. The existing staff, soldiery and other retainers of the palace are replaced by those drawn from the Paternova's own House. The chief amongst his servants is the Paternoval Envoy who becomes a High Lord of Terra and sits on the Senatorum Imperialis.

The role of the Paternova is an obscure part of Navigator biology although no-one doubts its importance. The Paternova is described as the guiding father whose powers transcend the warp itself.

During the interlude between the reign of one Paternova and another, all Navigators other than Heirs Apparent suffer a considerable reduction in their powers. Their ability to navigate the warp is impaired, warp journeys become longer, ships are unexpectedly lost, and younger Navigators may lose their abilities completely. As soon as the new Paternova is installed the powers of Navigators are restored. However, not all are restored to the same degree. Navigators belonging to the same House as the Paternova find their abilities enhanced, as if their blood relationship were enabling the Paternova to transmit his powers more effectively. Navigators belonging to the House of the old Paternova lose this benefit, and so individuals may find their powers impaired.

THE NAVIGATOR'S WARP EYE

The unusual feature shared by all Navigators is the Third Eye or Warp Eye. Navigators normally keep this eye covered with a bandanna or covering which is itself often decorated with an eye. This has led many humans to doubt the existence of this Third Eye.

In fact the Third Eye is the focus of the Navigator's power. The eye enables the Navigator to see the shifting currents of warp space and so to guide his spacecraft within the warp.

It is said that a Navigator can always see the warp even when he is in the material universe, and that it is this constant exposure to the unnamed horrors of Chaos that leads to their strange physical changes. It has been known for Navigators to react suddenly and violently to invisible things in the warp, and to collapse, lose their sanity or even die as a result.

The eye has other powers too, although these are employed far more rarely and are the subject of some mystique. These powers develop with the Navigator's experience of the warp, so that they are most developed of all in the Heirs Apparent. The uncovered stare of a Navigator can kill a man, and that of an Heir Apparent is said to ward off even the daemonic creatures of the warp.

Rival Navigators sometimes fight using the power of their eyes to blast each other - such open conflicts are rare but spectacular. It is also said that the eye of a Navigator has prophetic powers and that it can literally see into the future. Navigators are very reluctant to talk about their powers and it may well be that only the Paternova understands the full potential of a Navigator's abilities.

+++Adeptus Mechanicus+++

Mars is the planetary realm of the Adeptus Mechanicus, the home and domain of the Tech Priests of the Cult Mechanicus. The Red Planet is acclaimed as one of the wonders of the galaxy, the workshop of the Imperium, the forge-world, the maker of ships, and the guardian of secrets. It is the Adeptus Mechanicus that furnishes the technical knowledge of the Imperium, that preserves the scientific secrets of former times, and which explores the new sciences of the 41st Millennium.

THE CULT MECHANICUS

The Cult Mechanicus, or Cult of the Machine, acknowledges the Emperor as Master of Mankind but does not recognise the authority of the official Imperial Cult or the Ecclesiarchy. Instead, the Adeptus Mechanicus follows its own dark and mysterious strictures.

According to the strictures of the Adeptus Mechanicus, knowledge is the supreme manifestation of divinity, and all creatures and artefacts which embody knowledge are holy because of it. The Emperor is the supreme object of worship because he comprehends so much. Machines which preserve knowledge from ancient times are also holy, and machine intelligences are no less divine than those of flesh and blood. A man's worth is only the sum of his knowledge - his body is simply an organic machine capable of preserving intellect.

RANKS OF THE ADEPTUS MECHANICUS

The Adeptus Mechanicus controls the entire governmental, industrial and religious affairs of Mars and is thus very diverse and complex in its organisation. In its broadest terms the population is divided into two parts. The greater mass of Martians are worker-slaves called Servitors. Servitors are not really fully human, but half-man half-machine creatures whose minds have been partially programmed to perform specific duties. The Servitors are slaves to the ruling priesthood of Tech Priests who form a hierarchy of technicians, scientists and religious leaders. The Tech Priests provide the Imperium with its engineers and technical experts.

The leader of the Adeptus Mechanicus is the Fabricator General of Mars. The Fabricator General is also a High Lord of Terra and one of the most powerful members of the Senatorum Imperialis. He is also the head of the Cult Mechanicus in his capacity as the Magos Mechanicus.

THE QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE

The Adeptus Mechanicus is driven by the quest for knowledge. This quest takes many forms, including research and exploration, but its ultimate embodiment is the search for ancient STC systems.

STC systems were created during the scientific high-point of the Dark Age of Technology. During this time thousands of human colonies were founded on distant worlds. Many of these colonies

failed to survive, some were lost, and of those that survived most achieved only a subsistence level economy. Yet almost all of these colonies managed to retain a high level of technology thanks to the huge base of computerised information carried from Earth. This massive computer databank was known as the Standard Template Construct (STC) system.

The objective of the STC systems was to provide all the technical information needed to construct anything that settlers might need. The user simply asked how to build a bolter, tractor, house or whatever, and the computer supplied the details for fabrication. STC systems would calculate the constructional loads placed on locally-available materials, work out the depths of foundations, define the means of manufacture and assembly, and present the most efficient ways of achieving what it was the settler asked. The systems were designed to be practically idiot proof, so that even the least technically-accomplished person could build a vehicle, aircraft or weapon given time.

One result of the STC system and its pivotal place in human colonisation is that human material culture is very similar, even on worlds which are many thousands of light years apart.

The STCs are often said to embody the sum total of human knowledge. This is probably true as far as technical accomplishment goes. Although most colonists required little more than designs for agricultural machinery, programs were included for all sorts of advanced constructions such as nuclear power grids and fission reactors. However, the early colonists' needs were simple and were met by conventional energy forms and relatively low-level technology.

Every original colony had at least one STC system. With the passage of time these gradually failed, and passed out of use. Some colonies were forward-thinking enough to make drawings or hard copies of some designs, which were in turn copied repeatedly with varying accuracy. Some STC systems became corrupted and useless, and were eventually destroyed.

Today there are no known surviving STC systems, and only a very few examples of first-generation print out. On some worlds information about the ancient STC is regarded as holy and design copies are guarded as secret and sacred texts, housed in the inner sanctums of temples.

For thousands of years the Adeptus Mechanicus has pursued all information about the STC. It is their lost bible, Holy Grail and Cup of Knowledge. Any scrap of information is eagerly sought out and jealously hoarded. Any rumour of a functional system is followed up and investigated.

By their efforts much information has been retrieved or can be reconstructed by the vigorous analysis and comparison of copies. Yet the most technically-advanced knowledge eludes the Adeptus Mechanicus, for the early colonists were mostly simple folk whose needs were practical. Only rarely did anyone bother to take copies of the theoretical and advanced work which the STC contained.

ALIEN KNOWLEDGE

The technical achievements of non-humans, such as Eldar and Orks, and isolated human civilisations, such as Squats, are of almost as much interest to the Adeptus Mechanicus as rumours concerning the STC. Indeed, non-human knowledge is often more useful and usually far easier to obtain.

Members of the Adeptus Mechanicus always accompany Imperial exploration teams, Rogue Traders and Space Marine chapters, and so are ideally placed to investigate the technical abilities of other cultures. Even extinct civilisations are vigorously investigated and their technology recorded.

BIOLOGY AND BEYOND

The Adeptus Mechanicus is not only interested in technical achievement, but also in biological and natural science. Thus, the flora and fauna of a newly-discovered world will be recorded, and samples returned to Mars for classification. Weather systems and subterranean morphology will be mapped, atmospheres analysed and all aspects of the natural ecosystem studied.

Such studies are vital for further colonisation. Dangerous animals and plants must be considered, useful species may be studied for potential domestication. Weather and geographic stability must be determined and sometimes stabilised. Thanks to their in-depths knowledge of such things the Adeptus Mechanicus has the ability to mould a world's climate and ecology to meet human needs.

+++WARPSpace AND PSYKERS+++

The material universe is but one aspect of reality. There is a quite separate and co-existing immaterial universe. This is commonly known as the warp or warpspace, although it is also known as Chaos, the otherworld, the ether, the empyrean, the void and the immaterium. Warpspace may be explained in terms of an endlessly broad and deep sea of raw energy. This energy carries within it the random thoughts, unfettered emotions, memory fragments and unshakeable beliefs of those who live in the material universe — it is the collective mind of the universe itself.

All living creatures exist in warpspace as well as in the material universe, although most are not conscious of the fact. Just as a man's body inhabits the material universe, his soul inhabits that of the warp. The body is part of the universe and made of matter: the soul is part of the warp and is made from the stuff of raw Chaos. Human sensitivity to the warp is not generally well developed. The soul itself is not aware: it is simply a coherent lump of Chaos energy maintained whole by its anchor to the material body. However, in a minority of people this sensitivity is far more finely tuned. These people are psykers and they are able to consciously control and use the energy of the warp to affect the material universe. There are many kinds of psykers, not all of them Human, some of whom are tolerated or encouraged within Human society while others are regarded as dangerous and are actively persecuted and destroyed.

PSYCHIC POWERS

As power from the warp flows into realspace, it splits into eight parts, each perceived by those with psychic awareness (often called the second sight) as a separate colour. Just as the warp comprises tides and currents of emotion that over the millennia have melded together to form the great Powers of Chaos, so in realspace each of the colours of psychic power draws on a certain type of emotion or energy from warpspace. This gives each colour its own distinctive effects when used by a psyker. A small amount of raw energy from the warp leaks through into realspace all the time. Those with psychic powers see this energy as layered mists of colour, building into boiling, turbulent clouds and multihued storms where the barrier between the warp and realspace is particularly tenuous.

To cast a psychic attack, the psyker pulls energy of one colour into himself, draining the surrounding area as he concentrates and focuses the colour. When he uses his powers, he further weakens the distinction between warpspace and realspace, allowing more power to flow through, providing additional impetus to his attack and replenishing the mist of colour that surrounds him. To those with psychic second sight, it appears that the psyker is the centre of a maelstrom as fragments of colour whip and twist around him. As he gathers all the energy of one colour, the storm dies for a brief moment and he stands at the calm centre of the boiling clouds — he moulds the power into his chosen form, turning it with his mind from raw energy into potent weapon of attack or a shield of defence. Then he releases the pent-up energy, hurling it at his enemy or pushing it out to form an impenetrable shell around him.

Those with the second sight see psychic attacks in many ways. Each psyker interprets what he sees according to his understanding of the warp: some as a dance of pure colour; others as a strange geometry of mystical symbols drawn from the arcana; many as images of power and destruction taken from the mythologies of their homeworld. Where one may see bolts of startling colour, others will see the talons of huge beasts grappling with their enemies or strange forms with a Daemonic glint in their eyes ripping and tearing. For some, skeletal hands reach out of the darkness with the touch of death where others see all-consuming hellish fires burning with the souls of the damned. One will see spiders and beetles whose eyes glow with an uncanny radiance and whose feet send out sparks as they skitter along faint webs of colour to reach with thin feelers into the minds of their victims. Another will see pools of darkness that spread from the caster to consume everything they meet with the insatiable hunger of the warp.

Even those without the second sight see flickering shadows, or catch a sight of something from the corner of their eyes, bringing a moment's dread apprehension before the psyker's attack bursts upon them with its full energy, surrounding them with deadly fires or a hail of coloured bolts that strike down all in their path.

As well as using the power of the warp by drawing it into realspace, the psyker can reach out within the warp itself to clutch the soul of an enemy and break the thread that connects it to a living body. For a second the eyes of his victim will go blank and any who look into them will feel drawn in, sucked by the black emptiness of death, before the victim crumples to the ground in silence — only his soul, torn apart by the psyker, screams unheard with the agonies of annihilation. The links of those who are weak are easily broken; the psychically strong are anchored to their souls with adamant chains and only the most powerful of enemies can threaten them. As they feel the presence of animosity in the warp, they can

concentrate their power into the chain, setting it aglow as if just pulled from the fires of a furnace, throwing back the assailant with a white psychic heat that burns any who approach.

PSYKERS IN THE IMPERIUM

Most Humans do not have psychic powers, although all Humans have at least a limited potential for psychic activity. However, a small but growing minority of Humans do develop tangible powers. These people are called psykers by the Imperial authorities — on their own worlds they may be known by many names: warlock, witch, necromancer, spirit walker, exorcist, speaker in tongues, shaman. Psykers are dangerous individuals whose powers can only be tolerated when safely harnessed within the Imperial organisation: the psychic universe is the universe of Chaos and therefore perilous. It is a universe inhabited by Daemonic aliens that care nothing for living creatures and wish only to use and destroy Humanity. All psykers, even the most powerful, offer these aliens a potential means of entering and affecting the material world. Every planet in the Imperium is bound by law to control its psychic population. Persecutions or witch-hunts are an everyday part of life on most worlds. The same laws oblige rulers to set aside a levy of young and relatively promising psykers for transport to Earth by the Adeptus Astra Telepathica.

The Adeptus Astra Telepathica

The Adeptus Astra Telepathica is dedicated to the recruitment and training of psykers for service throughout the Imperium. The headquarters of the organisation is on Earth, but its ships travel the Imperium and its offices extend over most of Human space. The institution is divided into a teaching body called the Scholastia Psykana and a recruiting body known as The League of Blackships. These two are united under the Master of the Adeptus Astra Telepathica and his advisory council of several hundred senior officials drawn from the main divisions.

The League of Blackships

The League consists of a substantial fleet based throughout the Imperium. The ships visit each world every hundred years or so. As the fleets approach their destination, the ruling Imperial Commander is instructed to prepare the customary levy. On many planets, this is a holy time — a time for rejoicing as the young hopefuls gather for their chance to be taken to the stars and serve the unseen Master who rules them all. Once the levy has been collected, the Blackship Captains make an initial evaluation of their cargo before proceeding to the next world in their circuit. When the holds are full, the Blackships turn towards Earth. It is common for Inquisitors to travel on board these ships, as this gives them a good opportunity to investigate a planet's potential for psychic corruption and other heresy.

The Scholastia Psykana

The Scholastia Psykana is a vast teaching institution dedicated to the training of psychics. Most recruits are drawn from the levy collected by the Blackships, but a minority are handed over by the Inquisition, the Judges or through other channels. The role of this institution is to teach young psychics how to develop and control their powers. The future of each psyker depends on his abilities and character. Initial evaluation divides the levy into several groups depending on their innate psychic power and their willingness to serve the Emperor.

The Chosen

Those whose powers and strength of character are sufficient to resist possession and Daemonic taint under normal circumstances are chosen to serve in an elite capacity. They are often known as primary psykers or the Chosen and they will learn to serve the Imperium in many ways throughout the galaxy. The very young may be indoctrinated into the Space Marines as Librarians; the most talented may become Inquisitors or Grey Knights. Even these chosen psykers are not invulnerable to the powers of Daemons and psychic aggressors, but their training gives them a fighting chance against all but the most potent of these creatures.

Astropaths

Astropaths are selected from the second ranking of psykers, those whose powers are considerable but inadequate to resist the dangers of possession or Daemonic corruption. Astropaths undergo basic training coupled with a thorough study of telepathy. They are taught how to use the Emperor's Tarot, how to cast horoscopes, and the practices of cheiromancy and augury of all kinds. Once they have been prepared in this way they undergo the unique Binding Ritual which gives them a little of the Emperor's strength.

Sacrifices

The psychic levy inevitably includes many whose powers are too random and whose minds are too vulnerable. If left unrestrained they would soon perish and their doom would lead to further deaths — maybe even to the destruction of entire Human worlds. In a teeming universe their loss is of no great matter

but even in death they can serve, for the Emperor must feed upon raw psychic energy if he is to survive as the protector of Humanity. They become sacrifices to the Emperor, their souls leached from their bodies to sustain the Father of Mankind.

LIBRARIANS

A Marine chapter's Librarium is both its command and communications centre, and the repository for centuries of wisdom and history, culled from the reports, treatises and memoirs of the chapter's greatest warriors and finest minds. Because interstellar communications are achieved by psychic means, sending messages through the warp rather than through realspace, most of the Marines who work in the Librarium are psykers. Known as Librarians, they are recruited from among the youngest and most promising primary psykers trained by the Adeptus Astra Telepathica. Librarians also have potent psychic powers which they use on the battlefield to augment the conventional weaponry of their brother Marines.

Librarians hold a functionary rank, describing their role as well as their position. The four battlefield ranks of Librarian, in ascending order of importance, are Lexicanian, Codicier, Epistolary and Chief Librarian. Each of these enters battle ready to support his brothers with a range of psychic attacks and defences. They are fielded in many different situations, especially when Marines of the chapter face psychic opponents such as covens containing Rogue Psykers or followers of the Chaos Powers.

In addition to their duties as warriors, each performs an auxiliary role. The Lexicanian prepares a report of each battle for the chapter's records. The Codicier evaluates the reports of Lexicanians and provides a strategic overview of campaigns. The Epistolary is a more powerful Librarian — his role is that of chief psychic communications officer. He transmits and receives psychic messages on the battlefield.

The most important of all fighting Librarians are the Chief Librarians, superior in rank and psychic power. They report directly to the chapter's commander and hold overall responsibility for the maintenance of communication lines. They also scrutinize their subordinates' battle reports and give recommendations for honor awards, drawing on their intimate knowledge of the chapter's glorious past to appraise a Marine's valorous actions.

HYBRID PSYKERS

All Genestealers are psychic. They share a limited form of telepathy that lets the members of a brood communicate. They also use their power to hypnotize their victims before striking to implant their seed, lulling them into submission and then erasing the event from their minds. Only when the much-loved firstborn of such a victim arrives does the truth become apparent — by then the victim is ensnared, bonded to his Hybrid child by chains of parental love, strengthened by the pull of the Hybrid's latent psychic power. From this beginning, a brood of Hybrids and followers will grow, owing allegiance to their founder and Patriarch.

The psychic power of a brood is shared between all the members and is focused on the Patriarch. The Patriarch has the strongest soul and the greatest ability to draw power from the warp. He is a mighty psyker and his attacks can be devastating — to those unprepared to face him, it may seem as if the very gates of hell have opened when he unleashes his full power. He also passes on part of this power to his children, feeding and directing currents of warp energy towards them and strengthening their own psychic abilities. In Purestrain Stealers, this psychic power is latent. In many cases, however, Hybrids of the 3rd and 4th generation are able to direct their psychic power, casting psychic attacks to annihilate their enemies or shielding themselves and their kin from harm. Like other Stealers, they draw their power from the brood's shared presence within the warp; each Hybrid benefits from this presence, having a greater ability as part of the brood than he would alone. Because they draw power from the brood's strongly-bonded souls, the abilities of Hybrid psykers vary less than those of their Human counterparts. Even so, some Hybrids are gifted with much greater talents than others — it is one of these who will rise to the exalted position of Magus, standing at the right hand of the Patriarch, second only to him in power, and interpreting his will to the Human and other cult followers of the brood.

+++Adeptus Astra Telepathica+++

The Adeptus Astra Telepathica is dedicated to the recruitment and training of psykers for service throughout the Imperium. The headquarters of the organisation is on Earth, but its spaceships travel

the Imperium and its offices extend over most of human space. Its chief responsibility is to train psykers to serve as Astropaths.

HUMAN PSYKERS IN THE IMPERIUM

Most humans do not have psychic powers, although it is generally accepted that all humans have at least a limited potential for psychic activity. A small but growing minority of humans develop tangible powers - these people are called psykers.

Psykers are dangerous individuals whose powers can only be tolerated when safely harnessed within the Imperial organisation. After all, the psychic universe is the universe of Chaos and therefore perflous. It is a universe inhabited by daemonic aliens that care nothing for living creatures and wish only to use and destroy humanity. All psykers, even the most powerful, offer these aliens a potential means of entering and affecting the material world.

Every world in the Imperium is bound by law to control its psychic population. Persecutions or witch-hunts are an everyday part of life on most worlds. The same laws oblige rulers to set aside a levy of young and relatively promising psykers for transport to Earth by the Adeptus Astra Telepathica. It is from this levy that the Adeptus Astra Telepathica divides those who will live and serve from those who will be sacrificed to the Emperor.

THE ORGANISATION OF THE ADEPTUS ASTRA TELEPATHICA

The institution is divided into a teaching and a recruiting body, called the Scholastia Psykana and the League of Blackships respectively. The two are united under the Master of the Adeptus Astra Telepathica and his advisory council consisting of several hundred senior officials from the main divisions.

THE LEAGUE OF BLACKSHIPS

The League consists of a substantial fleet based throughout the Imperium. The ships travel around a huge circuit, visiting each world every hundred years or so. As the fleets approach their destination, the ruling Imperial Commander is instructed to prepare the customary levy.

Once the levy has been collected the Blackship Captains make an initial evaluation of their cargo before proceeding to the next world in their circuit. When the holds are full, the Blackships turn towards Earth.

It is common for Inquisitors to travel on board these ships, as this gives them a good opportunity to investigate a planet's potential for psychically-based corruption.

THE SCHOLASTICA PSYKANA

The Scholastia Psykana is a vast teaching institution dedicated to the training of psychics. Most recruits are drawn from the psychic levy collected by the Blackships, but a minority of recruits are handed over by the Inquisition, the Judges or through other channels. The role of this institution is to teach young psychics how to develop and control their powers. The future of each psyker depends on his abilities and character.

Primary Psykers

Those whose powers and strength of character are sufficient that they can resist possession and daemonic taint under normal circumstances. Primary Psykers are chosen to serve the Imperium only if they are young, intelligent and willing to learn. After five years of basic psychic training in the Scholastia Psykana they are ready to join any of the Imperial organisations in a suitable capacity. The very young may be indoctrinated into the Space Marines as Librarians, the most talented of all may become Inquisitors or Grey Knights. Primary Psykers are not invulnerable to daemons and other psychic aggressors, but their training gives them a fighting chance against all but the most potent of these creatures.

Astropaths

Astropaths are selected from the second ranking of psykers, those whose powers are considerable but inadequate to resist the dangers of possession or daemonic corruption. Like Primary Psykers, they must be young, vigorous and willing. Astropaths undergo basic psychic training before they assume their role of telepathic communicators throughout the Imperium. They are taught how to use the Emperor's Tarot, how to cast horoscopes, and the practices of cheiromancy and augury of all

kinds. Once they have been prepared in this way they undergo the unique Binding Ritual which gives them a little of the Emperor's strength.

The Adeptus Astronomica

Some Primary and Secondary Psykers are reserved for the Adeptus Astronomica. They are handed over to complete their training under the auspices of that organisation.

Sacrifices

The psychic levy inevitably harvests many whose powers are too random and their minds too vulnerable. If left unrestrained they would soon perish, and their doom would lead to further deaths and maybe even to the destruction of entire worlds. In a teeming universe their loss is of no great matter, but even in death they can serve - for the Emperor must feed upon raw psychic energy if he is to survive as the protector of humanity. These sacrifices are fed into the Emperor's Golden Throne so that the Emperor and the Imperium itself can continue.

The Tainted

Thanks to the vigorous checks of the Blackship Captains few tainted psykers get as far as Earth. Those who do are weeded out and destroyed on account of the daemons they harbour or the destructive powers they possess. Yet despite these vigorous precautions a few of the Tainted do get through. In the past important members of the Imperium, even High Lords, have been psykers of this kind. Who knows how many individuals have slipped past the checks and become important officials without their true nature being discovered?

ASTROPATHS

Astropaths are extremely important within human society because they offer the only means of communicating over interstellar distances. Astropaths are capable of sending telepathic messages across space and they can receive messages sent by other Astropaths if their minds are correctly attuned. Telepathic messages travel through the warp and so travel faster than light, although not instantaneously.

The need for Astropaths is enormous. They are a common sight in the Imperium and are easily distinguished by their green robes. Astropaths serve in the Fleet as ship-board and shore-based communicators. They serve in the Imperial Guard, the Inquisition, the Adeptus Ministorum, the Space Marines and throughout the Adeptus Terra.

The Imperial Commanders of distant worlds must have Astropaths if they are to communicate with the rest of the Imperium. Similarly, Astropaths are an essential part of civilian life, working for commercial shippers and anywhere where interstellar communication is needed. This vast body makes up a network covering the entire Imperium thus facilitating the transfer of information from one end of the galaxy to the other.

THE SOUL BINDING

No ordinary psyker could transmit a message through the warp, nor could he receive a telepathic message over such vast distances. Astropaths only gain this ability as a result of their many years training, culminating in a special ritual which combines some of the Emperor's own power with their own. This ritual, known as Soul Binding, brings the mind of the psyker close to the psychic greatness of the Emperor. In the Process, some of the Emperor's vast energy is transferred to the Astropath.

The transference of energy is traumatic for the psyker - not all survive despite years of preparation, and not all those that survive retain their sanity. Even the survivors suffer damage to the sensitive nerves of the eyes, so that almost all Astropaths are blind. In fact their increased psychic skills tend to make up for this loss of sight, so that they would not appear blind were it not for their distorted, sunken and empty eye sockets.

Soul Binding is said to affect Astropaths in other ways, and it is commonly claimed that once an Astropath's mind has touched that of the Emperor he gains a new understanding and insight into the nature of the universe.

>> Imperial History

+++The Emperor+++

The Master of Mankind, the Emperor of the Imperium, has sat upon the Golden Throne of Earth for ten millennia. His body is kept alive by means of ancient technology and sheer effort of will, for the Emperor is the greatest psyker of all, an almost bottomless repository of psychic energy. He is no ordinary man - in many respects he is a god, and is worshipped as such by untold billions.

Ultimately, the Emperor has absolute power within the Imperium.

The Emperor of the Imperium, Master of Mankind, Lord of Humanity and God of the human race, has ruled his vast spacial realm for longer than any living man can remember. Countless millennia ago he was born to mortal parents, growing into manhood little realising the fate awaiting him. As a youth he began to manifest strange powers, powers which intensified and multiplied as he grew older. Not least amongst these powers was that of longevity - a virtual immortality that gave him time to develop his abilities fully. For long ages he lived secretly amongst mankind, as empires grew and fell, and mankind discovered how to control and exploit the Earth. As his powers evolved he learned of the dangers beyond his own world, of the psychically attuned creatures that roamed the voids inbetween space, hungering and clawing for the life-stuff of living creatures. For countless ages he hid within humanity, nurturing his powers and waiting. At last, over ten thousand years ago he began his struggle, for he knew that humanity was on the verge of a revolution, a genetic revolution which would create a new psychically aware race, a race of which he was the first and most powerful. Without his guidance he realised the emerging race of psychics would fall prey to the dangers he had already faced, the perils of entities that fed upon psychic energy, or who used that energy for their own horrific purposes. So, the Emperor emerged from long hiding, creating the Age of the Imperium over ten millennia ago in a series of wars now remembered by none save their victor. His rule has been a long and harsh one, for there is much at stake - the life of humanity itself. The strain of his constant vigilance has taken a heavy toll upon the man that was once human, for now his body can no longer support life, and his shattered carcass remains intact only because it is held by a spirit itself sustained by the strangest of machinery - ancient artifacts constructed by the Emperor in an elder age.

It is ironic that this creature, whose will extends to over a million worlds, is now unable to leave the life-giving machinery of his imperial throne, unable to so much as lift a shrivelled finger or twitch a shrunken eye. The living carcass of the Emperor is immobile, held fast within the bio-machine that sustains his spirit. The mass of this machine is contained within the imperial palace; room upon room of twisted technology, pulsing with a life and will of its own - living, breathing, reproducing and writhing like a giant, mindless organism. Held within this perversion of science lies the Emperor himself, or rather what now remains of his carcass, the seat of his omnipotent will.

The Emperor understands the dangers that face his race, and has assumed the role which seems preordained for him, that of its guardian. Perhaps he is a freak, or perhaps nature created him as the protector of her metamorphosis. Either way, the Emperor is now the custodian of his race, and he alone bears the knowledge of its fate. To this end the Emperor maintains strict control over the development of humanity and contributes directly to its survival by utilising his powers. He plays a vital role in space travel within the Imperium. In order to steer a craft over great distances, a human navigator uses a mental homing signal, a sort of psychic beacon to guide him through warp space. To provide a mental signal throughout human controlled space would not be possible to any ordinary psyker. However, the Emperor is no ordinary psyker - his powers go beyond those of mortals. Even so, the strain of transmitting a continuous signal would prove far too strenuous, and he merely concentrates his powers on directing a signal created by others. These are the imperial servants known as the Adeptus Astronomica, psykers whose bodies and souls are leached of energy. This energy is projected by the mind of the Emperor in the form of the psychic beacon known as the Astronomican. The sheer quantity of mental energy is vast, and only the mind of the Emperor is sufficient to handle so much raw power.

The fate of the Adeptus Astronomica is a sad one, for their efforts soon reduce them to empty husks of bone and dry flesh. Many die every day. They are not the only psykers who are asked to make the ultimate sacrifice, for the Emperor cannot eat as men eat, or drink fluids or breathe air. His life has passed beyond a point where such things can sustain him. For the Emperor the only viable sustenance is human life-force - soul - and he has a great and insatiable appetite. Nor will just any human suffice for this purpose, for the soul-donor must be a very special person in their own right, someone with psychic powers. The Inquisition scours the Imperium in a tireless search for emergent psykers, individuals too vulnerable to be left alone. Some of these men and women will be recruited into the Adeptus Terra (especially the Adeptus Astronomica and Adeptus Astra Telepathica) but many more will serve their Emperor in a more gruesome way. Given up to the weird machinery that surrounds the Master of Mankind, their souls will be gradually leeched from their bodies to feed the Emperor's spirit. Hundreds must die in this way every day if the Emperor, the Imperium and humanity are to survive.

It would be simple to think of the Emperor as an evil corruption of nature. Yet, as the Adeptus Terra teach, the sorrow and slaughter that feeds his divine corpse is a trifling price to pay for the survival of the race. Without the Emperor there would be little space travel and no protection in a hostile universe. Left uncontrolled, the emerging race of psychic humans would become the unwitting vehicle of humankind's destruction. For there are many foul aliens which not only feed upon the life-force of other races, but which use that life-force as a means of opening portals in warp space, infiltrating populated planets via the poorly protected minds of inexperienced psykers. The Master of Mankind knows that to protect his race he must survive, must live forever if necessary, or until such time as psychic humans have evolved sufficient strength to withstand the dangers they face. If thousands must endure pain and death for his sake, how considerable must be the agony of a creature whose body is all but destroyed, whose mind is encased inside a rotting shell and whose every thought is enslaved to the task of serving his race.

+++The Age of Apostasy+++

Path to Damnation

The power of the Ecclesiarchy spread into every facet of Imperial life. From humble miners and clerks, through Imperial Guard and Navy officers to planetary Governors and the High Lords of Terra themselves, everybody was an adherent to the Imperial Creed, in theory at least. Frequently the High Lords would take their lead from the views of the Ecclesiarch, believing that he was the mouth of the Emperor; a belief the Ministorum did nothing to contradict. Soon the Ecclesiarchy was indirectly dictating Imperial law, organising armies, deciding which threats gained priority and where to direct Imperial resources.

As the grip of the Ecclesiarchy grew, elements of the Imperium rebelled against such control. In the High Lords' councils the Fabricator General of the Adeptus Mechanicus opposed the will of the Ecclesiarchy, and the Chapter Masters of the Space Marines also viewed Imperial orders with doubt. Following their lead, the Administratum began to fight against the pervasive force of the Ecclesiarchy.

Angered by their loss of control, the Administratum began to re-establish itself as the commanding, binding power within the Imperium. So began a feud that has lasted 7,000 years to the present. The Administratum exercised its influence in a number of ways, undermining the authority of the Ecclesiarch, influencing votes in the council of the High Lords and positioning its own loyal followers in powerful posts. From the late 34th to the early 35th millennium, the power of the Ecclesiarchy waned. Following the election of a series of disastrously weak and incompetent Ecclesiarchs, the Administratum managed to wrest much of its control back from the Ministorum. As time passed the Administratum gained dominance once more. To the populace at large the Ecclesiarchy was as mighty, all-seeing and powerful as ever, but behind the scenes the Administratum was dictating the agenda of the Holy Synod.

In an attempt to escape the clutches of the High Lord of the Administratum, Ecclesiarch Benedin IV moved the Holy Synod and the upper echelons of the Adeptus Ministorum to the planet of Ophelia VII in the Segmentum Tempestus. This had been Benedin's diocese as a Cardinal and was possibly the richest planet after Terra and Mars.

The Ecclesiarchal palaces on Ophelia covered nearly 90,000 square miles and soared 4,000 metres into the sky. They were only rivalled by the Imperial palace on Earth. Separated from the designs of the Administratum by sheer distance, the power of the Ecclesiarchy grew again. With a succession of punishing increases in tithes, the resources of the Ministorum reached its height. The Cardinals of different dioceses competed with each other to erect the most magnificent monuments, to build the largest and most ostentatious temples and cathedrals. The purges of so-called heretical cults increased significantly, as any opposition to the word of the Ecclesiarch was ruthlessly crushed. Separated from the Administratum, the Ecclesiarchy began to form its own fleet of interstellar ships and armies. The Frateris Templars, as these forces came to be known, numbered many commercial transports and warships, and dozens of fighting armies each of which rivalled an Imperial Guard regiment in strength. All the while, the Ministorum buildings on Earth were left to ruin and crumble.

In the middle of the 35th millennium, nearly three hundred years after the move to Ophelia VII, Greigor XI was elected to the position of Ecclesiarch. A deeply spiritual man, Greigor was seen as the next step in the Ecclesiarchy's growth: a fresh outlook to spur on what had increasingly become a stagnant Holy Synod. However, the Cardinals were totally unprepared for what would come next. Greigor announced that the Adeptus Ministorum would return to Earth. Although this was vigorously opposed both within and outside the Ecclesiarchy, Greigor felt that the true centre of the Faith should be Terra, the home world of humanity.

None could dissuade him from this course, and though it took him twelve years to organise the return, with the time needed for marshalling his resources and the physical requirements of warp travel, the doors of the Ecclesiarchal palaces on Earth were finally opened once more. The refurbishment of the palaces took a heavy toll on the already thinly stretched resources of the Ecclesiarchy. Their funds depleted by the extremely expensive business of relocating to Terra, the Ecclesiarchy had to increase tithes even further to balance the costs of the rebuilding.

As the rebuilding progressed, Greigor XI began laying the groundwork for other changes within the structure of the Adeptus Ministorum, changes that were seen as radical by many of his peers within the Holy Synod. Again, he refused to bow to opinion, but before his innovations could be put into action, Greigor died of food poisoning. Tears were wept at his funeral (it is said that six million followers filed past his open-topped casket) and the Cardinals spoke of a great man that had been taken from them too soon. However, no sooner had the tears dried and Greigor's body been interned in the great Mausoleum of Remembrance than a new, more conservative Ecclesiarch was elected and the Ministorum continued as it had done before.

Descent into Anarchy

Fuelled by the growing demands of the Cardinals, Ecclesiarchy tithes were increased once more. Unfortunately, much of the populace was already stretched to breaking point and this further increase was seen by many as unnecessarily exorbitant. Across many worlds of the Imperium the populace openly rebelled against the Ecclesiarchy and refused to pay. Even Planetary Governors spoke out against the excesses of the Ministorum, but they went unheeded.

The Ecclesiarchy responded with a vengeance, sending its armies to crush any sign of revolt and executing higher officials as heretics. Alexis XXI used the Officio Assassinorum to eliminate several Governors who redirected their tithes to pay for their own Planetary Defence Forces, and is quoted as saying, "They had forsworn the Emperor's protection for their own worldly gains." The tithes were used to build ever larger temples, to line the highways of planets with statues of past Ecclesiarchs and to decorate the Ecclesiarchal palaces with the rarest metals and gems. The unrest continued, massive uprisings spreading across the Imperium, only for the Frateris Templars of the Ecclesiarchy to arrive and quell any insurgencies. All those who defied the rights of the Ecclesiarchy were decried as heretics and suitably punished. Some thought the Ecclesiarchy's bloody methods of control were excessive, but it was nothing compared to what was to come.

Even as the Imperium struggled to survive amidst bushfire wars and a lack of true leadership from Earth, further disasters befell humanity. In the early 36th millennium the incidence of warp storms started increasing. Travel between all but the warp soon became a tumultuous mass of roiling tempests and storms. Navigation became difficult everywhere and hundreds of systems were totally isolated. With the resources of the Administratum and Ecclesiarchy turned towards their power struggle, much of the Imperium devolved into anarchy. In those few worlds still accessible by starships, the power of the Ecclesiarchy was brutally enforced by the Frateris Templars and any slight deviation from the holy decrees was marked as heretical, with the burnings and hangings which attend that crime.

Seeing the turmoil wracking the Imperium, Chaos raiders poured forth from the Eye of Terror to attack and despoil their ancient foes. Ork Warlords rampaged across vast tracts of the galaxy and there was nobody who could halt them. On the planets cut off from Terra, Chaos and Genestealer cults rose in rebellion and overthrew their governments, damning entire worlds to slavery and slaughter. Those worlds are not overrun by alien attackers strove to retain what they could. As time passed even the most advanced worlds were brought to their knees. As before, with no central guidance from the Adeptus Ministoeum even the worship of the Emperor began to devolve into a series of cults and sects, and in the trying times of those centuries those who were once brothers under the light of the Emperor fought against each other to assert their religious ideals.

Much of the Imperium was under the malaise of a preapocalyptic gloom. Crazy zealots denounced the Ecclesiarchy and claimed the Emperor was displeased with their greed and excesses- sending the warp storms as a test to judge the truly faithful and set them apart from heretics and sinners. Spurred on by these statements, citizens turned to flagellation and self-mutilation to prove their belief and faith. Whole populations became seething masses of despair-laden cults, each trying to outdo the other in their tortuous devotion to the Emperor. Strange splinter groups grew in power, preaching extreme causes. Bloodthirsty pogroms eradicated many innocents as the populace tried to stem the wrath of the God-Emperor. In some communities any small deviation from what deemed normal brought instant death to a child and its family. Whole populations were enslaved or slaughtered, deemed heathens for some real or suspected deviancy.

High Lord Vandire

The name most infamously connected with the Age of Apostasy and the architect of the Reign of Blood was Goge Vandire, 361st High Lord of the Administratu. Vandire had a hard reputation and was a staunch opponent of the Ecclesiarchy's dominance. It was rumoured he used Assassins and blackmail to achieve the rank of High Lord, and none within the Administratum dared oppose him. Shortly before his ascendancy to the vaulted rank of High Lord, Vandire was instrumental in the election of Ecclesiarch Paulis III, a degenerate incompetent who was easily controlled by Vandire and his followers.

Once he had established his position within the Administratum Vandire moved in to take over the Ecclesiarchy. While other High Lords had manipulated the Adeptus Ministorum covertly, Vandire personally led a handpicked contingent of Imperial Guard officers into the Ecclesiarchal palace and overthrew Paulis III in what can only be called a military coup. Declaring Paulis to be a traitor to humanity he had the Ecclesiarch summarily shot and took upon himself the dual role of High Lord of the Administratum and Ecclesiarch.

Shaken and terrified, the Holy Synod could do nothing to oppose Vandire as he set about eradicating any within the Ministorum who opposed him. As Vandire's wrath fell upon the Cardinals all those not already fleeing elected to return to Ophelia VII to escape the High Lord's clutches. However, fate thwarted them and as their ship entered the warp it was engulfed by a huge storm and they were never seen again. Vandire claimed it was the will of the Emperor; evidence of his divine right to reign over the Imperium in the Emperor's name.

Vandire elected Cardinals of his own choosing to fill the mahogany benches of the Holy Synod chambers. He chose a calculated mix of weak-willed fools and brilliant geniuses with just the right amount of cruelty to ensure they would enforce his will without any qualms. The High Lord now had total, unopposed control of both the Ecclesiarchy and the Administratum. The Imperium was about to face its darkest time since the Horus Heresy.

The Reign of Blood

Vandire was insane: a paranoid megalomaniac who saw plots and intrigue everywhere. His mind was twisted in every way and he delighted in torturing his victims, declaring he was purifying their souls for the Emperor. He expected his every word to be recorded for posterity and was constantly accompanied by a plethora of scribes whose job was to note down anything he said or any particularly innovative tortures he inflicted in the converted catacombs beneath the Ecclesiarchal palace. His mood would swing violently, laughing one moment and murderously angry the next. Vandire would often fall into a trance-like state, during which he would argue with himself in a mumbling voice and on other occasions he would shout out loud for no apparent reason. He claimed he was receiving messages from the Emperor. These meditative periods would always be followed by bouts of excessive violence. He had a huge tri-d map of the Imperium installed in his audience chamber, with a constant relay of current warp storm activity. As soon as a world was reachable, he would dispatch a war fleet to establish control.

The Reign of Blood affected the whole Imperium. Sycophantic Army and Navy officers were only too ready to execute Vandire's orders: virus bombing the hive world of Calana VII without reason; invading the farmlands of Boras Minor and enslaving every female child under twelve years of age; using the orbital batteries of Jhanna to melt the planet's ice caps, drowning nearly 4 billion people in the resultant floods. The list goes on and on, meticulously recorded by Vandire's scribes. Vandire would dictate long speeches bemoaning the wretched state of the Imperium, demanding justice object of hate.

Daughters of the Emperor

Early in the Reign of Blood Vandire's extensive network of spies notified the High Lord of a particular sect which had previously eluded the attention of the Ministorum. It was a small cult, perhaps only 500 members in total on the little known agri-world of San Leor. Vandire was furious when he first heard of the group, but as his agents continued to explain the nature of the cult, his interest swerved from homicidal intent to covetousness. The sect, known as the Daughters of the Emperor, contained only female members and devoted itself to worship of the Emperor through inner purity. The Daughters of the Emperor studied the ancient arts of war using a taxing learning process to clear their minds of all worldly considerations, honing their skills over their entire lives. His interest piqued, Vandire ordered a ship to prepare immediately for a journey to San Leor and announced he would honour the world with an Ecclesiarchal visit.

With an entourage of nearly a hundred thousand servants and soldiers, Vandire on San Leor. As the miles-long procession made its way to the temple of the Daughters of the Emperor, Vandire's agents moved ahead of the Ecclesiarchal train, forcing the meager population of the farms and towns to line the streets and show due respect. Those who failed to cooperate were executed as heretics, regardless of their reasons. Even newly-born babes and ancient elders were dragged from their homes to witness the arrival of the Ecclesiarch. The crowds were supplied with laurels and gifts to present to Vandire, showering him with scented flowers and crying their praise at gun point. Holo-vids of the various creemonies performed by Vandire were spread throughout the accessible Imperium and the propaganda was used to further enforce the power of the Ecclesiarch.

Upon reaching the temple, Vandire found the gates barred against him and was informed by a young Daughter of the Emperor that the order did not recognise his authority. Expecting the customary explosion of rage and destruction, Vandire's terrified functionaries feared for their lives. However, Vandire had anticipated such an insolent response and had already considered the solution. He ordered the Daughters of the Emperor to witness a feat that would prove he had the favour of the Emperor. With a small bodyguard of men, Vandire entered the temple and was conducted to the main hall. Before the assembled order Vandire knelt in supplication to the Emperor, praying for his protection, clutching the Ecclesiarch's Rosarius in both hands. Standing again, he ordered one of his guards to shoot him with his laspistol. The officer refused at first, begging with Vandire not to endanger himself. Vandire's response is quoted as, "there is no danger, I have the Emperor's protection. Do you doubt that?" The officer had no answer to such a question, loaded as it was with subtle malice and the threat of punishment. He duly raised his pistol, aimed at the Ecclesiarch's chest and pulled the trigger.

As the bolt of energy struck Vandire there was an explosion of light, blinding all who stood in the hall. As they recovered their senses, they saw Vandire standing totally unharmed in the centre of the

chamber, leaning on his bone walking cane. Almost as one, the Guardsmen and Daughters of the Emperor fell to their knees in worship. As he later boasted to his scribes, Vandire had gambled that the isolated Daughters of the Emperor would have never heard of a Rosarius or the conversion field generator it contained.

Taking oaths of fealty from the Daughters of the Emperor, Vandire elevated the sect to the position of Ecclesiarchal bodyguard and took them back to Terra with him. From then on, the warrior women became his personal retinue of soldiers and companions, and Vandire renamed them the Brides of the Emperor. They were trained by the best teachers in the Imperial Guard to combine their own skills with the modern weapons of war and world of their dedication to the protection of Vandire spread through the Imperium. They were his constant guardians and his silent executioners, who would kill with a word from their lord.

The Brides not only served as Vandire's bodyguard, but also as servants and companions. They tasted the High Lord's food, fed him when he fell weak with illness, nursed his frail body and entertained him with singing, dancing and other, more exotic, skills. For all their gaiety on occasion, the Brides of the Emperor were still hardened fighters, and when the Holy Synod tried to have Vandire assassinated a few years later, the Brides went into the meeting chambers, locked the doors and emerged an hour later carrying the severed heads of every Cardinal present.

Sebastian Thor

The violent repression and wanton slaughter continued for seven decades after Vandire's ascension to the Ecclesiarchal palace. The resources of the Adeptus Ministorum were directed towards bloodthirsty pogroms and the building of immense new monuments to the Emperor and Vandire. However, Vandire's insanity was ever directed outwards, and though distant planets boasted mile-high spires and cathedrals, the Terran palace itself was allowed to fall into decay once more. Whole wings of the sprawling building collapsed from the weight of centuries, and the immense chandeliers and incense burners of the audience chamber were allowed to gutter and die.

While the rest of the Imperium glowed with the radiance of gold and platinum and sparkled with the light of millions of rare gems, Vandire's own domain became a dark lair of shadows and dank, chilling winds. Dust lay knee-deep in places, the ancient relics were tarnished and stained, tapestries became torn and mildewed and rats and other vermin left their trail across the priceless rugs and carpets. Occasionally just a single candle would be lit in the enormous expanse of the great hall, with only the odd footfall betraying the presence of the Brides of the Emperor in the darkness. Even during the day, the patina of grime and filth on the stained glass windows let through only a trickle of sunlight. When sweeping rains cleaned the outside of the windows a shaft of brighter light might play about the floor of the great hall, but at these times Vandire would retire to his chambers and sit for days on end in complete silence. The High Lord fell into long, nightmare-ridden sleeps, crying out in hysterical screams. His ancient body was pumped full of drugs and elixirs to keep the inevitable diseases and depredations of age at bay. However, with the guns of the Brides of the Emperor always ready to obey his will, the crippled High Lord still commanded with an iron fist. In his more lucid moments, the ailing Vandire could be heard muttering about the light, and the writings of his scribes recorded that his fear of light seemed to grow with every passing day.

It was with trepidation that a young agent appeared on Terra, coming back from the northern reaches of the galaxy, around the planet Dimmamar. His report was disturbing to the High Lord's advisors and caused Vandire to break into a fit of apoplectic rage. Dimmamar had denounced the High Lord as a traitor of the Imperium and the ancient rites of the diocese. The name of one man was heard again and again, all across the Segmentum Obscurus. His name was Sebastian Thor. None on Terra knew where this man came from or what his ultimate purpose might be. The puppet High Lords raged with debate for over a month as to what course of action to take. After his initial outburst, Vandire withdrew into himself more than ever, and for most of the council meeting would be seen huddled in the velvet and ebony throne of the Ecclesiarch, surrounded by the ever vigilant Brides of the Emperor, his eyes staring at nothing. As more news came in of the revolt, it became clear that things would have to be stopped soon. Within three months another eighty systems had declared their loyalty to the Confederation of Light and only the Weight of Ministorum armies and fleets in other sectors prevented similar occurrences all across the northern reaches. The most

trusted and loyal of the Frateris Templars were dispatched to deal with the threat, and were ordered to raze Dimmamar and eradicate every living creature on the world.

The war fleet was duly sent, but shortly after it jumped into warp space outside the Clax system it was smashed asunder by a warp storm of gigantic proportions. The last astropathic transmission reported white arcs of energy tearing apart the hulls of the ships, the power of the storm literally twisting men and machines apart, turning soldiers inside out and disintegrating everything. The Clax system has been cut off ever since by the swirling tempest, and it is claimed that those who pass close by can still hear the screams of the dying and feel the panicked last thoughts of the Astropaths echoing through the whole region. It is an area of ill omen now known as the Storm of the Emperor's Wrath.

With this huge blow to the Ecclesiarchy's military power, the whole of the Segmentum Obscurus erupted into rebellion. The Cardinal palaces were stormed by frenzied converts who tore down the hangings, burned the icons and smashed the ornate stained glass windows. Through all the madness, the name of Sebastian Thor still kept appearing. Who was this shadowy figure who seemed intent on the destruction of the Ecclesiarchy and with that, the Imperium itself? Perhaps he was some from of vessel for the gods of Chaos, another Horus attempting to enslave humanity once more. Or maybe some other alien influence controlled him, one of the many creatures of the warp or one of the immensely powerful elder races, hitherto undetected. As more information was relayed back by the Ministorum's agents, the High Lords were stunned by the news.

Thor was no daemonic entity intent on corrupting the Imperium, he was just a man, born in a Dimmamar Schola Progenium habitat. Interrogations of old companions revealed that he had been a devout, if somewhat introverted, follower in his early life. However, Thor recently claimed to have visions of the Emperor, and warned that disaster was befalling mankind. It was claimed that Thor had cast an old Preacher from the pulpit in the middle of a prayer session and denounced the ways of the Ecclesiarchy. With an eloquence and charisma the informants could not explain, Thor spoke to those present, reaching into their hearts and minds with his words.

News of the incident spread and soon thousands travelled to hear Thor's sermons and went away with a new religious zeal burning in their souls, spreading the message even further. Members of the heretic Confederation of Light approached declared his loyalty to the sect. Thor was brought before the Imperial Commander, Gaius Welkonnen, and spoke of his visions and dreams, and of his ambition to rid the Imperium of Vandire's tyranny. No one could explain what rare power was held in Thor's voice, but the Governor immediately swore his loyalty to Sebastian Thor and placed Dimmamar's army at his disposal, as the adept had requested.

As word spread, anarchy embroiled the Segmentum Obscurus, and desecration, looting and wanton destruction erupted. Although Vandire's spies were exposed and driven out with startling efficiency, it became clear that Sebastian Thor's 'army' had grown to over 5 million followers within the space of a year, and the huge entourage was slowly making its way through the Imperium towards Terra. Even some of the surviving Frateris Templars joined his forces.

Many legends sprang up around Thor and his long journey, and miraculous events were attributed to his presence. Some of this can be explained by the oratory skills of the young adept, such as the way the population of the planets he passed through would gather their resources to feed and house his immense following. Others remain true mysteries, like the Navigator's tales of the utter calmness of the warp as they journeyed from system to system. Though the rest of the galaxy was still embroiled in the raging tempests that had engulfed the Imperium for many hundreds of years, the massive fleet of the Confederation of Light passed through the warp without hindrance. The Paternova of the Navigators dubbed him Abstracta Preomnis, Master of the Warp.

News of Sebastian Thor spread from the Segmentum Obscurus to other parts of the Imperium. Distance exaggerated the message and soon Thor was being hailed as a god-like being. With much of its armed might destroyed at Clax, the Adeptus Ministorum could do little to stop system after system, diocese from swearing loyalty to the new wave of belief centred around Thor. Despite fierce opposition from many Cardinals and Confessors who saw their power, traditions and whole way of life being destroyed, Thor's creed converted millions of followers. Co-operation and sacrifice became the doctrine of those who heard Thor's impassioned speeches, delivered from different planets along the route to Terra. Although many opposed Thor, all across the Imperium the tide had changed

against Vandire. The masses had been pushed too far, and this time they had a leader to unite behind.

The Wars of Apostasy

More disturbing news was to reach the Council of the High Lords. Until now, the Adeptus Mechanicus and Space Marine Chapters had played only a small role in the Age of Apostasy. The vagaries of warp travel made any long distance journeys hazardous at best and impossible in some areas. Instead the Adeptus Astartes' planets and the Forge Worlds of the Adeptus Mechanicus became fortresses amidst a sea of anarchy. These organisations were on the defensive, protecting the few systems they could from the ravages of the Age of Apostasy and the carnage of Vandire's Reign of Blood. Of all the Imperium, it was these small empire-like enclaves which survived the whole epoch with the least harm inflicted, the guardianship of the Adeptus Mechanicus and Space Marines protecting them from the worst events of that terrible era.

With news of Sebastian Thor and the spread of the Confederation of Light, many Space Marine Chapter Masters in the Segmentum Solar and the nearest sectors of the rest of the Imperium began voicing their support for this movement. The Adeptus Mechanicus issued a summons for the High Lords to account for themselves and to indict and execute Vandire as a traitor. Vandire's response was to dissolve the Council of High Lords and order his remaining armies and fleets to attack the rebellious Space Marines and Cult Mechanicus. Many officers refused such a suicidal endeavour, only to be burned or hanged as heretics. They were replaced with more tractable commanders, but by this time Vandire's treachery was revealed. Enraged by what he saw Gastaph Hedriatix, the Fabricator General of the Adeptus Mechanicus, ordered regiments of the Martian Tech-Guard to transport to Earth. These regiments were joined by the Imperial Fists, Fire Hawks, Soul Drinkers and Black Templars Chapters.

Although much of the Ecclesiarchal palace had fallen into ruin, the central complex which housed Vandire's throne room still remained an almost impregnable fortress. For months the combined forces of the Tech-Guard and Space Marines tried to breach its walls, only to be constantly thwarted by the Brides of the Emperor, who numbered some 10,000 fighters by this time. As the huge cannons of the Adeptus Mechanicus pounded on the walls of the palace and the Space Marine assault squads fought down mile-long corridors littered with dead, the attention of the High Lords and Vandire was turned outwards. But it was from within that the greatest threat was to come.

The High Lord Falls

Since the Reign of Blood started, another organisation had remained apart from the bloodshed and devastation. Within the secure walls of the Imperial palace, the Adeptus Custodes continued their eternal vigil over the Golden Throne. To escape the anarchy that prevailed, and to ensure the protection of the Emperor himself, the Custodians had cut themselves off from the outside completely. Only scraps of information passed through the sealed walls of the most holy of places, and it was only when the Space Marines and Adeptus Mechanicus moved against Vandire that the true extent of the treachery perpetrated by the High Lord became known to them. In secret meetings with the commanders of the Space Marines, the Adeptus Custodes learnt of the Reign of Blood and the Brides of the Emperor defending the traitor High Lord. The mysterious order advised the Space Marines to continue their attack while they would do what they could.

The defences of the Ecclesiarchal palace were no obstacle to the Adeptus Custodes, with their lifelong knowledge of the Imperial palace and its thousands of miles of hidden conduits and secret corridors. A small contingent of Custodians, led by a Centurion of the Companions, made its way into the very heart of Vandire's domain. Surfacing not far from Vandire's audience chamber, they were confronted by the Brides of the Emperor. Calling for a truce and a parley, the Centurion laid down his weapons and walked unarmed to meet the guardians of Vandire. For an hour he made an impassioned plea for the Brides to revoke their oaths, striving to convince them that they were fighting for evil, not the Emperor. However, they were not to be swayed by his arguments, and the nameless Centurion had only one option left. Leaving his men as hostages, the Centurion guided their leader and a bodyguard of five female warriors back into the tunnels.

+++The Reformation+++

The Ecclesiarchy Reborn

Although Vandire's Reign of Blood ended with the death of the High Lord, the Age of Apostasy was to continue for many centuries. Much of the Imperium was still wracked by warp storms and all manner of small empires and kingdoms were being carved by Imperial Commanders and Cardinals. The Sebastian Thor had begun his pilgrimage to Earth. However, with no Council of High Lords and no Ecclesiarch there was little hope that the rest of the Imperium could be swiftly restored to its former power.

The Space Marine Chapter Masters and the Fabricator General of the Adeptus Mechanicus set about resurrecting what remained of the High Lords of Terra. The copious notes of Vandire's scribes provided damning evidence against many of those who had profited from the Reign of Blood, and Hedriatix was adamant that all those implicated would face a trail for their conduct, sooner or later. Many of the organisations were encouraged to purge their own ranks, such as the Navigators and Chartist Captains, Imperial Commanders were promoted from within the ranks of those who had opposed Vandire, while other High Lords were vindicated by their peers and duly kept their seats in the Council. However, there was still no Ecclesiarch.

The Trial of Sebastian Thor

Messages were sent to Sebastian Thor, requesting that he journey immediately to Earth. His reply was simple, explaining that he had more work to carry out in the northern reaches before he could continue his journey to Terra. A fast transport ship was sent to collect Thor, but again he refused the invitation, insisting that he was not yet ready. Exasperated, the High Lords issued a decree declaring Thor a traitor and demanding he stand trial on Terra for various seditious activities against the appointed officials of the Emperor. Thor was taken into custody without violence, commanding his followers to stay their hands and let the Emperor protect his messenger.

The galleries of the huge courtroom were filled with thousands of Thor's supporters, watching the proceedings with tense anticipation. The poor and wealthy alike travelled from all across the Imperium to witness the trial of the Imperium's latest saviour. The Judicium Terran became a focal point for the faithful and the end of long pilgrimages. Many of those who set out arrived months or even years after the trial had finished, but were determined to complete their journeys and show their support for Thor.

The prosecution of Thor was vigorously pursued by certain members of the High Lords, their pride affronted by Thor's dismissive refusals. However, for every charge, there was clear and concise evidence of Thor's innocence. He had not incited the people to smash the temples of the Ministorum, there were documented accounts of his sermons decrying such behaviour. He had not fought against the soldiers of the Imperium, and many of those who had been sent against him were now numbered amongst his most loyal followers. Finally, after two months, the trial came to its end. The High Lords consulted each other for three days, debating what to do with this charismatic young man.

It was Captain-General Excelsor of the Adeptus Custodes who delivered their verdict. After explaining that Thor was found innocent of all charges brought against him, Excelsor explained the dire need of the Imperium for a new Ecclesiarch. Since Thor had been proved totally innocent of even the most petty crime, he was an obvious candidate to fill the post in such a time of spiritual need. The crowds roared their approval, thanking the Emperor in his divine wisdom for sending Thor to deliver them. Speaking quietly, Thor declined the offer and the Council erupted into chaos. While the other High Lords ranted at one another and at Thor's impudence, and the watching supporters gasped in despair and disbelief, Excelsor took Thor aside and spoke to him. Although no one truly knows what the Captain-General said to Thor, it is widely believed to have been, " You will leave Terra as an Ecclesiarch, or you will not leave Terra at all..."

As the fell silent once more, Thor announced that he would take on the mantle of Ecclesiarch, but only on certain conditions. He was to have the full backing of the High Lords whenever he needed it. He would make changes to the organisation of the Ecclesiarchy and they would trust him in his

actions. He also wanted to continue as he had been, moving across the Imperium, preaching to the people directly. It was as an orator that the Emperor had guided him, and with his sermons and prayers he would unite the Imperium under the Emperor once more. Naturally, the High Lords agreed Thor I was the 292nd Ecclesiarch.

The Reformation

There were a number of important changes to the Adeptus Ministorum after the Reign of Blood and throughout the Age of Apostasy. Many of them were at the instigation of Sebastian Thor himself. Although Thor strongly disapproved of the way the Ecclesiarchy had been previously run, he was enough of a statesman to realise that radical changes in the Faith were not what was required. There was enough instability already and what the populace was crying out for was solid leadership. Although many of Thor's ideas were never fully realised during his lifetime, the foundations he laid down during his time as Ecclesiarch continue to hold the Adeptus Ministorum together to this day. The first change executed by Thor was the formation of the Synod Ministra on Ophelia VII. Although the Holy Synod remains on Terra and Cardinals from all over the Imperium are free to gather there and discuss the issues concerning the Ecclesiarchy, the Synod Ministra acts as a secondary governing body further from Terra. This has a two-fold effect. Firstly, the Synod Ministra relays and disseminates the dictates of the Ecclesiarch and the Holy Synod, enforcing the laws of the Ecclesiarchy. Secondly, it provides a defence against the manipulation of the Ecclesiarchy by other organisations or even a single individual within the ranks of the Ministorum itself. Never again will a High Lord or Ecclesiarch have total power over the Adeptus Ministorum.

In a similar vein, each of the dioceses was broken down into smaller areas. Again, this had two effects. Each Cardinal had less personal power and controlled fewer men and resources. Secondly, with more Cardinals within the Holy Synod there would be more opposition to radical changes and plans and so further diluted the power held by any one individual.

Other transformations were at the order of the High Lords of Terra. The most important of these was the Decree Passive 0001288/M36. Amongst other prohibitions on military activity, the Decree Passive forbade the Ecclesiarchy from controlling any 'Men under arm'. Sebastian Thor was ordered to disband the Frateris Templars of Vandire and any armies and fleets assembled by other members of the Ministorum while separated from Terra. This was duly done, but for one exception. Seeing that some military force would be needed, and not wishing the Ecclesiarchy to be totally subservient to the will of the Adeptus Terra and the Imperial Guard, Sebastian Thor kept the one army he was allowed under the Decree Passive. Due to the archaic wording of the law, the Daughters of the Emperor did not break the ban.

Incorporating the sect fully into the Ecclesiarchy was difficult, but eventually they were renamed the Orders Militant of the Adepta Sororitas. Although the High Lords were uncomfortable with this development, they had no legal standing to oppose Thor and his argument that the Adepta Sororitas would regulate the Ecclesiarchy as much as enforce its will did not fall on deaf ears.

Even with these major changes, there were hundreds of other details to be seen to: the Schola Progenium needed organising again, the tithes would have to flow into Ministorum vaults once more, there were shrines to be refurbished and temples to be rebuilt. However, after spending a wearisome decade on Terra, Thor departed the Ecclesiarchal palace and left the bulk of the work to the Arch-Deacons and Cardinals. He journeyed all across the Imperium for the next eighty years, quelling heresy and apostasy wherever he came across it.

At the age of 112 Sebastian Thor returned to Terra. He was to live for another six months before finally the Emperor claimed his soul. A massive wing was built onto the Mausoleum of Remembrance to contain his sarcophagus. The week after his death was declared a period of mourning and over seventy million pilgrims filed past his tomb within the first year. Huge murals commemorating his life and works adorn the three-mile long passageway leading up to his burial chamber, and the people of the Imperium still travel to Terra to gaze upon the face of the Emperor's most faithful servant.

+++The Badab War+++

In 901.M41, as a result of Lufgt Huron's apparent mental destabilisation, the Master of the Tiger Claws and Lord of Badab attacked and destroyed an Imperial investigation fleet as it entered orbit around Badab. Huron's action can be understood with the benefit of hindsight. The Adeptus Mechanicus had long complained of the Tiger Claws' tardiness in submitting gene-seed for routine analysis, whilst the chapter had amassed a huge debt in planetary tithes stretching back over a hundred and fifty years. And when the Imperium moved against its wayward chapter, a full scale rebellion was initiated, the most serious of its kind since the end of the Fourth Quadrant Rebellion in 780.M41.

The Tyrant of Badab, as Commander Huron is known in Imperial histories, was a power-hungry and ambitious individual who should never have risen to power within a Marine Chapter. He was plainly a dangerous individual, able in many respects but lacking the absolute dedication to humanity vital in a Lord of the Imperium. It will never be known for sure, but current hypotheses suggest that the Commander was either an alien shapechanger, or otherwise subject to alien domination of a most unnatural kind. A sudden and unexpected manifestation of psychic powers may lie at the heart of the matter.

By 903 three other chapters, the Mantis Warriors, Executioners and Lamenters had joined the rebellion. Imperial shipping was attacked, and a ship belonging to the Fire Hawks Chapter was captured by the Mantis Warriors in 904. The Fire Hawks immediately retaliated, and soon five whole chapters were involved in the fighting. The Emperor recalled the Marines Errant from the Eastern Fringes, but they quickly found themselves fully occupied protecting Imperial ships in transit. In 906 two more loyal Marine units, the Red Scorpions and the Minotaurs, had been brought in, and the threat to Imperial shipping was more or less quashed. In 907 the Red Scorpions and Fire Hawks were recalled to their normal service duties in the galactic east, and two more chapters, the Novamarines and Howling Griffons were committed to space-lane duties.

Meanwhile, the Star Phantoms began the task of besieging Badab whilst two other chapters were drafted in to investigate the worlds occupied by the Mantis Warriors and Executioners. The Lamenters were caught in an ambush by the Minotaurs in 908 and eventually surrendered after bloody ship-to-ship fighting. This came as a great blow to the Tyrant, and the rest of the war consisted almost entirely of close sieges. The uprising came to an end in 912 with the fall of Badab and final defeat of the Tiger Claws. Before the war was over, The Exorcists, Fire Angels, Salamanders, Space Sharks and Sons of Medusa all became involved for short periods of time, chapters replacing other chapters as pressures elsewhere necessitated their re-deployment. With the rebellion over, The Mantis Legion, Executioners and Lamenters were granted the Emperor's forgiveness, subject to undertaking a hundred year crusade. The homeworlds of the Mantis Legion and Executioners were forfeited to the Space Sharks and Star Phantoms for their part in the war. The other legions received salvage rights to spacecraft and a proportion of the booty. The Tiger Claws were all but destroyed. Only a contingent of about two hundred fought their way through the Exorcists' blockade and escaped into deep space. They have not been heard of since. Of the fate of Imperial Commander Lufgt Huron, Master of the Tiger Claws and Tyrant of Badab, nothing is known.

>>Imperial Government

+++The High Lords of Terra+++

The Imperial organisations are so huge and so very complex that it would be impossible to describe them in any detail within this volume. Not even the Curators of the Estate Imperium, the million-strong records office of the Administratum, can not list all the departments of the Adeptus Terra, let alone give details of their composition or purpose. The description that follow therefore only

concentrate on the vital aspects of the most important organisations. In particular, this volume is concerned with the fighting warriors of the Emperor's armies and not with the petty details of Imperial bureaucracy. However, it would be inappropriate to examine any of these powerful fighting organisations without at least a cursory look at the mighty High Lords of Terra themselves. The High Lords are the twelve most powerful men in the galaxy. They rule the Imperium in the Emperor's name, and it is they who send the Imperium's fleets to war and who direct the Imperium's inexhaustible armies. Their task is to interpret and enact the Emperor's will, relying upon His potent mind to guide their thoughts and inspire their actions. Each of the High Lords is leader of one of the most powerful organisations in the Imperium. A complex web of political skulduggery, promises of support, and considerations of mutual interests, bind them together and determines who will hold office and who will not. In practice, some of the Imperium's organisations are so powerful that it would be unthinkable for their leader not to be a High Lord. Over the millennia different organisations have provided High Lords depending upon which was the most powerful at the time. Ruthless ambition and rivalry characterises all of these great men, and their organisations vie against each other for portions of the Imperial power. The following offices are almost invariably represented as High Lords because they are the cornerstones of the Imperium, the most important of its ancient institutions.

- The Master of the Administratum
- The Inquisitorial Representative
- The Ecclesiarch of the Adeptus Ministrorum
- The Fabricator General of the Adeptus Mechanicus
- The Grand Provost Marshal of the Adeptus Arbites
- The Paternoval Envoy of the Navigators
- The Master of the Astronomican
- The Grand Master of the Officio Assassinorum
- The Master of the Adeptus Astra Telepathica

These nine posts are virtually sacrosanct. Should they become empty due to death or retirement, it is usual for the successor to the title to become High Lord. The position of Inquisitorial Representative is not held by any specific Inquisitor, but the seat is retained for whichever individual is sent on behalf of the Inquisition. Similarly, the place of the Paternoval Envoy is open to whoever might be the Envoy of the Paternova of the current ruling family of Navigators. The remaining three posts are most likely to be filled from amongst the following mighty officials:

- Lord Commander of the Segmentum Solar
- Lord Commander Militant of the Imperial Guard
- Cardinal(s) of the Holy Synod of Terra
- The Abbess Sanctorum of the Adepta Sororitas
- Captain-General of the Adeptus Custodes
- Chancellor of the Estate Imperium
- The Speaker for the Chartist Captains

+++Adeptus Ministrorum+++

The Emperor is a being of god-like powers. Indeed, it is common for citizens of the Imperium to honour their Emperor as a god, especially upon primitive or degenerate planets. This deification of the Emperor is not officially recognised but is accepted and even encouraged within the Adeptus Terra. The Emperor, for his part, suffers from no illusion about his humanity and sees himself only as the first servant of mankind. However, even those who work close to the Emperor, members of the Adeptus Custodes and the Adeptus Mechanicus, are riddled by superstition and fervour. This has led to a general acceptance of the Emperor's deification, and the establishment of the Imperial Cult. The cult was envisaged as a means of reinforcing loyalty amongst primitives, feral worlds and the uneducated levels of society. However, over the centuries the cult has become more generally accepted and even its administrators have become 'believers'.

The cult organisation, sometimes known as the Adeptus Ministorum, is a division of the Administratum. The 'Ministry' is run by the Holy Synod of Terra whose members all hold the rank of Cardinal. The chief, known as the Ecclesiarch, is elected from amongst their number by the Synod. The organisation is also known as the Ecclesiarchy for this reason. Although technically subordinate to the Master of the Administratum, the Ecclesiarch is extremely influential and is almost invariably included amongst the High Lords of Terra as an Administratum representative. The working priests of the Ecclesiarchy are fully initiated members of the Imperial Cult known as Preachers. Senior Preachers may be placed in charge of a Mission of up to several hundred Preachers and despatched to spread the word amongst unenlightened worlds. The principal tenets of the Imperial Cult are the persecution of mutants, the abhorrence of aliens and the worship of both the Emperor and Imperial ideals. By increasing the awareness of these dangers, albeit in a relatively unsophisticated way, the Adeptus Ministorum makes the job of the Inquisition that much easier. However, missionaries do sometimes come into conflict with Inquisitors as their fields of responsibility overlap.

Trained Preachers administer the rites of the Imperial Cult to devotees all over the Imperium. The army, navy, and all branches of the Adeptus Terra have Preachers within their ranks. As well as common Preachers there are special officers empowered to conduct the most important Cult rites. The most common of these are the Confessors. Confessors are highly experienced individuals whose success as Preachers has led to their elevation to Confessors. They travel from planet-to-planet, spreading the faith and holding evangelical rallies. New cult recruits are encouraged to 'confess' personal mutations as well as mutations or strange behaviour amongst their friends and relatives. Confession is not necessarily good for the soul... but it does help the process of mutant control which is vital to the future of humanity.

+++Administratum+++

The Administratum represents the vast bulk of the multi-million strong priesthood. Its members are stratified into countless ranks and sub-divisions, with responsibilities that extend to every aspect of life in the Imperium. At the lowest level are humble scribes and clerks, at the highest level are the mighty High Lords of Terra - an inner council whose task is to interpret the Emperor's instructions and formulate policies based on them. The most powerful of all the Lords of Terra is the Master of the Adeptus Terra, chosen by the Emperor himself and the practical figurehead of the whole Imperium. Whilst the main administrative centre is Earth, the Administratum also have countless minor posts scattered throughout the galaxy - these are called temples, and each temple houses a staff comprising members from several divisions of the Adeptus Terra as well as the Administratum. These buildings combine the functions of church, fortress, barracks, jails and office for the members of the priesthood that inhabit them. Like other non-combatant servants, the members of the Administratum wear a monastic style of dress, but their habits vary in colour according to rank and, to some extent, area of responsibility. The basic colour for the lowliest scribe is black, whilst as an individual's standing increases so his clothing is lighter, various shades of grey and eventually pure white. Only the High Lords of Terra wear red robes, but they may wear pure white for informal occasions and daily use. Higher ranking members are likely to carry weapons, and even the lowest ranks may carry weaponry if they are away from Earth. Members of the Administratum are a common sight throughout the galaxy - gathering information, assessing taxation, productivity and making reports for appraisal back on Earth.

+++Planetary Government+++

Planetary Administration lies in the hands of governors called Imperial Commanders - a title which corresponds roughly to the term 'Lord'. The Commander is appointed by the Administratum to

oversee a planet or, more rarely, a continent or a special project of some kind. The position is often regarded as an hereditary one, associated with an ancient title (Duke of Calaco, Baron of Ymgarl, Lord of Lambs World, etc). Although duty-bound to the priesthood, the Commander is essentially an independent governor, and so long as his taxes come through, his quotas are met and his planet kept in order, he is free to run things in any manner he chooses. Commanders can recruit and maintain their own armies and inter-planetary fleets, and may even be permitted access to interstellar spacecraft.

>>Space Marines

+++SPACE MARINES+++

The Space Marines are the product of genetic engineering, intensive training, biochemical alteration and implant surgery which takes them to the limits of Human development and beyond. A Space Marine can survive terrible wounds, heal with superhuman speed, and perform incredible feats of strength and endurance. A Marine is genetically related to all the other members of his Chapter, since each Marine carries some genetic material from the Chapter's founder, or Primarch - one of a small group of super-humans created by the Emperor and his scientists.

In numerical terms, the Space Marines are a small force compared to the countless billions of Imperial citizens, but their superhuman ability and fearsome reputation makes them worth many times their number in conventional troops. They are held in awe throughout the Imperium.

Each Space Marine Chapter is a fully self-sufficient fighting force, with its own space fleet and machine pools as well as support and technical personnel. The Techmarines are trained by the Adeptus Mechanicus, and can repair almost any piece of military equipment, from a bolter to a spaceship.

A Chapter's fleet is its home, providing accommodation, training facilities, machine shops, armories, shuttle silos, chapels, a mausoleum and every other facility the Chapter requires. The fleet travels endlessly through the galaxy; task forces split off from it for individual missions or campaigns, and rejoin the fleet when the mission is accomplished.

The Chapter provides for all a Marine's needs. Tradition and ritual are of great importance, with as much emphasis on moral welfare as on physical training and combat skills. The Chapter is a Marine's family; all other ties of blood and loyalty are renounced. A Space Marine is devoted to the Emperor, to his Chapter, and to the craft of war; these things are his entire life.

Each Chapter is headed by an Imperial Commander - during the Horus Heresy, most of the Commanders were Primarchs. In addition to their support and technical personnel, a Chapter contains tens of thousands of Marines (Note that after the Heresy new Chapters were formed with far smaller complements so that no Commanders would ever wield the same power as Horus). Space Marines may be recognized by their distinctive powered armor - which includes air and blood purifiers, drug injectors and communications equipment. Neuroplastic fiber-bundles replicate and amplify the wearer's movements, so that powered armor is no more cumbersome to wear than a normal suit of clothes.

Each Chapter has its own colors and insignia, which are used on its armor and vehicles as well as on the flags and banners which are often carried into battle. It also has its own particular rituals and traditions. The Space Wolves, for instance, have a completely different Litany of Combat than the Ultramarines. Even the most basic activities, such as weapons checks and maintenance routines are turned into rituals; a Marine's every action must express his devotion to his Chapter.

In the earliest stages of the Horus Heresy, the Space Marines who sided with the Warmaster kept to the original colors and rituals of their Chapters. Later on, however - particularly after the death of Horus and the withdrawal from the Sol system - this began to change.

The litanies proclaiming devotion to the Emperor had already been dropped, and they were replaced with declarations of allegiance to Horus. As the feral world cults introduced by Horus spread throughout the Traitor Chapters, most Chapter rituals changed beyond recognition. Insignia and colors also began to change; most common was the replacement of imperial insignia with the Eye of Horus or with symbols from the feral cults. Some Traitor Marines went so far as to re-paint their armor in new colors.

+++History of the+++ +++Space Marines+++

INTRODUCTION

The Legiones Astartes is known always as the Space Marine, it comprises 1000 independent fighting units called Chapters, each of roughly 1000 fighting troops. Each Chapter has its own Commander, one of whom holds the title of Master of Marines. Each Commander is subject to the orders of top-ranking members of the priesthood - but only in a general, non-military sense. So, whilst a Commander may receive orders to destroy a target, the means to be employed are left to the Commander - his only duty is to succeed! The Space Marines represent the Imperium's main strike-force of mobile warriors, ready to travel anywhere at any time. Amongst men and aliens alike they are popularly called Angels of Death.

THE ORIGIN OF THE LEGIONES ASTARTES

The Legiones Astartes (Space Marines) were instrumental in the early wars that put the Imperium on the galactic map. At the end of the Age of Strife, Earth was a single sovereign planet which had only recently become free of volatile warp-storms. With the sudden dispersal of these storms, it became possible once again for spacecraft to travel to and from Earth. Earth's forces had carved out an Empire that stretched almost half-way across the galaxy within two hundred years. This was the First Crusade.

Research and development leading to the creation of the Space Marines was undertaken in the thirtieth millennium immediately prior to the beginning of the First Crusade. This work was conducted in the superbly equipped laboratories built deep inside the planet Earth. The objective of the program was to create a caste of warrior elites, characterised by super-human strength and unflinching loyalty.

These new warriors were organised into their own special units called 'chapters'. Those chapters created at the time of the First Crusade are known as Chapters of the First Founding. There were originally 20 of these, but only 7 survive in forty first millennium. Since the First Founding there have been twenty five other occasions when the Emperor has felt it necessary to create new chapters. The most recent Twenty Sixth Founding was in the year 738 of the current millennium.

GENE-SEED AND ZYGOTES

There are nineteen varieties of gene-seed corresponding to the nineteen different super-human organs which are surgically implanted into the Space Marine.

Most chapters have existed for thousands of years. During that time, gene-seed belonging to some chapters has mutated. This has resulted in changes in the exact nature of the artificially cultured organs. Such changes, may sometimes make an implant useless. In other circumstances changes in an organ might reduce its effectiveness, or cause new and strange effects. Whatever the result, it will affect the entire chapter - all Space Marines belonging to a chapter share implants cultured from the same original gene-seed.

As well as mutant implants, many chapters have lost one or more types of gene-seed due to accident, genetic failure, or some other cause. Very few chapters therefore possess all nineteen

implants. All possess the carapace implant (phase 19). It is this implant which marks a Space Marine for what he is - irrespective of other implants, training or psycho-surgery.

VARIATIONS BETWEEN CHAPTERS

Each organ serves a specific function as outlined above. Although a chapter's Apothacaries and surgeons are able to perform the necessary implant operations, they do not necessarily understand the exact functioning of each organ. The processes involved are incredibly ancient. Procedures are handed down from generation to generation, becoming increasingly ritualised and misinterpreted. For these reasons, the efficiency of each organ differs from chapter to chapter, depending on the condition of that chapter's gene-seeds and the degree of debasement of its surgical procedures. In some chapters, mutation of gene-seed, poor surgical procedure, or inadequate post-operative conditioning, has twisted the functioning of implants. For example, the omophagea gene-seed of the Blooddrinkers has mutated so that all Blooddrinkers have an unnatural craving for blood. In some chapters individual organs are either useless or absent altogether.

REPRODUCING

Gene-seed can only be obtained by removing one or both progenoid organs from a living (or very recently deceased) Marine. The whole purpose of the progenoid organ is to provide gene-seed to enable the chapter to continue. It is not possible to create a zygote in any other way. Each chapter's stock of gene-seed is therefore unique to itself. Gene-seed has a great deal of religious significance to a chapter, representing its identity and future. Without gene-seed a chapter has no future. The extinction of a type of gene-seed means that a zygote has been lost forever. The extinction of a phase 18 or 19 gene-seed would effectively mean an end to a chapter.

As each marine has only two progenoid glands, the rate at which a chapter can create new Marines is restricted. It may take many years for a chapter to rebuild itself after heavy losses. Gene-seed is often rendered useless if a marine is exposed to high radiation levels or other forms of genetic disturbance. The efficiency of different chapters' progenoid gene-seed also varies, and some chapters are able to make up their numbers faster than others.

According to their charter, each chapter is obliged to send 5% of its genetic material to the Adeptus Mechanicus on Earth. This 'tithe' has two purposes. Firstly, it enables the Adeptus Mechanicus to monitor the health of each Marine chapter. Secondly, it enables the Adeptus mechanicus to store gene-seed with a view to founding new chapters.

A new chapter cannot be founded overnight. A single suitable gene- seed must be selected for each zygote. Zygotes are then grown in culture and implanted into human test slaves. These test slaves must be biologically compatible and free from mutation. Test-slaves spend their entire lives bound in static experimental capsides. Although conscious they are completely immobile, serving as little more than mediums within which the various zygotes can develop. From the original slave come two progenoids, which are implanted within two more slaves, from which come four progenolds and so on. it takes about 55 years of constant reproduction to produce 1000 healthy sets of organs. These must be officially sanctioned by the Master of the Adeptus Mechanicus and then by the Emperor himself. Only the Emperor can give permission for the creation of a new chapter.

RECRUITMENT AND INITIATION

The various implants cause vital changes in a Marine's physique and mental state. Many of these changes are controlled by natural hormonal secretions and growth patterns. Implants may not prove effective, or may not become fully functional, if they are carried out once the recipient has reached certain stages of natural development. It is therefore inevitable that recruits must be reasonably young. Tissue compatibility is also essential, otherwise organs may fail to develop properly.

The third consideration is mental suitability. The catalepsean node, ocullobe, and sus-an membrane will only develop to a useable condition under the stimulus of hypnotic-suggestion. A recruit must therefore be susceptible to this particular treatment.

These considerations mean that only a small proportion of people can become Space Marines. They must be male because zygotes are keyed to male hormones and tissue types, hence the need for tissue compatibility tests and psychological screening. If these tests prove successful a candidate becomes a neophyte. With the completion of organ implantation and attendant chemical and hypnotic training, the subject becomes an initiate. An initiate receives training before joining the

ranks as a full brother. A Marine usually joins the ranks between the ages of 16-18. Pressures during wartime may accelerate the process.

THE RISKS

Although the chapters are careful to select only the most suitable candidates, not all neophytes survive to become initiates. This is in part to the degeneration of knowledge amongst the individual chapters that makes screening procedures less effective than they were. Nor are operational methods entirely satisfactory in some cases. In many chapters implant surgery is heavily ritualised, and often accompanied by scarring, incantation, periods of prayer, and all sorts of mystical practices which compromise medical efficiency. For example, the Spacewolves, phase 17 implant is accompanied by the withdrawal of the initiate's canine teeth and their replacement with longer canines. The chapter regards the additional surgery as part of the initiation ceremony.

If an implant fails to develop properly, it is likely that a Marine's metabolism become badly out of synchronisation. He may fall into a catatonic state or suffer bouts of hyperactivity. In either event, he will probably die.

Those unfortunates that do not die almost invariably suffer mental degenerating into homicidal maniacs or gibbering idiots.

However, when a chapter is at full strength these misfits may be put out of their misery. If the chapter is short of Marines they are often allowed to live, and may be placed within their own special units. Those who display uncontrollably psychotic tendencies can be recruited into suicide assault squads, or as suicide bombers.

Some chapters deliberately foster such creatures, even going so far as to implant deformed zygotes into some initiates. This is very dangerous, and the practice is discouraged by Imperial edict. But old traditions die hard.

PSYCHO-CHEMICAL AND OTHER CONDITIONING

Implantation goes hand-in-hand with chemical treatment, psychological conditioning and subconscious hypnotherapy. All of these are essential if the Marine is to develop properly.

Chemical Treatment - Until his initiation, a Marine must submit to constant tests and examinations. The newly implanted organs must be monitored very carefully, imbalances corrected, and any sign of maldevelopment treated. This chemical treatment is reduced after completion of the irritation process, but it never ends. Marines undergo periodic treatment for the rest of their lives in order to maintain a stable metabolism. This is why their power armour suits contain monitoring equipment and drug dispensers.

Hypnotherapy - As the super-enhanced body grows, the recipient must learn how to use his new skills. Some of the implants, specifically the phase 6 and 10 implants, can only function once correct hypnotherapy has been administered. Hypnotherapy is not always as effective as chemical treatment, but it can have substantial results. If a Marine can be taught how to control his own metabolism, his dependence on drugs is lessened. The process is undertaken in a machine called a hypnomat. Marines are placed in a state of hypnosis and subjected to visual and aural images in order to awaken their minds to their unconscious metabolic processes.

Training - Physical training stimulates the implants and allows them to be tested for effectiveness.

Indoctrination - a Marine is more than a human with extraordinary powers. Marines have extraordinary minds as well! Just as their bodies receive 19 separate implants, so their minds are altered to release the latent powers within. These mental powers are, if anything, more extraordinary than even the physical powers described above. For example, a Marine can control his senses and nervous system to a remarkable degree, and can consequently endure pain that would kill an ordinary man. A Marine can also think and react at lightning speeds. Memory training is an important part of the indoctrination too. Some Marines develop photographic memories. Obviously, Marines vary in intelligence as do other men, and their individual mental abilities vary in degree.

+++THE FOUNDING LEGIONS+++

<u>No.</u>	<u>Chapter Title</u>	<u>Primarch</u>	<u>Notes</u>
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- | | | | |
|----|---|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Dark Angels | Lion El' Jonson | |
| 2 | *All known records expunged from library - order origination unknown* | | |
| 3 | Emperor's Children | Fulgrim | (Excommunicate Traitoris) |
| 4 | Iron Warriors | Perturabo | (Excommunicate Traitoris) |
| 5 | White Scars | Jaghatai Khan | |
| 6 | Space Wolves | Leman Russ | |
| 7 | Imperial Fists | Rogal Dorn | |
| 8 | Night Lords | Konrad Curze/Night Haunter | (Excommunicate Traitoris) |
| 9 | Blood Angels | Sanguinius | |
| 10 | Iron Hands | Ferrus Manus | |
| 11 | *All known records expunged from library - order origination unknown* | | |
| 12 | World Eaters | Angron | (Excommunicate Traitoris) |
| 13 | Ultramarines | Roboute Guilliman | |
| 14 | Death Guard | Mortarion | (Excommunicate Traitoris) |
| 15 | Thousand Sons | Magnus the Red | (Excommunicate Traitoris) |
| 16 | Lunar Wolves | Horus | (Excommunicate Traitoris) |
| 17 | Word Bearers | Lorgar | (Excommunicate Traitoris) |
| 18 | Salamanders | Vulkan | |
| 19 | Raven Guard | Corax | |

+++The Creation of+++ +++a Space Marine+++

There are nineteen varieties of gene-seed corresponding to the nineteen different super-human organs which are surgically implanted into the Space Marine.

Most chapters have existed for thousands of years. During that time, gene-seed belonging to some chapters has mutated. This has resulted in changes in the exact nature of the artificially cultured organs. Such changes may sometimes make an implant useless. In other circumstances changes in an organ might reduce its effectiveness. Whatever the result, it will affect the entire chapter -- all Space Marines belonging to a chapter share implants cultured from the same original gene-seed. As well as mutant implants, many chapters have lost one or more types of gene-seed due to accident, genetic failure, or some other cause. Very few chapters therefore possess all nineteen implants. All possess the carapace implant (phase 19). It is this implant which marks a Space Marine for what he is, irrespective of other implants, training or psycho-surgery.

Implants

The nineteen organs created by the ancient technicians of the Emperor are described below. Each of these organs is extremely complicated and because many of the organs only work properly when another organ is present, the removal or mutation of one organ may affect the functioning of the others. For these reasons, implants must be constantly monitored, and many Marines have to undergo corrective surgery or chemo-therapy to re-balance their metabolism.

Phase 1 -- Secondary Heart. The simplest and most self sufficient implant. The secondary heart is capable of boosting the blood supply or maintaining full life functions even with the destruction of the recipient's original heart. The phase 1 implant enables Marines to survive low oxygen concentrations and traumatic injury.

Phase 2 -- Ossmodula. This is a tubular shaped organ whose small size belies its complex structure. The ossmodula monitors and secretes hormones affecting epiphiseal fusion and ossification of the skeleton. At the same time, the specially engineered hormones encourage the forming bones to absorb ceramic based chemicals administered in the Marine's diet. Two years following implantation, this will have caused considerable strengthening of the long bones, extreme ossification of the chest cavity (caused by growth of the ribs forming a solid mass of inter-laced bone plates) and a general increase in the size of the recipient's skeleton.

Phase 3 -- Biscopea. This organ is implanted into the chest cavity. It is small, approximately circular and, like the Ossmodula, its primary action is hormonal. The presence of the biscopea stimulates muscle growth throughout the body.

Phase 4 -- Haemastamen. This tiny organ is implanted into a main blood vessel. The haemastamen serves two purposes. It monitors and to some degree controls the phase 2 and 3 implants. The organ also alters the constituent make-up of the recipient's blood. As a result, Marine blood is considerably more efficient than ordinary human blood, as it has to be when you consider the extra biological hardware a Marine carries inside him!

Phase 5 -- Larraman's Organ. This is a liver shaped, dark, fleshy organ about the size of a golf ball. It is implanted into the chest cavity along with a complicated array of blood vessels. The organ generates and stores special 'larraman cells'. If the recipient is wounded, these cells are released into the blood stream. They latch onto leucocytes in the blood and are transported to the site of a wound. Once in contact with air, the larraman cells form a skin substitute of instant scar tissue, staunching the flow of blood and protecting any exposed wound area.

Phase 6 -- Catalepsean Node. This brain implant is usually inserted into the back of the skull via a hole drilled into the occipital bone. The pea-sized organ influences the circadian rhythms of sleep and the body's response to sleep deprivation. Normally, a Marine sleeps like any normal man, but if deprived of sleep, the catalepsean node 'cuts in'. A man implanted with the node is capable of sleeping and remaining awake at the same time by 'switching off' areas of the brain sequentially. This process cannot replace normal sleep entirely, but increases a Marine's survivability by allowing perception of the environment whilst resting.

Phase 7 -- Preomnor. The preomnor is a large implant which fits into the chest cavity. It is a pre-digestive stomach which allows the Marine to eat a variety of otherwise poisonous or indigestible materials. No actual digestion takes place in the preomnor. Individual sensory tubes assess potential poisons and neutralise them or, where necessary, isolate the preomnor from the rest of the digestive tract.

Phase 8 -- Omophagea. This is a complicated implant. It really becomes part of the brain, but is actually situated within the spinal cord between the cervical and thoracic vertebrae. Four nerve sheaths called neuroclea are implanted between the spine and the preomnor stomach wall. The omophagea is designed to absorb genetic material generated in animal tissue as a function of memory, experience or innate ability. This endows the Marine with an unusual survival trait: he can actually learn by eating. If a Marine eats part of a creature, he will absorb some of the memories of that creature. This can be very useful in an alien environment. Incidentally, it is the presence of this organ which has created the various flesh eating and blood drinking rituals for which the Marines are famous, as well as giving the names to chapters such as the Blood Drinkers, Flesh Tearers, etc.

Phase 9 -- Multi-lung. This is another large implant. The multi-lung, or 'third' lung, is a tubular grey organ. Blood is pumped through the organ via connecting vessels grafted onto the recipient's pulmonary system. Atmosphere is taken in by means of a sphincter located in the trachea. In toxic atmospheres, an associated sphincter muscle closes the trachea and restricts normal breathing, thus protecting the lungs. The multi-lung is able to absorb oxygen from poorly oxygenated or poisonous air. Most importantly, it is able to do this without suffering damage thanks to its own efficient toxin dispersal, neutralisation and regeneration systems.

Phase 10 -- Occulobe. This small slug-like organ sits at the base of the brain. It provides the hormonal and genetic stimuli which enable a Marine's eyes to respond to optic-therapy. The occulobe does not itself improve a Marine's eyesight, but it allows technicians to make adjustments to the growth patterns of the eye and the light-receptive retinal cells. An adult Marine has far better eyesight than a normal human, and can see in low light conditions almost as well as in daylight.

Phase 11 -- Lyman's Ear. This organ enables a Marine to consciously enhance and even filter certain types of background noise. Not only is hearing improved, but a Marine cannot become dizzy or nauseous as a result of extreme disorientation. Lyman's ear is externally indistinguishable from a normal human ear.

Phase 12 -- Sus-an Membrane. This flat, circular organ is implanted over the top of the exposed brain. It then grows into the brain tissue until completely merged. The organ is ineffective without subsequent chemical therapy and training. However, a properly tutored Marine may then enter into a state of suspended animation. This may be a conscious action, or may happen automatically in the event of extreme physical trauma. In this condition a Marine may survive for many years, even if bearing otherwise fatal injuries. Only appropriate chemical therapy and auto-suggestion can revive a Marine from this state -- a Marine cannot revive himself. The longest known period of de-animation followed by successful re-animation is 567 years in the case of brother Silas Err of the Dark Angels (d. 321 M.27).

Phase 13 -- The melanochrome, or melanochromatic organ, is hemispherical and black. It functions in an indirect and extremely complicated manner. It monitors radiation levels and types bombarding the skin, and if necessary sets off chemical reactions to darken the skin to protect it from ultraviolet exposure. It also provides limited protection from other forms of radiation.

Phase 14 -- Oolitic Kidney. This red-brown and heart shaped organ improves and modifies the Marine's circulatory system enabling other implants to function effectively. The oolitic kidney also filters blood extremely efficiently and quickly. The secondary heart and oolitic kidney are able to act

together, performing an emergency detoxification program in which the Marine is rendered unconscious as his blood is circulated at high speed. This enables a Marine to survive poisons and gases which are otherwise too much for even the multi-lung to cope with.

Phase 15 -- Neuroglottis. Although the preomnor protects a Marine from digesting anything too deadly, the neuroglottis enables him to assess a potential food by taste. The organ is implanted into the back of the mouth. By chewing, or simply by tasting, a Marine can detect a wide variety of natural poisons, some chemicals and even the distinctive odours of some creatures. To some degree a Marine⁴ is also able to track a target by taste alone.

Phase 16 -- Mucranoid. This small organ is implanted in the lower intestine where its hormonal secretions are absorbed by the colon. These secretions initiate a modification of the sweat glands. This modification normally makes no difference to the Marine until activated by appropriate chemo-therapy. As a result of this treatment, the Marine sweats an oily, naturally cleansing substance which coats the skin. This protects the Marine against extremes of temperature and even offers a slight degree of protection in vacuum. Mucranoid chemo-therapy is standard procedure on long space voyages and when fighting in vacuum or near-vacuum.

Phase 17 -- Betcher's Gland. Two of these identical glands are implanted, either into the lower lip, alongside the salivary glands or into the hard palette. Betcher's gland works in a similar way to the poison gland of venomous reptiles by synthesising and storing deadly poison. Marines are rendered immune to this poison by virtue of the gland's presence. The gland allows the Marine to spit a blinding contact poison. The poison is also highly acidic and corrosive. A Marine imprisoned behind iron bars could easily chew his way out given an hour or so.

Phase 18 -- Progenoids. There are two of these glands, one situated in the neck, the other deep within the chest cavity. These glands are important to the survival of the Marine's chapter. Each organ grows within the Marine, absorbing hormonal stimuli and genetic material from the other implants. After five years the neck gland is mature and ready for removal. After ten years the chest gland becomes mature and is also ready for removal. A gland may be removed any time after it has matured. These glands represent a chapter's only source of gene-seed. When mature, each gland contains a single gene-seed corresponding to each zygote implanted into the recipient Marine. Once removed by surgery, the progenoid must be carefully prepared, its individual gene-seeds checked for mutation, and sound gene-seeds stored. Gene-seeds can be stored indefinitely under suitable conditions.

Phase 19 -- Black Carapace. This is the last and the most distinctive implant. It looks like a film of black plastic when it's growing in the tanks. This is removed from its culture-solution and cut into sheets which are implanted directly beneath the skin of the Marine's torso. Within a few hours the tissue expands, hardens on the outside, and sends invasive neural bundles deep inside the Marine. After several months the carapace will have fully matured and the recipient is then fitted with neural sensors and transfusion points cut into the hardened carapace. These artificial 'plug-in' points mesh with features integral to the powered armour, such as the monitoring, medicinal and maintenance units. Without the benefit of a black carapace a Space Marine's armour is relatively useless.

+++Space Marine Armour+++

Most humans who have any contact with Space Marines will know and recognise the most common types of Space Marine armour quite readily. However, there are other older types which remain in service to this day and which are very different in their design. Some Space Marine Chapters use only a single type of armour while others make use of several different types.

Many of the older variants have special associations for particular Chapters and may be worn by ceremonial guards or by elite units. For example, other Space Marine Chapters are less formal in their use of armour, mixing various types into their fighting units with little or no regard for conformity. The degree of uniformity within a Space Marine Chapter varies a great deal from Chapter to Chapter and is often determined by historical precedent or tradition.

The initial evolution of Space Marines and their armour occurred during the long period of Earth's isolation that preceded the rise of the Imperium and which later became known as the Age of Strife. The Age of Strife lasted From approximately the 26th millennium to the beginning of 31st (ie roughly from 25000 AD to 30000 AD - further references to dates are given in terms of millennia). During these five thousand years the ancient pan-galactic human civilisation of the past broke down and was replaced by many thousands of local civilisations based around either a single solar system or, occasionally, a small cluster of nearby stars. The reason this happened is that warp travel (the means by which spacecraft travel throughout the galaxy) became dangerous and eventually impossible due to colossal disturbances in the fabric of the warp. These disturbances, known as warp storms, were caused by the growth of the Chaos Power Slaanesh - a thorough discussion of which appears elsewhere in this volume, along with a description of the Fall of the Eldar.

During the Age of Strife Earth and the other planets of the Terran solar system were unable to communicate with other human worlds, but maintained contact with each other. For much of this period the government of Earth held sway over the entire system, at other times Mars and the Moon were dominant.

For much of the time the different worlds found themselves at war. During the 28th millennium Earth government broke down completely and the planet divided into dozens of inter-warring nations. After two and a half thousand years of continuous warfare little remained of the once sophisticated civilisation of the past. The planet had become a battleground fought over by techno-barbarian warlords and their warrior hordes. This was a dark time for the people of Earth: a time dominated by brutal rulers like Kalagann of Ursh, Cardinal Tang, and the most infamous of all, the half-mad half-genius Narthan Dume Tyrant of the Panpacific Empire. It was against this background of techno-barbaric warfare that the first Space Marines were created and the first Space Marine Armour type developed.

FORMATIVE MARINE ARMOUR

This first type of armour is now often referred to as 'Mark 1'. In fact this is the sort of armour worn by the techno- barbarian warriors that dominated the Earth. When the Emperor began his conquest of the planet his retinue was equipped and armed in the same way as the troops of other warlords. The first Space Marines formed part of that retinue and were equipped with the same sort of armour as other warriors of the time.

The thunder-bolt and lightning emblem on the breastplate of this suit was the personal badge of the Emperor in those days, predating the Imperial eagle which only became the symbol of the Imperium much later. This emblem gives the suit its other common name - Thunder Armour.

This is not really a single enclosing suit and offers no atmospheric protection or life-support facilities - all of these being unnecessary while fighting was restricted to Earth. The helmet and the top plume are fairly typical, but these early suits were manufactured on an entirely local basis and their exact designs were often a matter of personal taste. The main part of the armour is the massive powered torso which encloses the chest and arms. Beneath the armoured chest plate coiled energy cables transmit power into the arms, effectively multiplying the wearer's fighting abilities three or four times over. During this period most fighting consisted of close combat, warriors preferring to grapple with each other rather than use long range weapons - the power of a warrior's chest and arms was therefore of paramount importance.

The warrior's legs are not power armoured at all but enclosed in tough padded breeches. In the example shown the warrior wears armoured greives and armoured boots. These were not standard by any means, but were worn by many of the better equipped warriors and were common amongst the early Space Marines. The warrior wears a backpack which provides his suit with power - most of its bulk is taken up by a cooling mechanism meant to prevent the power unit from overheating. Warriors equipped in this way fought during all the Emperor's wars on Earth, and also on the Moon and Mars which have Earth-type atmospheres. Mark 1 armour is unlikely to be seen on the 41st millennium battlefield but ceremonial units are sometimes equipped in this way.

MARK 2

Once the Terran system was secure and the process of rebuilding firmly in hand, the galactic conquest could begin. Even before the warp storms and the Age of Strife ended, the Emperor

started to make provisions for his Great Crusade. Part of these plans included the re-equipping of the Space Marine armies with a far more sophisticated fighting suit.

With its advanced technology the newly conquered planet of Mars became the centre for munitions development. New types of armour were produced in great numbers in the Martian factories under the direction of the Adeptus Mechanicus, the ruling class of Tech-priests installed to administrate its affairs on behalf of the Emperor. This enabled the entire Space Marine Corps to be re-equipped. The new type of armour was the Crusade Suit, which became soon known as Mark 2 armour while the old style became Mark 1 retrospectively. The armour is totally enclosed and life-sustaining, and so suitable for fighting on alien worlds as well as in deep space. It is arranged into articulated hoop-shaped plates for ease of movement and these now cover the legs as well as the chest. The additional energy cabling required to operate the leg armour can be seen in the example illustration while the chest coils are enclosed by armoured plates. The old armour had deliberately placed these coils on the outside to help keep the armour cool, but more efficient coolers in the Mark 2 did away with this necessity.

The back pack retains the old shape but is now much more efficient and contains all the extra equipment needed to maintain life-support, air recycling, fluid recovery, and the various automatical medical Functions which have remained common to Space Marine armour ever since.

The helmet is now fitted with automatic sensory devices developed in the Martian workshops. These consist of exterior sensors which gather visual and audio stimuli from the immediate environment - effectively functioning as eyes and ears. The information gathered in this way is processed by a computer brain and then transmitted directly into the wearer's mind by a neural connector. The practical result for the wearer is that he appears to see and hear quite normally, but he can also see infra-red and ultra-violet light, and hear a wider range of sound frequencies. The wearer is also able to selectively enhance a visual image or sound should he wish.

If exposed to blinding lights or deafening noises, the computer processor acts as a safety valve and dampens down the stimuli preventing damage to the Space Marine.

This sort of armour was used throughout the Great Crusade. Many maintain that it is the most efficient of all Space Marine armours, although its overlapping plates are notoriously difficult to repair. Actual examples of this armour, much repaired and carefully maintained, are still used in small numbers by many Space Marine Chapters.

MARK 3

The Mark 3 armour variant dates from the inner-galactic wars between the Emperor's forces and the inhabitants of worlds close to the galactic core, which included many of the Squat Homeworlds, not all of which were entirely pleased to find themselves the object of galactic reconquest. Mark 3 armour was never intended to replace Mark 2, but to provide an optional heavy armour type suitable for fighting on board spacecraft and in tunnel complexes. High casualties suffered during early battles had shown the need for such armour. Mark 3 therefore placed considerable emphasis on frontal protection, while the rear armoured plates were lightened to compensate. This armour was reckoned ideal where cover was minimal and combat was a matter of frontal assault.

The suit itself is a highly modified Mark 2 with the addition of fixed armour plates to the body and limbs and a new heavy armoured helmet. The sloping plates of this helmet were intended to deflect shot to the left and right, and was to inspire the Mark 4 and 6 helmet designs. No Space Marine forces were ever equipped solely with this mark although many modern Chapters still use Mark 3 armour for boarding actions and tunnel fighting.

While a successful solution to a specific need, Mark 3 armour is too clumsy and uncomfortable for everyday use. As the most visually brutal of all Marine armour, it is sometimes used as a basic uniform for ceremonial guards. Mark 3 armour is sometimes called the Iron Suit or *Armorum Ferrum* in recognition of its great strength.

MARK 4

The Great Crusade lasted for approximately 200 years at the end of which came a period of political consolidation. The Space Marines were now scattered far and wide throughout the galaxy, many serving as garrisons rather than as campaigning armies, and their size was scaled down to reflect this new role. Much of the equipment of the past was rapidly wearing out, including the old Mark 2 and 3 armour suits produced on Mars. While some Marine Chapters chose to continue local

production and maintenance, the Martian factory hives of the Adeptus Mechanicus set about producing a new variant. This was to be the Mark 4 or Imperial Maximus Suit.

The main change was to abandon the separate abutting plates in favour of larger inflexible armour casings incorporating the flexible joints originally developed for the Mark 3. The result was only marginally less mobile than the earlier type and considerably easier to produce and maintain.

Technical secrets uncovered on newly conquered worlds enabled the Martians to develop a more efficient armour, improving the quality of protection and reducing the weight of the suit at the same time. Improved armouring of the power cables enabled the main arm and chest supply to be safely relocated on the exterior of the armour, while use of new material also allowed the size and number of cables to be reduced.

The helmet is an entirely new type, the basic shape inspired by the sweeping front of the Mark 3. In earlier armour the helmet is fixed and the wearer's head is free to move inside. In Mark 4 and later versions the helmet is not fixed but moves with the wearer's head. This facility reflects the constructors' increasing experience with neural connector gear and the use of new materials which flooded into the Martian workshops as the Great Crusade progressed. Mark 4 armour was designed to be the ultimate and final type of Space Marine armour, able to offer the best protection in a variety of conditions. The Martian factories were turned over to its production and many of the Space Marine armies were entirely or partially re-equipped.

MARK 5

The general issue of Mark 4 armour was only half complete when the Horus Heresy broke out. This threw the entire program of supply into turmoil. In fact many of the most recently supplied Chapters were to turn against the Imperium while many loyal Chapters were forced to continue with older variants, and the confusion was considerable. The Space Marine armourers (Techmarines and Artificers) had hardly got used to the new armour and many were as yet unable to maintain it properly let alone duplicate it as was originally intended.

With the Mark 4 newly in service the need for large numbers of spares had not been anticipated, so that suits quickly became unusable due to quite minor battle damage. It was soon found that the new and rather specialised materials used in the construction of the Mark 4 were unavailable locally and this increasingly became a problem as Chapters moved from battle-zone to battle-zone. The Imperial forces were soon forced into a fall-back position. Production of Mark 4 armoured ceased, and a new type of armour was designed almost literally over-night. This was the Mark 5 or Heresy Suit.

The Mark 5 used as many pre-Mark 4 components as possible. Large stocks of these existed and the Marine Artificers were already familiar with their application. Once supplies of the new materials used in the Mark 4 armour dried up it became necessary to re-use older substances. In the illustration the lighter chest, arm and leg cabling of the Mark 4 has been replaced by older and heavier style cabling made from more readily available materials. However the cables are now exposed because they are too bulky to fit under the new style chest plate. This was to prove a consistent weak spot in the design leading to the fitment of all kinds of improvised chest armour. A distinguishing feature of the Mark 5 armour were the heavily studded armour plates. This was an attempt to reinforce the Mark 4 pattern plates when inferior materials were used due to lack of the proper supplies. An extra skin plate was fitted around the armour using molecular bonding studs. The extra weight was considerable, especially if a further chest plate had been added, leading to increased pressure on energy from the power pack. As a result the wearer either had to turn up the power output and suffer intolerable heat build-up, or leave the power supply as it was and accept reduced power levels.

The helmet type illustrated is a spin-off from the Terminator development program, an early type of pre-production helmet, sharing the same type of auto-sense components as contemporary Terminator suits. Being something of an improvised stop-gap, it is common for Mark 5 suits to vary a great deal. Where Mark 4 helmets, armoured plates and cabling were available these were often used.

Despite its inauspicious origin the Mark 5 armour proved remarkably durable and equally importantly it was easy to produce and maintain. Huge quantities were shipped out to Space Marine Chapters during the Heresy, including to Chapters which subsequently went over to Horus. As Horus's own

supply position became tenuous Mark 5 suits were scavenged from fallen enemies and used by his forces. After the Heresy most of the Mark 5 suits were broken up or dismantled to provide spares. Few Chapters maintain examples of the design, preferring perhaps to forget the dark days of the Heresy. Renegade Space Marine Chapters may still be equipped with this armour.

MARK 6

At the same time as production of Mark 4 armour ceased, work began on a long term development program to replace the Mark 4 with a more durable type. The Mark 5, or Corvus Suit, was only ever perceived as a stopgap design. The weapon development workshops on Mars began to experiment with a mixture of new and old technology, making the newer materials more durable where possible. A notable feature of the resulting armour types (Marks 6 and 7) is the provision of dual technology circuits. These permit relatively rare or sophisticated functions to be temporarily replaced or repaired using common or very simple technology. Although development was incomplete the new armour was rushed into production while the forces of Horus advanced throughout the Terran solar system. Hastily equipped Space Marines wore the new style Mark 6 armour into battle while the development laboratories were disassembled and prepared for transfer to Earth. During the Martian campaign forces of Horus eventually overran the production facilities for Space Marine armour and soon began to manufacture new suits for their own use. Consignments were distributed to other forces elsewhere in the galaxy so that this new type of armour became quite widespread.

Distinguishing features of the Mark 6 armour are its relatively clean appearance due to rehousing the main power cables under the armour plates. The exterior chest and arm cables are duplicated under the chest plate and automatically isolated from the main system if damaged - thus providing a failsafe and overcoming the vulnerability of the Mark 5. The helmet is an improved version of the Mark 4 rather than a new type, although a new type was under development and was to be used on the Mark 7. The left shoulder armour retains the same construction method as the earlier Mark 5 and for the same reasons. Where supplies of material were short it is the right side of the warrior which needs to be better protected while he fires his weapon, thus the left side could be most easily replaced by slightly less effective plates. The need to economise in this way was very real at the time. Later the studded pad became associated with the Terran campaign and the final heroism of the Space Marines so that it became a traditional emblem of those days.

MARK 7

While the final battle for Mars was underway the Imperium, realizing that the planet would eventually fall, set about duplicating the munition production lines back on Earth. The armour development teams from Mars were transferred wholesale to continue the development program and incorporate their latest work into a new armour type. As Horus's forces finally overcame the defenders of Mars new Mark 7 armoured suits started to reach the Space Marines on Earth and the Moon. Mark 7 represents the fulfillment of the new design program which was really only half complete in the Mark 6. In fact, so effective was the Mark 6 that both types continued in service thereafter and many Chapters chose to continue with their old armour rather than adopt Mark 7.

The main improvement is the newly designed chest plastron which covers the chest and arm cabling. This bears the eagle device and gives the armour its common name of *Armorum Impetor* or Eagle Armour. The other main difference is the abandonment of the studded right shoulder piece and the substitution of the new helmet for the old Mark 4 derived model. Improvements were made to the knee joint articulation, but this modification had already been incorporated into many of the later Mark 6 suits. On the whole it is fair to say that Mark 7 represents the final development of Mark 6 and that the two sets of armour have a great deal in common. Parts from one are readily interchangeable with parts from another, so that a Mark 7 helmet will fit a Mark 6 suit and vice versa.

CHAPTER VARIANTS

The 7 basic marks of Space Marine armour were all developed up to and during the period of the Horus Heresy. During the production history of each mark various improvements were incorporated in the light of field experience. Thus there is a certain variation even within each mark although this is usually limited to the types of material used rather than to stylistic changes.

Following the end of the Heresy much in the Imperium changed, including the organization and number of the Space Marine Chapters. Whereas up until this time there had only been twenty

Chapters, henceforth the huge pre- Heresy forces were to be broken up into many smaller Chapters. The new Chapters that were founded were equipped with whatever suitable armour and weaponry was available. For the most part the armour used was either Mark 6 or 7, but with a fair sprinkling of older types.

Since that time each Chapter has largely taken over the production of its own equipment. That is not to say that every Chapter produces every single item of hardware that it uses. Some Chapters trade items with other Space Marine Chapters, or they commission work from local fabricators. This latter option is especially common where Chapters hold the governorship of the world they live on - in which case the planet is effectively owned by the Chapter and its resources can be organized by the Space Marines as they wish. In other Space Marine Chapters supplies are purchased through the Adeptus Mechanicus.

MARINE ARTIFICERS

Within each Chapter Space Marine armour is maintained by skilled Marine Artificers, These are not Space Marines, but highly trained and dedicated servants who spend their entire lives working for the Chapter, Artificers are just one of the many types of 'civilian' servants who work for their Space Marine Masters. In some Chapters these Artificers traditionally work together in a single huge workshop and their products are distributed amongst the Space Marine Chapter as a whole. In other Chapters individual Artificers are the personal servants of either a Squad of 10 Marines or an individual officer. These Artificers are very proud of their Space Marine masters, considering the status and reputation of their unit or officer to be of the utmost importance. In their turn the Space Marines are equally proud of the Artificers whose fine workmanship adorns their armour and weapons. Over the history of a Chapter especially talented Artificers become famous and justly celebrated, and examples of their work are much sought after.

In many Chapters it is traditional for Artificers to come from special families, and for fathers to pass on their skills and position to their sons. In other Chapters the position is open to all, but involves a long period of apprenticeship to an older Artificer.

The Artificer's job is to decorate and maintain the Chapter's armour and weapons. In fact, the Chapter also has Engineers and Techmarines whose role is to manufacture much of the equipment, so the Artificers are involved more with decoration, engraving, customizing and modifying the basic equipment. For example, when a Space Marine earns a combat honour it is the Artificers who make the honour badges and fasten them on to the Marine's armour. Similarly, the Artificers make rank badges, long service badges and other marks of distinction that are used by their Chapter.

Older types of armour are associated with the past history of many Chapters and often with the deeds of heroic individuals. Artificers will carefully hunt down examples of ancient armour-to use as the raw material on which they can engrave honour marks or purely decorative features. Such pieces will be lovingly restored, often plated with silver or gold, and then painstakingly engraved with naturalistic scenes, abstract designs or Chapter badges. A piece of armour that can be shown to have belonged to an old Chapter hero is valued above all others. As successful Space Marine Officers are often presented with ancient pieces of armour, a single armoured plate or helmet might have a long and famous history and could have belonged to a whole succession of Space Marine heroes and been worked on by many famous Artificers.

INDIVIDUALISED ARMOUR

As well as resurrecting old pieces of armour for notable Space Marines, the Artificers also decorate new armour and modify armour to suit particular individuals. Only Space Marines earning some kind of reward or honour would be given such items. As a result of their efforts over the many thousand years the Chapter has been in existence, it is quite common to find suits which combine elements of the different marks as well as quite unique suits which have customized armoured plates or helmets.

Some Chapter reserve such armour for special individuals, officers, or high ranking commanders. There is no fixed rule on this, it is a matter of Chapter tradition and preference how such armour is used. However, it is generally the case that very high ranking officials inherit special suits of armour, which they may then combine with their own existing suits so that their individual honours or personal pieces of armour are retained when they are appointed to a new position.

+++SPACE MARINE ARMAMENT+++

Space Marines have access to the full range of Imperial weaponry and equipment. Their training and biochemical engineering ensure that they are natural masters with any type of weapon, from rocks and sticks of feral world savages to the sophisticated needlers and neuro-disruptors favored by spies and assassins. For nearly all their combat duties however, they use standard weapons mixes, relying on a narrow range of favored general purpose weapons.

The standard Space Marine weapon is the bolt gun, or bolter. This is a light, rapid-fire weapon, firing a hail of small-caliber explosive shells. Bolter shells generally use mass-reactive fuses, so that they explode after penetrating the target, rather than upon impact: this makes the bolter a highly effective anti-personnel weapon.

The main close assault weapon is the bolt pistol, a smaller version of the bolter that works on identical principles. While it lacks the range of the larger bolt gun, its handier pistol configuration makes it ideally suited for close fighting.

Other favored close assault weapons include the power glove and the chainsword, both of which are most commonly issued to officers leading assault troops. The power glove is a scaled-up metal gauntlet surrounded by an energy field which gives it the strength to punch through armor and even steel bulkheads. The chainsword is as it sounds - a sword-like weapon whose edges are fitted with a loop of moving blades.

The Space Marines also use a wide range of support weapons, of which the most common are heavy bolters, melta-guns, plasma guns, las-cannons and missile launchers.

The heavy bolter is a larger version of the bolt gun, which can lay down a curtain of fire across a wide area. While its firepower against personnel targets is devastating, its shells are too light to harm armored vehicles.

Also known as the melter or fusion gun, the melta-gun is a heat weapon, whose short range is balanced by its effectiveness against both infantry and vehicles. A small scale controlled fusion reaction inside the weapon's firing chamber causes it to project a blast of heat so intense that metal or plastic can be melted almost instantly.

The plasma gun fires small packets of superheated gas plasma. Like the melta-gun, its killing power helps make up for its short range and it is equally effective against infantry and armored vehicles.

The las-cannon, or laser cannon, is a favorite anti-vehicle weapon, with a long range and sufficient punch to knock out a Land Raider. As well as being a popular infantry weapon, it is often mounted on vehicles.

The missile launchers rival the las-cannon as the most popular infantry weapon. Its variety of loads makes it equally effective against vehicles and infantry, and its range is equal to that of a las-cannon.

+++SPACE MARINE+++ +++ARMORED VEHICLES+++

The Space Marines are not purely an infantry force; they command a wide variety of fighting vehicles, ranging from one-man jetcycles to orbital artillery platforms.

The Land Raider is the main armored fighting vehicle of the Space Marines. Thousands of these tanks are in action on both sides in the Horus Heresy, and they are produced in large numbers by the Adeptus Mechanicus in both camps. Its sturdy frame is equipped with heavy ceramite armor, and its four las-cannon give it a devastating punch in almost any direction. Its anti-personnel weaponry consists of two heavy bolters. In addition to its roll as an armored fighting vehicle, the Land Raider can carry up to ten Marines into battle; it is very popular as a heavily-armed transport.

The Rhino armored personnel carrier is one of a family of armored vehicles that are widely used throughout the Imperium. The Rhino is the most common of these designs, and is the standard Space Marine personnel carrier and armored transport. It is more lightly armed and armored than the Land Raider, but like a Land Raider it can carry up to ten troops.

The Whirlwind missile carrier is one of several Rhino variants. It is more or less identical to the original chassis, but the original bolter armament is augmented by a turret-mounted multi-launcher, giving the Whirlwind a powerful support capacity.

+++LAND RAIDER+++

From the beginning of time, man has believed that the stars control his fate. Through their movements, people have seen future events and intimations of the will of their gods. In the forty-first millennium, billions still watch the sky fearfully, searching for a portent of doom. But in this time, they have reason to fear. From the stars come ships, some to trade, many to wage war. Most feared of all are the ships of the Legiones Astartes, gravid with their cargo of death - the Land Raiders of the Space Marines, bursting upon the unsuspecting, roaring like thunder, burning all before them.

The Space Marines are rightly feared by ordinary folk, for their presence signifies death as surely as the plague bells of Phobos. The images of the Space Marines and the Land Raider Battle Tank are forever meshed in the popular imagination. In some cultures, the vehicles are portrayed as Chariots of Destruction ridden upon the solar winds by the Angels of Death, poised throughout the galaxy, ready to crush the serpent of Chaos.

MAN, MYSTICISM AND MECHANICS

Mysticism is an important part of everyday life in the Imperium. A twentieth century man might recognise in the Land Raider nothing more than a huge battle tank, a mere engine of war. But the men of the forty-first millennium are wiser. They know that every Land Raider has its own spirit, and its own destiny.

Whether a Land Raider is built in the Martian weapon-shops of the Adeptus Mechanicus or in the armouries of the Space Marines, its purity and spiritual welfare are given as much attention at every stage of construction as its mechanical aspects. A wildcat (or other locally-obtainable predator sacrificed within its ceramite framework. Armoured panels are inscribed with runes of protection as they are reverently bolted in place. Components are checked and blessed before assembly. As each Land Raider grinds towards the end of the production line, preparations are made for the Ceremony of Commission.

Land Raiders are delivered to the Space Marines, the Imperial Guard, the Inquisition, the Adeptus Arbites, to certain Rogue Traders and to other, more secret and obscure Imperial bodies. Space Marine Land Raiders are handed over to a Techmarine, or Frater Astrotechnicus to use the proper title. In other cases, it will be accompanied to its new home by an Adeptus Mechanicus Technomat - a human machine programmed with the knowledge required to service his charge. For many technicians, the commission represents the culmination of years of training; learning how to divine the runes of engineering, memorising the liturgy of maintenance, and studying the routine of service. If a Marine Land Raider should be lost, its Techmarine offers prayers of mourning for its spirit. If a Techmarine is slain, his Land Raider must be reconstructed by one of his technical brethren. In the field, this is often done simply by taking a ring bearing the vehicle's serial runes from the dead Techmarine, and the full reconstruction takes place later.

THE LAND RAIDER IN BATTLE

The Land Raider is ideally suited to the style of warfare favoured by Space Marines. Like the Marines themselves, the vehicle is capable of fighting in almost any environment. The Land Raider also offers protection and transport for a squad of troops, as well as carrying many of their supplies and back-up equipment. On Death Worlds and in other harsh environments, the Land Raider becomes a vital life-support as well as a fighting machine.

In battle, the squad normally disembark, leaving the Land Raider and its Techmarine crew to fight independently. Its adaptability allows it to fight in a variety of roles. Where appropriate, a single Land Raider or a small group will be sent forward with troops in order to provide covering fire and support. On other occasions, Land Raiders from several companies, are brought together into huge armoured formations, ready to do battle with enemy vehicles or defences.

LAND RAIDER CAMO SCHEMES

Marines are warriors of a wholly practical devotional order. Whilst their endless liturgies and prayer may appear, to the uninitiated, to be men superstition, they serve an important and real function. For example, while preserving the accumulated experience of millennia, the doctrinal lore of camouflage schemes is not so dogmatic as to prevent the adoption of appropriate or innovative colours and patterns where appropriate. So while there are innumerable official or approved colour schemes, there are also many which have been evolved by individual chapters to meet their particular requirements in certain situations.

Some Marine chapters adhere rigidly to the traditional patterns. The chapter of the Red Scorpions not only sticks strictly to the lore of camouflage handed down from their original founding and embodied in the Codex Imperialis, but views any deviance from this practice as tantamount to heresy. This has led to the Red Scorpions actually refusing to fight alongside other Marine chapters on a number of occasions - one of the reasons why they were mostly confined to space lane duties during the Badab War. The Commanders of the Imperial Guard are less stringent about such things than Marines, and will sometimes design their own schemes for a specific campaign.

Wherever they may be serving, Land Raiders may sometimes appear garish in comparison to the camouflage schemes evolved for use in the limited range of combat environments offered by twentieth-century Earth. A Land Raider camouflaged for use in the spectacular cobalt chromate deserts of Galen V, for instance, would be highly conspicuous in a yellow-brown silicone oxide desert beneath Earth's yellow sun. Many schemes show no attempt at camouflage as such, but consist of solid heraldic colours proclaiming the identity of the occupants as surely as the shield of a medieval knight. Indeed, there are some Marine chapters whose tradition actually forbids the use of camouflage on the grounds that "the colours of cowardice" are wholly inappropriate to a true warrior. This attitude, although by no means rare amongst the Legiones Astartes, is not officially recognised and is not embodied within the ancient Codex Imperialis.

Most strange of all are the fully Pictorial designs painted onto Land Raiders both by Marines and by the Imperial Guard. These take the form of actual paintings of battle scenes or of famous events in the history of the unit concerned. Although this is a spectacular example of vehicle decoration, machines rarely enter the battle zone wearing such lavish paint schemes.

+++The Cursed Founding (21st)+++

The Twenty First Founding was the largest since the Second Founding. It took place sometime immediately before the Age of Apostasy, a time of Civil war which divided and almost destroyed the Imperium. The new Chapters were dogged by bad luck right from the start. Several disappeared mysteriously whilst in action or in warp space.

Every surviving Chapter of the founding is affected by spontaneous genetic mutation of its gene-seed. As a result the Chapters have gradually dwindled in size as their inability to raise and induct recruits means that battle casualties cannot be replaced. Worse still, some Chapters have developed genetic idiosyncrasies, mutations which strain the tolerance of the Inquisition and threaten the Chapter's survival. Few Chapters have suffered as ignominious an end as the Flame Falcons whose spontaneous and extreme physical corruption turned them into a race no longer human or sane. The Chapter was declared Excommunicate and driven from its home world of Lethe by the Grey Knights.

+++The Dark Angels+++

+++History+++

The origins of the Dark Angels Chapter are shrouded in mystery.

There are no records of its beginnings nor any mention of its part in the Emperor's Great Crusade. Any reference in the Imperial histories of its deeds during the accursed times of the Horus Heresy has been deleted. But yet a legend persists that once the Dark Angels teetered on the brink of Chaos, that a terrible betrayal besmirched all the Chapter's honour. Such is their shame that from that time they have striven for absolution from the sins of millennia past.

The Dark Angels are now considered to be one of the greatest of all the Space Marine Chapter with their Deathwing company being particularly revered. Only the highest ranking members of the Dark Angels Chapter know the terrible shameful secret of what happened ten thousand years ago - a secret that drives the Dark Angels to search throughout space and time for the final conflict that will bring them redemption or damnation...

The Primarchs

To understand what happened to the Dark Angels we must return to a time more than 10,000 years ago. To a time before there were any Space Marines; to a time when the Emperor created Primarchs. To help him in his Great Crusade to reclaim the galaxy for humanity, the Emperor, in his wisdom, created the genetically-engineered superhuman Primarchs. The mutant genes used as the basic building blocks for these elite warriors had taken centuries to gather and refine, and despite the Emperor's best efforts of psychic shielding, his industry did not go unnoticed by the Dark Gods of Chaos. Not having the resources to actually destroy the incubator capsules in which the embryonic Primarchs grew, the Chaos Powers combined their energies and instead stole them away from the Emperor, scattering the amniotic tanks and their foetal occupants throughout the warp.

The twenty incubation capsules drifted through the warp for decades or even centuries, until finally coming to rest on human-inhabited worlds throughout the galaxy. The capsule of one Primarch, he who was to become known as Lion El'Jonson, founder of the Dark Angels, was dropped on an isolated planet on the northern fringe of the Eye of Terror - the death world of Caliban.

Caliban

Caliban was as cruel and harsh an environment as any in the galaxy. In the bleak forest that covered the globe lived creatures that had been by Chaos, and which were of such ferocity that mere day-to-day survival was a constant struggle. The human inhabitants of Caliban were forced to live in huge fortresses and castles, located in clearings hacked from the forests of the planet. Cut off from earth by the Warp storms that savaged the galaxy in the Age of Strife, civilisation on Caliban devolved back into a semi-feudal state, with most of the population ruled over by a small warrior elite.

The nobility of Caliban were a bluff and pugnacious race. Raised from childhood to live and die by the sword, they were great warriors and extremely brave. They fought in a form of power armour much like that used by the Space Marines, and like them their main weapons were the chainsword and bolt pistol. Most other forms of advanced technology had, however, been lost, and the warrior nobility therefore rode into battle on huge warhorses known as destriers.

The nobles' life was one of constant struggle as they fought against the multitude of chaotic creatures that threatened to overrun their small settlements. Sometimes a particularly fearsome creature would stay in one area and terrorise it, in which case the ruler of the community would declare a quest against the monster, and the nobles from all around would come and attempt to kill the beast. Slaying a quest-creature could bring honour and fortune for the noble lucky enough to kill it - more often than not though it brought only a bloody and horrific death at the teeth and talons of a hell-spawned abomination.

The Young Lion

Such then was the planet where the young Primarch's capsule crash-landed. Most of the other Primarchs were fortunate enough to be found and raised by the local human inhabitants of the planet they landed on. Such was not to be Jonson's fate, for his capsule landed in a remote and isolated region of Caliban many miles from the nearest human settlement.

How Jonson survived those early years on Caliban is a complete mystery. By rights he should have died within the first few minutes he was exposed on the planet. But Jonson did not die. Somehow, as a young child on one of the most deadly death worlds in the Imperium he not only survived, but grew strong and tall. What it was like for him in those grim and dark days none can say, for there was no-one there to record the events of his life, and Jonson never spoke of those times himself. All that can be said for certain is that for a decade Jonson was forced to trust to his own wit and skill in order to survive. He had no-one to aid him, he could rely on only himself. And so it was, in this state, that at the turn of the decade since his arrival on the planet, the Primarch encountered his first humans.

The Order

The brave warrior knights he encountered belonged to a group known simply as the Order. The Order had a reputation across all of Caliban for the honesty, nobility and fearless skills of its brother-knights in battle. Uniquely amongst the knights of Caliban, then members, or brothers, of the Order were selected by merit rather than inheritance. Anyone could join the Order, no matter how low born they might be. Contingents of brother-knights from the Order travelled across the planet, giving their aid whenever it was needed.

It was while on one of their great expeditions that a band from the Order came upon the wild man that lived in the forests. Thinking him a monster, the knights were ready to kill the Primarch when one of their number, sensing that there was something more to the creature than was at first apparent, halted his fellows. Luther, for such was the name of the Primarch's saviour, and the other knights returned to civilisation, taking with them the man born of the forest.

Because of his appearance and the place of his discovery, the Order gave the wild man the name of Lion El'Jonson, which meant 'The Lion, the Son of the Forest'. Jonson easily adapted to the ways of humans, learning to speak remarkably quickly. But of his time growing up in the forest he never spoke.

Within the fortress monastery of the Order of the Primarch was assimilated into human society on Caliban. There he and Luther formed a close friendship. It appeared that the two men filled in the gaps in each other's personality. Where Jonson was temperamental and taciturn, Luther was charming and charismatic. Where Luther was rash and emotional, Jonson was a brilliant strategist and unstoppable once decided upon a course of action. They realised that they complimented each other and, as such, became an incomparable team.

Over the following years Jonson and Luther rose through the ranks of the Order. Their exploits became the stuff of legend on Caliban, and the reputation of the Order rose accordingly. The number of young warriors wishing to join the Order grew and grew, so that in time many new fortress monasteries had to be built. As the Order grew in size Jonson and Luther argued for a crusade against the monsters that infested the forests, to cleanse the planet once and for all of their foul presence. The oratory of Luther convinced the Grand Masters of the monasteries and most of the nobles of the planet to join in the crusade, but it was Jonson's supreme ability at planning and organisation which ensured that within the course of a single decade the entire planet of Caliban was cleared of the monstrous creatures that had once inhabited it. A golden age dawned for the inhabitants of the once troubled planet.

In recognition of his triumph against the creatures of Chaos Lion El'Jonson was proclaimed new Supreme Master of the Order and Caliban. Although Luther did not openly begrudge Jonson the honour he had won, he would not have been human if he did not feel some twinge of jealousy. Thus was lit the first small spark that would lead to the schism which would tear the Dark Angels Chapter apart. But all this was in the future - for the present the people of Caliban enjoyed a time of peace and plenty.

The Emperor Reaches Caliban

Meanwhile, unbeknown to Jonson and the people of Caliban, the Emperor was waging his Great Crusade across the galaxy, reuniting humanity and purging entire star systems of their alien

oppressors. As the Imperium's wave of conquest advanced across the galaxy, Imperial Scouts rediscovered the isolated world of Caliban.

It was not long before the Emperor was at last reunited with the Primarch and was filled with joy as would be a father on finding his lost son. The Emperor's first action was to give Lion El'Jonson control of the Dark Angels Legion. This body of Space Marines had been created by the Emperor from its Primarch's gene-stock and had fought alongside the other Imperial forces as the Great Crusade was waged across the galaxy.

Caliban was made the home world of the Dark Angels and the whole of the Order moved to join its ranks. Those knights who were still young enough had the Legion's gene seed implanted within them, while those too old for this process underwent surgery to transform them into elite warriors of the Imperium. The first to be brought into the Legion in this way was Luther, who became Jonson's second-in-command, just as he always had been within the Order.

The Great Crusade, of course, had to go on: there were countless human worlds that were still under the influence of Chaos or suppressed by the harsh rule of alien races. So it was that Jonson and many of the Dark Angels set out with the Emperor to continue the battle for humanity and Luther was left behind in charge of the remainder of the Legion on Caliban. Despite the importance of Luther's position, it was not one that suited his ambitious personality.

As Jonson's fame spread throughout the galaxy and reports of his great deeds and prowess in battle reached the the Legion's home world, Luther felt robbed of his share of the glory. He wanted the fame and recognition that he felt he deserved as Jonson's equal. His role as planetary governor of some half-forgotten backwater world seemed more and more to him like an insult. The seed of jealousy and dissension that had been planted within Luther when Jonson was made the Supreme Master of the Order now began to grow and rankle within his heart as the Primarch became more and more celebrated and famous.

The Fall of Caliban

Then came the terrible days of the Horus Heresy. As the Emperor fought Warmaster Horus for the possession of the Earth, Lion El'Jonson was far away fighting for humanity alongside Leman Russ, Primarch of the Space Wolves Legion of Space Marines. Hearing of the potentially disastrous proceedings taking place around the Earth, the two generals hurried back as quickly as they could. Coming into Earth's orbit they realised that they had arrived too late. Events had already taken their terrible course and the cataclysmic final battle was over.

The forces of Chaos had been defeated, but they had left the Imperium in ruins. And for Jonson one final, shattering betrayal remained to be discovered on his return to his home world of Caliban. It had been many long years since Jonson had been to Caliban, and he longed to see his home world once more. As the unsuspecting ships of Jonson's fleet moved into orbit they were met with a devastating barrage of defence laser fire. Ships exploded into flame and crashed to the surface like monstrous comets. Stunned by the attack, Jonson withdrew and attempted to find out what had happened.

A captured merchant ship soon provided the answer: Luther had used his skills at oratory to lead the Dark Angels under his command to the path of Chaos, instilling his own feelings of jealousy and rage in the Dark Angels who had been left on the Caliban during the Great Crusade. Luther had convinced them that they had been shamed, that the Emperor had turned his face from them.

While Jonson and those Space Marines who had gone with him battled for humanity light years away, Luther's feelings of anger and jealousy had grown within him like a corrupting canker until they were his only purpose and driving motivation. Luther was now a man obsessed, whose own neuroses had pushed him over the edge and made him dangerous beyond imagining. The fury of Jonson and the loyal Dark Angels at learning this horrible information knew no bounds. They had fought from one end of the galaxy to the other and thought that the curse of Chaos had been cleansed from the planets of the Imperium, and now they found that their own home world and their own brethren, had been corrupted and turned against them. Jonson immediately ordered an assault on the planet, driving the rebel Dark Angels back to their fortress monasteries.

Knowing that one surgical strike was all that was needed to end the conflict Lion El'Jonson led an assault on the greatest monasteries himself. He knew that this was where he would find Luther: and so it was that there, the two former friends, now mortal enemies, faced each other. Even though the

Primarch possessed superhuman powers, the two opponents were equally matched, for Luther's own, already considerable abilities, had been enhanced by the dark gods of Chaos.

What followed was a fight of titanic proportions during which the two equally-matched adversaries laid blow for blow against each other, tearing down the monastery around them until the whole massive edifice had been levelled by their battle. Meanwhile the massed guns of the fleet carried on pounding the planet, reducing the fortress monasteries to rubble. The very surface of Caliban began to crack and heave under the strain of the bombardment.

As the planet itself started to break apart, the battle between Jonson and Luther reached its climax. Luther, weakened by the long combat, staggered and fell, leaving himself open to a death blow from Jonson's power sword. But Jonson could not bring himself to strike the fatal blow. As he hesitated, Luther, aided by the powers of Chaos, unleashed a furious physic attack that knocked Jonson to his knees and left him mortally wounded. But as the dying Primarch struggled to stand, his noble features racked with pain, it was as if a curtain was lifted from Luther's eyes and he realised the full extent of what he had done. His was a triple betrayal: of his friend, of the Dark Angels, and of the Emperor. The truth shattered his sanity and he slumped down beside Jonson, no longer willing to fight.

Luther's psychic cry of pain and despair echoed through the warp and the Chaos gods realised, that once again, they had been defeated. They lashed out in fury and frustration. A rent appeared in the very fabric of space and a warp storm of unprecedented fury engulfed Caliban. In an uncontrollable, swirling flood of psychic energy the warp rushed into the physical universe. Those 'fallen' Dark Angels who had served under Luther his clandestine masters were sucked from the face of Caliban into the warp and scattered throughout space and time. Caliban, already weakened by the loyal Dark Angels bombardment, was ripped apart and destroyed, the debris being sucked into the warp. The only part of the planet that survived the storm was the huge fortress monastery where Jonson and Luther had fought. Protected by force fields of awesome power the monastery and a huge chunk of the bed-rock of Caliban held together. When the storm abated this was all that was left of the once magnificent home world of the Dark Angels.

The Dark Angels flew down to the dark surface of the rock and gazed about them in horror at all that remained of their once beautiful home world. The great fortress had been razed to the ground and of all the living things that had once teemed across the face of Caliban only one remained. At the heart of the ruined wasteland the Space Marines found Luther. The warriors were unable to get anything coherent out of the shell of the man who had once been Jonson's closest friend and second-in-command. Luther just constantly repeated the same words over and over again: The Primarch had been carried away by the Watchers in the Dark and one day he would return to forgive Luther for the terrible sins he had committed. Of the mighty Primarch, Lion El'Jonson, there was no sign.

The Chapter Today

This story of treachery and betrayal is the Dark Angels' secret shame. None know of it other than the Dark Angels, their Successor Chapters and, maybe, the Emperor on his Golden Throne. Even within the Chapter itself very few Brother-Marines know exactly what happened during those fateful days.

The organisation of the Dark Angels Chapter has been shaped primarily by events in its history. As a result it is different from that of any other order. The Chapter is monastic in nature with much time being given over to worship and prayer. There are also many different levels within the Chapter which individuals may gradually rise through. On attaining each level, they find out a little more about the truth behind the Dark Angels' origins. Most Dark Angels themselves know nothing about the beginnings of the Chapter. It is only those at the very top who have learned the whole truth.

The bulk of the Dark Angels Chapter is organised along strict Codex lines, as laid down in the Codex Astartes. However, the First Company and the Second Company both have special O organisations. The Second Company is known as the Ravenwing, and is trained as a special mobile formation equipped completely with either bikes or land speeders.

The First Company is the famous Deathwing, and although it appears superficially to be the same as any other Chapter's First Company, it is actually a highly specialised formation. It is only when Dark Angels reach the Deathwing that they learn the story of Luther's betrayal. More terrible still they learn that many of the Dark Angels that followed Luther are still alive. These damned warriors

are known as the Fallen Dark Angels, or simply "the Fallen", and it is the eradication of this stain on the Chapter's honour which drives and motivates the Chapter to this day. As long as still one of the Fallen stays alive, the honour of the Chapter will never be restored. Even within the Deathwing company there are various levels of admission, and with these come gradually increasing levels of knowledge.

The Fallen Dark Angels

In the eyes of the Dark Angels Space Marines, the only way that they can rid themselves totally of their shame, and restore their honour and trust in the Emperor's eyes, is if all the Fallen are found and either made to repent or are slain. However, since the Fallen were cast through the warp to all corners of space and time, this is no mean task for the Dark Angels to achieve. Unlike the Inquisitors and Grey Knights of the Imperium, whose role it is to root out the agents of Chaos at work within the galaxy, in this regard the Dark Angels are only concerned with finding the Fallen of their Chapter. Although the Dark Angels will be called upon for many different missions for the Imperium, the search for their Fallen comrades is a constant quest that they can never relinquish. Not all of the Dark Angels' damned brethren have succumbed to the power of Chaos to the same degree. Some of the Fallen have embraced the ways of the Dark Gods totally becoming true Chaos Space Marines. These Fallen do not belong to a Chapter of their own, like Angron's World Eaters. Instead they are dispersed throughout space and time as either isolated individuals or in small bands.

However, most of the Fallen realise that their actions to the fall of Caliban were wrong. Disgusted by the corrupting influence of the Chaos gods and unable to reconcile themselves with their order they lead a solitary existence. Many of them become mercenaries or pirates, roaming the galaxy as masterless men. Others are willing to atone for their sins and in an attempt to do so have integrated themselves back into human societies taking on the role of any ordinary person. This only makes the Dark Angels' task of finding the Fallen as they are not easy to identify as such. But it is still the Dark Angels' duty to try and track them down. In order to do so, they must investigate any rumour or story relating to the Fallen, in case it should lead them to one of their corrupted brethren.

The Dark Angels can go for years without hearing any rumours that might lead them to one or more of the Fallen. When they do however, and their mission is a success, those Fallen that are captured are taken back to the Rock. Deep inside its dungeons Interrogator-Chaplains attempt to make the Fallen repent. Occasionally they do and for their pains die quickly. More often than not though, the captured Fallen refuses and suffers a long drawn-out and agonising death at the hands of those who would save their soul.

The Final Secret

The only people that know about the disastrous events that took place on Caliban all those millennia ago are the Emperor and the Dark Angels themselves. The Dark Angels will never reveal the truth to anyone outside the Chapter for they could not bear others to know the truth of their terrible shame. And all the while, deep within its cell, Luther, the betrayer, speaks of what is to come. Yet even the highest ranking Dark Angels do not know everything, although they may think they do.

Buried even deeper within the Rock, is the final, greatest secret of the Chapter. Only one person in the entire universe knows the truth - the Emperor himself. For hidden inside a secluded, unreachable chamber at the heart of what once was the planet Caliban, Lion El'Jonson lies sleeping, waiting with the Watchers in the Dark for that time when he will be needed once again to defend the Imperium against its enemies.

+++The Angels of Retribution+++

After the Horus Heresy, the Dark Angels founded three chapters, to track the Fallen. These three chapters share in the secret of the Fallen. As the glorious light of the Emperor was shed on more star systems, the Space Marines needed to create more chapters, in order to better protect the

believers from the traitors of Chaos. Thus, the Angels of Vengeance founded the Angels of Retribution.

The Masters of the Unforgiven decided that it would be improper to share the secrets of the Fallen with this lesser chapter, and so the Angels of Retribution were not initiated into the secrets of the deathwing, or that of the interrogator-chaplains.

The Angel of Retribution were gifted with two things:

- The chapter standard
- The secrets of the Ravenwing. The Angels of Retribution refer to this part of their chapter as "the Emperor's Fist".

The Angels of Retribution use The Codex Astartes standard markings to reflect their lack of knowledge of the Fallen, though this is unknown to them. The company itself emphasizes mobility and firepower, scattering the Emperor's Fist throughout the battle companies, so that each battle company might be self-sufficient, working together as a unit. In addition, the veterans are not separated out into a separate company, but lead their companies, lending their experience to the younger brother marines who are rising to veteran status themselves. The scouts are also attached to a company after they are implanted with the gene-seed of the Dark Angels, as passed to the Angel of Retribution. This overall effect of this is to create a strong sense of unity in the companies, making them into a complete fighting force that is accomplished at working together.

This sense of unity is directed into the Glory of the Emperor by the Chaplains of the Angels of Retribution. Unlike most other chapters, the Angels of Retribution have at least three chaplains in a given company. This scheme was originally decided on by the Master of the Dark Angels to prevent the blandishments of the Fallen from turning the Chapter from the Glory of the Emperor. That the Chapter still maintains a large number of chaplains is a tribute to both their devoutness and their steadfastness.

Because the companies have diverse troop types, they are larger than the norm. There are only eight companies in the Angels of Retribution. There are the five battle companies and one reserve company for each of the major tactical types. The reserve companies serve as a home for Space Marines whose squads have sustained excessive casualties, or who left their original company to seek veteran status. The Chapter Standard is given for a fifty year period to the company that has distinguished itself most in the eyes of the Emperor in the previous period. For a company to maintain the standard, it must excel beyond the level which allowed it to attain the standard in the first place, for the standard aids the marines in battle. In the history of the Chapter, only the second company has been able to retain the standard for a second fifty year period.

In the end of the fourth-first millennium, the Angels of Retribution have been given the task to protect the world of Anduin. For reasons unknown, the Eldar seek something on this world. The Angels of Retribution have fought many campaigns across the forests of Anduin against the Fire Warhost of the Eternal Night, under the command of Eldrad Ulthran. His warhost has left the Craftworld and what he seeks is unknown, but it must be of great importance to the Eldar to cause Eldar to leave the craftworld at his great age. The fourth company has borne the brunt of the fighting to date, since they are the current bearers of the Standard of Retribution.

+++Deathwing+++

Cloud Runner gazed on the wreckage of his home and felt like weeping. He closed his eyes and took three breaths, but when he looked again, nothing had changed. He turned back towards the dropship Deathwing.

Weasel-Fierce had just descended from the ramp. He gazed round ferally at what once had been Cloud Runner's village and brought his storm Bolter into attack position. A grin split his skull-like face.

"Dark Angels, be wary. Death has walked here," he said. The sun glistened off Weasel-Fierce's black Terminator armour. With his white hair and y-shaped scar-tattoos, he looked like the Eater of Bones come back to claim the world.

Cloud Runner shook his head in disbelief. For two hundred years he had the memory of this place in mind. Although the Chapter was his home and the Battle Brothers were his family, he had always felt his spirit would return here when the Emperor granted him rest.

He glanced in the direction of the burial mounds. They had been broken open. He made his way to the entrance. He could see that the bones had been broken and mingled. It was a blasphemy that only the bitterest of foes would preform. It marked the ending of his clan.

"The ghosts of my ancestors wander homeless," he said. "They will become drinkers of blood and eaters of excrement. My clan is dishonoured."

He felt a heavy, gauntleted hand on his shoulder and turned to see Lame Bear gazing down on him. Two centuries ago, Cloud Runner and he had belonged to enemy clans. Now the clansmen who they had fought alongside were dead, and the old rivalry had long ago become fast friendship.

"The Dark Angels are your people now," said Lame Bear in his soft voice. "If necessary we will avenge this dishonour."

Cloud Runner shook his head. "That is not the Way. The Warriors From The Sky are above the squabblings of the clans. We choose only the bravest of the Plains People. We take no sides."

"Your words do honour to the Chapter, Brother Captain," said Lame Bear, stooping to pick up something that lay in the grass. Cloud Runner saw that it was a metal axe-head. Sorrow warred with curiosity and won.

"This was not the homecoming I had imagined," Cloud Runner said softly. "Where are children gathering flowers for the Autumn Feast? Where are the young bucks racing out to count coup on our armour? Where are the spirit-talkers who wish to commune with us? Dead. All dead."

Lame Bear limped away, leaving Cloud Runner alone with his grief.

Two heads Talking studied the desiccated bodies within the lodge. One had been an old warrior. His shrivelled hand still clutched a stone axe inscribed with the thunderbird rune. The other had been a squaw. Between her skeletal fingers was the neck of an infant.

She strangled the child rather than let her fall into the hands of the enemy, said Bloody Moon. The Librarian noticed the undercurrent of horror in the marine's voice. He took a deep breath, trying to ignore the musty stench that filled the house.

"Something evil happened here, but it happened decades ago", Two Heads Talking replied, seeking to relieve Bloody Moon's superstitious fear. He wanted time to consider, to probe the events of the past. The aura of old terror almost smothered him. Shadows lay over this lodge. Something was ominously familiar about the psychic aura of the area.

"Lord Shaman . . ." said Bloody Moon. The Librarian almost smiled, the habits of their ancient former lives had returned in strength now that the once more walked the soil of their homeworld.

"Brother Librarian is my title, Bloody Moon. You are no longer my honour guard. We are both Marines."

"Lord - Brother Shaman," Bloody Moon continued. "No warriors of the plains would have wrought such havoc. Do you think. . . ?"

"We shall have to investigate, old friend. We must visit the other lodgetowns and speak with their chieftains. If has returned to the customs of the Reaving Time, we will put an end to it."

It was rumored that some of the Hill Clans still kept the old daemon-worshipping practices from time before the Emperor's people came. If that were true, it was up to marines to take action.

Somehow Two Heads talking did not think it would come to that. This did not have the feel of daemon worshippers, although there was a taint in the air that it was akin to it. An almost recognisable horror clawed at his mind. He fought it down and hoped that his suspicions were not true.

The city reared above the plain like a soot-grimed leviathan. Cloud Runner spotted it before the others and ordered Lame Bear to land the dropship in a valley, out of sight of its walls.

From the brow of the hill, he studied it trough magnoculars. It was an ugly place that reminded him of the hiveworlds he had visited. It covered many miles and was enclosed by monolithic walls. Great smokestacks loomed in the distance, belching acrid chemical clouds into the greyish sky.

Outside the walls, the rivers ran black with poisons. As Cloud Runner watched, he saw herd elk being driven squealing from barges towards great abattoirs within the walls. From huge stone barracks, people swarmed through the streets towards enormous, brick factories. Smog drifted everywhere, occasionally obscuring the grimy city and its teeming inhabitants.

"That is where Lame Bear's metal axe came from," said Two Heads Talking, lowering himself to the ground beside Cloud Runner. "I wonder who built it?"

"It's a nightmare," murmured Cloud Runner. "We return home to find our lodges ravaged and this . . . abomination in its place."

"That city could hold all the clans of all the peoples of the Plains and ten times more besides. Could our folk have been enslaved and taken there, Brother Captain?"

Cloud Runner remained silent, considering. "If they have been, then we will go down with flamer and stormbolter and free them."

"We must know before we act. We could be outnumbered and trapped," replied the Shaman.

"I say we go in with weapons armed," said Weasel-Fierce from behind them. "If we find foes we burn them."

"Suppose they think the same? The soot and filth give the place an Orkish look," said Lame Bear. He had been scouting further along the crest.

"No Orc ever put stone and stone like that," countered Two heads talking. "That is human workmanship."

"It is not the work of the People," said Cloud Runner. "Those barracks are hundred times the size of a lodgehouse and built of brick."

"There is only one way to find out anything," said Two heads Talking. "One of us must visit the city."

The warriors nodded assent. Each tapped a scar-tattoo to indicate that he volunteered.

Two Heads Talking shook his head. "I must go. The spirits will shield me."

Cloud Runner saw the rest of the warriors look at him to see what his decision would be. As Captain, he could overrule the Librarian. He looked at the city, then at the Shaman standing quiet and proud before him. A sensation of emptiness, of futility came over him. His people, his village had gone.

"As you wish, Lord Shaman. Speak to the spirits and seek their aid," he said, giving the ancient ritual answer. "Bloody Moon's squad will remain here to watch over you. The rest of us will take Deathwing and seek out any surviving logetowns."

Night fell as Two Heads Talking completed his preparations. He laid the four nine-etched skulls of his predecessors on the ground about him. Each faced one of the cardinal points of the compass and watched over an approach from the spirit realm.

He lit a small bonfire in the deep hollow, cast a handful of herbs on the fire and breathed deeply. He touched the ceremonial winged skull on his chest-piece and then the death's head inlaid on his belt. Lastly, he prayed to the Emperor, tamer of thunderbirds and beacon of the soul path, to watch over him as he made magic. Then he began to chant.

The fumes from the herbs filled his lungs. He seemed to rise above his body and look down upon it. The other Terminators backed away from the spirit circle. A chill stole over him, and life leached away until he was close to the edge of death. Great sobs wracked his body, but he mastered himself and continued with the ritual.

He stood in a cold shadowy place. He sensed chill white presences at the edge of his perception, clammy as mist and cold as the gravemound. Above him he could hear the beating of mighty pinions from where Deathwing, the Emperors steed and bearer of the souls of the slain, hovered. The Shaman talked with the presences, made pacts that bound them to his service and rewarded them with a portion of his strength. He sensed the hungry spirits surge around him, ready to shield him from sight, to cloud the eyes of any who might look upon him, causing them to see only a friendly being.

He walked from the circle, past the watching Marines. As he crested the brow of the hill, he saw the distant city. Even at night, its fires burned, lighting the sky and turning the metropolis into a giant shadow cast upon the land.

Above them, through the gloom, loomed the Mountains of Storm. Cloud Runner wondered how Lame Bear was taking it. The big man's face was a blank mask. He was not allowing himself to think about what might have happened to his people.

The Hunting Bears village was the last they had visited: the most remote, built in caves beneath Cloud-Girt Peak. Lame Bear limped up the narrow pathway in the cliff-face.

Cloud Runner tried not to think of the other lodgetowns they had seen. They had found nothing but desolation and desecrated graves. No living soul except the Marines walked among the fallen totems. They had buried the bodies they had found and offered prayers to the Emperor for the safety of their slain kin.

Cloud Runner could see Weasel-Fierce pause. The gaunt man's hand played with the feathered hilt of his ceremonial dagger. He studied the ledges above the paths and seemed to sniff the air.

"No sentries," he said. "As a buck, I raided these mountains. The Hunting Bears always had the keenest watchers. If anyone was alive, we would have been challenged by now."

"No!" Lame Bear shouted and ran across the threshold and into the caverns.

"Squad Paulo, overwatch!" Cloud Runner ordered. Five Terminators froze in position, guarding the entrance.

"The rest of you follow me. Helmets on. Keep your eyes peeled. Weasel-Fierce, establish a fix on Lame Bear. Don't lose him."

Night-lights cut in as they entered the cave mouth. Dozens of tunnels led from the place. Chittering things flapped away from their lights. For a moment, Cloud Runner allowed himself to feel hopeful. If they were to find any survivors of the Plains People, it would be here. In this huge night-black maze Lame Bear's people could have hidden out for years, dodging any pursuit.

As they followed Lame Bear's locator signal through the warren of tunnels, despair filled Cloud Runner. They passed hallways where the dead lay. Sometimes the bodies were marred by the mark of spear and axe; sometimes they were crushed and mangled by inhuman force. Some had been ripped asunder. Cloud Runner had seen bodies butchered like that before but told himself that it was not possible here. Such a thing could not happen on his homeworld - in vast hulks that lay cold in space, perhaps, but not here.

They found Lame Bear standing in the largest cave of all. Bones littered the floor. Scuttlers fled from their lights. Lame Bear sobbed and pointed to the walls. Paintings dating from the earliest times covered the caveside, but it was the last and highest-situated representation that drew Cloud Runner's attention. There was no mistaking the four-armed, malevolent form. Hatred and fear chased each other through his mind.

"Genestealers," he spat. Behind him, Lame Bear moaned. Weasel-Fierce gave his short, barking laugh. The sound chilled Cloud Runner to the bone.

Two Heads Talking stalked past the city's open gates. The stench assailed his nostrils. His concentration faltered, and he could feel the spirits struggling to escape. He exerted his iron will, and the spell of protection fell into place.

Studying his surroundings, he realised that he had no need to worry. There were no guards, only a toll-house where a pasty faced clerk sat, ticking off accounts. In its own way this was ominous: the city's builders obviously did not feel threatened enough to post sentries.

Two Heads Talking studied the scribe. He sat at a little window, poring over a ledger. In his hand was a quill pen. He was writing by the light of a small lantern. Momentarily, he seemed to sense the Librarian's presence and looked up. He had the high cheek-bones and ruddy skin of the Plains People, but these the resemblance ended.

His limbs seemed stunted and weak. His features had an unhealthy pallor. He gave a hacking cough and returned to his work. His face showed no sign of manhood scars. His clothes were made of some coarse-woven cloth, not elk leather. No weapon sat near at hand, and he showed no resentment at being cooped up in the tiny office rather than being under the open sky. Two Heads Talking found it hard to believe that this was a descendant of his warrior culture.

He pushed on into the city, picking his way fastidiously through the narrow, dirty streets that ran between the enormous buildings. The place was laid out with no rhyme or reason. Vast squares lay

between the great factories, but there was no apparent plan. The city had grown uncontrolled, like a cancer.

There were no sewers, and the roads were full of filth. The smell of human waste mingled with the odour of frying food and the sharp tang of cheap alcohol. Low shadowy doors of inns and food booths rimmed each square.

Unwashed children scuttled everywhere. Now and again, huge, well-fed men in long, blue coats pushed their way through the throng. They had facial scar-tattoos and they walked with an air of swaggering pride. If anyone got in their way, they lashed out at them with wooden batons. To Two Heads Talking's surprise, no-one hit back. They seemed too weak-spirited to fight.

As he wandered, the Librarian noticed something even more horrible. All the members of the crowd, except the urchins and the bluecoats, were maimed. Men and women both had mangled limbs or scorched faces. Some hobbled on wooden crutches, swinging the stumps of legs before them. Others were blind and were led about by children. A dwarf with no legs waddled past, using his arms for motion, walking on the palms of his hands. They all seemed to be the accidental victims of some huge, industrial process.

In the darkness, by the light dancing from the hellish chimneys, they moved like shadows, scrabbling about crying for alms, for succour, for deliverance. They called on the Heavenly Father, the four-armed Emperor, to save them. They cursed and raved and pleaded under a polluted sky. Two Heads Talking watched the poor steal from the poor and wondered how his people had come to be laid so low.

He remembered the tall, strong warriors who had dwelled in the lodgetowns and asked nothing of any man. What malign magic could have transformed the People of the Plains into these pathetic creatures?

He felt a shock as a child tugged at his arm. "Tokens, Elder. Tokens for food."

Two Heads Talking sighed with relief. His spell still held. The child saw only a safe, unobtrusive figure. He could feel the strain of binding the spirits gnawing away at him subconsciously, but they had not yet slipped his grasp.

"I have nothing for you, boy," he said. The urchin ran off mouthing obscenities.

Depressed and angry, the Marines left the cave village. Cloud Runner noticed that Lame Bear's face was white. He gestured for the big man and Weasel-Fierce to follow him. The two squad leaders fell in beside him. They marched up to a great spur of rock and looked down into a long valley.

"Stealers," he said. "We must inform the Imperium."

Weasel-fierce spat over the edge of the cliff.

"The dark city is theirs," said Lame Bear. There was a depth of hatred in his quiet voice that Cloud Runner understood. "They must have conquered the People and herded them within."

"Some clans resisted," Cloud Runner said. He was proud of that. The fact that his clan had chosen to continue a hopeless struggle rather than surrender gave him some comfort.

"Our world is ended; our time is done," said Weasel-Fierce. His words tolled like great, sad bells within Cloud Runner's skull. Weasel-Fierce was right. Their entire culture had been exterminated. The only ones who could remember the world of the Plains People were the Marines of the Dark Angels. When they died the clans would live only in the Chapter Fleet's records. Unless the Dark Angels broke with tradition and recruited from other worlds, the Chapter would end with the death of the present generation of Marines.

Cloud Runner felt hollow. He had returned home with such high hopes. He was going to walk once more among his people, see again his village before old age took him. Now he found his world was dead, had been for a long time.

"And we never knew," he said softly. "Our clans have been dead for years, and we never knew. It was a cursed day when we rode the Deathwing back to our homeworld."

The squad leaders stood silent. The moon broke through the clouds. Below them, in the valley, they saw the faded outline of a giant winged skull cut into the earth.

"What is that?" asked Weasel-Fierce. "It was not here when last I stalked in the valley." Lame Bear gave him an odd look. Cloud Runner knew that his old friend had never pictured the brave of an

enemy clan walking in his people's sacred valley. Even after a century, the taciturn, skeletal man could still surprise them.

"It was where our spirit talkers made magic," answered Lame Bear. "They must have tried to summon Deathwing, the bearer of the Warriors from the Sky. They must have been desperate to attempt such a summons. They trusted us to protect them. We never came."

Cloud Runner heard Weasel-Fierce growl. "We will avenge them," he said.

Lame Bear nodded agreement. "We will go in and scour the city.

"We number only thirty, against possibly an entire city of Stealers. The Codex is quite clear on situations like this. We should virus-bomb the planet from orbit," Cloud Runner said, listening to the silence settle. Lame Bear and Weasel-Fierce looked at him, appalled.

"But what of our people? They may still survive," Lame Bear said, like a man without much hope.

"We must at least consider that possibility before we cleanse our homeworld of life."

Weasel-Fierce had gone pale. Cloud Runner had never seen him look so dismayed.

"I cannot do it," he said softly. "Can you, Brother Captain? Can you give the order that will destroy our world - and our people - forever?"

Cloud Runner felt the weight of terrible responsibility settle on him. His duty was clear. Here on his world was a great threat to the Imperium. His word would condemn his entire people to oblivion. He tried not to consider that Lame Bear might be right, that the People might not yet be totally enslaved by the Genestealers. But the thought nagged at him most of all because he hoped it was true. He stood frozen for a moment, paralysed by the enormity of the decision.

"The choice is not yours alone, Cloud Runner," said Weasel-Fierce. "It is a matter for all the warriors off the People."

Cloud Runner looked into his burning eyes, Weasel-Fierce had invoked the ancient ritual; by rights, it should be answered. The Terminator Captain looked at Lame Bear. The giant's face was grim.

Cloud Runner nodded. "There must be a Gathering," he said.

Two Heads Talking saw a commotion break out across the square. A squad of bluecoats forced the maimed beggars to one side. People were crushed underfoot as they pushed through the throng like a blade through flesh.

The Librarian dropped back toward the entrance of a tavern. A surly bravo with fresh-scarred cheeks came too close. He raised his truncheon to strike Two Heads Talking, obviously perceiving him as one of the throng. It bounced off the carapace of his Terminator armour. The bluecoat squinted in astonishment at him, and then backed away.

A palanquin borne by two squat, shaven-headed men in brown uniforms moved through the path cleared by the bully-boys. Two Heads Talking looked at the sign of a four-armed man on its side and a thrill of fear passed through him. His worst suspicions were justified.

"Alms, Elder, give us alms," the crowd pleaded, voices merging into one mighty roar. Many had abased themselves and kneeled, stumps and grasping hands outstretched in supplication towards the palanquin.

A curtain in its side was pulled back, and a short, fat man stepped out. His pale skin had a bluish tint, and he was wearing a rich suit of black cloth, a white waistcoat and high, black leather boots. A four-armed pendant dangled from a chain hanging around his neck. His head was totally hairless, and he had piercing black eyes. He gazed out at the crowd and smiled gloatingly, great jowls rippling backward to give him a dozen small chins.

He reached down and found a purse. The crowd held its breath expectantly. For a second, his gaze fell on the Librarian, and he looked puzzled. A frown crossed his face. Two Heads Talking felt a tug on his leg and fell to one knee, although it went against the grain to kneel to anything except the image of the Emperor. He felt that malign glance linger upon him and wondered whether the fat man had somehow penetrated his bound spirits' disguise.

All the squads gathered around the fire. The great logs smouldered in the dark, underlighting the faces of the Marines, making them look daemonic. Behind them, Deathwing sat on its landing claws, a bulwark against the darkness. He knew that beyond it lay the city of their enemy, where dwelled abomination.

Nearest the fires squatted the squad leaders, faces impassive. Behind them were their men, in full battle regalia, storm bolters and flamers near at hand. Firelight glittered on the winged swords painted on their shoulder pieces. Their garb was Imperial, but the scarred faces that showed in the firelight belonged to the Plains People.

He had known these men for so long that not even Two Heads Talking could have done a better job of reading their mood. In each stern visage, he saw a thirst for vengeance and a desire for death. The warriors wished to join their clansmen in the spirit realm. Cloud Runner, too, felt the tug of his ancestral spirits, their clamour to be avenged. He tried to ignore their voices. He was a soldier of the Emperor. He had other duties than to his people.

"We must fight," said Weasel-Fierce. "The dead demand it. Our clans need to be avenged. If any of our people survive, they must be liberated. Our honour must be reclaimed."

"There are many kinds of honour," responded Bloody Moon. "We honour the Emperor. Our Terminator suits are the badge of that honour. They are signs of the honour our Chapter does us. Can we risk losing all traces of our Chapter's ancient heritage to the Stealers?"

"For a hundred centuries, the armour we wear has borne Marines safely through battle. The suits will not fail us now," replied Weasel-Fierce hotly. "We can only add to their honour by slaughtering our foe."

"Brother Marius, Brother Paulo, pray, silence," Cloud Runner said, invoking formality by the use of Chapter ritual and calling Weasel-Fierce and Bloody Moon by the names they had taken on when they had become Marines. The two Terminators bowed their heads, acknowledging the gravity of the moment.

"Forgive us, Brother Captain, and name penance. We are at your service. Semper fideles," they replied.

"No penance is necessary." Cloud Runner looked around the fire. All eyes were upon him. He weighed his words carefully before he spoke again.

"We are gathered tonight, not as soldiers of the Emperor, but by ancient custom, as warriors of the People. To this, I give my blessing as Captain and Warchief. We are here as speakers for our clans, joined in brotherhood so that we might speak with one voice, think as one mind and discern the correct path for all our peoples."

Cloud Runner knew his words rang false. Those present were not speakers for their clans. They were their clans - all that was left. Still, the ritual had been invoked and must be kept to.

"Within this circle there will be no violence. Till the ending of this gathering, we will be as one clan."

It was strange to speak those words to warriors who had fought together in a thousand battles under a hundred suns. Yet it was the ancient rite of meeting, meant to ensure peaceful discourse among the warriors of rival tribes. He saw some Marines nod.

Suddenly, it felt right. The ways of their people had been born on this world, and while they were here, they would keep to them. In this time and space, they were bound by the ties of their common heritage. Each needed the reassurance after the trials of the day.

"We must speak concerning the fate of our world and our honour as warriors. This is a matter of life and death. Let us speak honestly, according to the manner of our people."

The Elder fondled his chain of office and continued to stare at Two Heads Talking. A frown creased his high, bulbous forehead. Abruptly, he looked away and fumbled in his purse.

A ragged cheer went up from the crowd as he threw handfuls of gleaming iron tokens out to them, then withdrew into his palanquin to witness the scramble. The Marine watched people grovel in the dust, scrabbling for coins. He shook his head in disgust as he entered the tavern. Even the most debased hive world dweller would have shown more dignity than the rabble outside.

The place was nearly empty. Two Heads Talking looked around at the packed earth floor and the crudely made tables over which slouched a few ragged, unwashed drunks. The wall were covered in rough hangings which repeated a stylised four-armed pattern made to look like a crude star.

Outside, in the distance, he heard the long, lonely wail of a steam whistle.

The innkeeper leaned forward against the counter, gut straining against the bar-top. Two Heads Talking walked over to him. As he reached the counter, he realised that he had no tokens. The innkeeper stared at him coldly, rubbing one stubbled, broken-veined cheek with a meaty paw.

"Well," he demanded peremptorily. "What do you want?"

Two Heads Talking was surprised by the man's rudeness. The People had always been a polite folk. It paid to show courtesy when an offended party might hit you with a stone axe. He met the man's gaze levelly and exerted a portion of his will. He met no resistance from the man's weak spirit, but even so, the effort was fatiguing.

The innkeeper turned away, eyes downcast, and poured a drink from a clay bottle, without being asked. Outside the doorway came the sound of footsteps. The doors burst open, and a crowd of workers flooded in, bellowing orders for drink.

Both men and women had gaunt, tired faces. Their hands and bare feet were as grimy as their clothing. Two Heads Talking guessed that a shift had just ended. He took his drink and sat down in a comer, watching the workers slump down in the chairs, listening to them listlessly curse their overseers and their lack of tokens. A group set up a dice game in the corner and gambled indifferently.

After a while, Two Heads Talking noticed that people were drifting through a doorway in the back of the tavern. He rose and followed them. No-one seemed to object.

The room he entered was dark and smelled of animal fat. In its center was a pit surrounded by cheering, cursing workers. Two Heads Talking made his way forward, and the crowd melted away about him. He stood at the edge of the pit and saw the object of everyone's attention.

Down below, two great Pains weasels were fighting, ripping long strips of flesh from each other while the audience roared and betted. Each was the size of a grown man and wore a spiked metal collar. One had lost an eye. Both were bleeding from dozens of cuts.

Two Heads Talking was disgusted. As a youth, he had hunted weasels, matching stone axe against ferocious cunning. It had been a challenge in which the warrior gambled his life against a fierce and deadly adversary. There was no challenge to this cruel sport. It was simply a safe outlet for the bloodlust of these weary, hungry workers.

The Librarian departed from the pit, leaving the workers to their sport. As he left, he noticed that a bluecoat had entered the bar and was talking to the bartender. As he stepped outside, he saw that they were looking in his direction. He hurried into the smoggy night, thinking that he felt inhuman eyes watching him.

Cloud Runner looked at the faces round the fire. They were waiting for him to begin. He took three deep breaths. By long tradition, he must be the first to speak.

A Gathering of Warriors was not an argument in the formal sense, where words were used as weapons to count coup on the enemy. It was a pooling of experience, a telling of stories. Words must have no sharp edges on which to snag anger. He chose his carefully.

"When I was twelve summers old," he began, "I dwelled in the Yellow Lodge among the young bucks. It was my last summer there, for I was pledged to marry Running Deer, who was the fairest maiden of my clan.

"Often, the bucks would talk of the Warriors from the Sky. A hundred years had passed since their last visit, and the red star was visible in the sky. The time was near for their return.

"Hawk Talon, my grandfather's grandfather, had been chosen and taken to the spirit realm to serve the Great Chief Beyond The Sky. My bloodline had acquired much honour because of it, although he had left his son fatherless and needing to found a new lodge.

"Silver Elk was a buck with I had vied for Running Deer's hand. Because she had chosen me. He boasted of how he would be chosen. His word were a taunt, aimed at belittling my kinsman's honour. Silver Elk's own line had no spirits who had ridden Deathwing and ventured beyond the sky.

"I was stung and responded to this taunt. I said that, if that were so, he wouldn't mind climbing Ghost Mountain and visiting the Abode of the Ancestors."

Cloud Runner paused to let his words sink in, to let the warriors imagine the scene. The memory seemed fresh and clear in his own mind. He could almost smell the acrid wood smoke filling the young men's lodge and see the furs hanging from its ceiling.

"That was what Silver Elk had wanted me to say. He sneered and replied that he would go to the mountain if someone would accompany him as a witness. He looked straight at me.

"So I was trapped. I could not back out with dishonour. I had to go, or he would have counted coup on me.

"When she heard, Running Deer begged me not to go, fearing that the spirits would take me. She was a Shaman's daughter and had the Witching Sight. But I was young, with a young man's pride and folly, so I refused her. Seeing that I could not be swayed, she cut a braid from her hair and wove it about with spells, making it a charm to return me safely home.

"It was a three-day trip at hunter's walk to Ghost Mountain. Fear was our constant companion. What had seemed possible in the warmth of the lodge seemed dreadful in the cold autumn nights when the moon was full and spirits flitted from tree to tree. I believe that if either of us had been alone, we would have turned back, for it was a terrible thing to approach the places of the restless dead at night as winter approaches.

"But we could show no fear, for the other was a witness, and our rivalry drove us forward. Neither wanted to be the first to turn back.

"On the evening of the third day, we met the first warning totems, covered by the skulls of those the sky warriors judged and found wanting. I felt like running then, but pride kept me moving on.

"We began to climb. The night was still and cold. Things rustled in the undergrowth, and the moon leered down like a Witching Spirit. Stunted trees hunched over the pathway like malign ghosts. We climbed till we came to the vast empty plateau marked by the sign of the winged skull.

"We were filled with sense of achievement and enmity was, for the moment, buried. We stood in a place few men had ever seen. We had defied the spirits and lived. Still, we were on edge.

"I don't know what I thought when Silver Elk pointed upward. There came a howling as of thousand roused ghosts, and fire lit the sky. Perhaps I thought the spirits had chosen to strike me down for my presumption. Perhaps I was so filled with terror that I thought of nothing. I know that I froze in place, while Silver Elk turned and ran.

"If I had been afraid before, imagine how I felt when I saw a great, winged shape in the distance and heard the roar of the approaching thunderbird. Picture my horror when I saw it was Deathwing itself, steed of the Emperor, chooser of the slain, Winged Hunting Skeleton.

"I bitterly regretted my folly. I could not move to save myself, and waited for Deathwing to strike me with its claws and release my spirit.

"I was surprised when the thunderbird stooped to earth on front of me and ceased its angry roaring. Still, I could not run. Its beak gaped, disgorging the massive, black-armoured forms of the Chosen dead. On each shoulder, they bore the sign of the winged blade.

"I knew then that I was in the realm of spirits, for Hawk Talon, my grandfather's grandfather, stood among them. I had seen his face carved on the roof pole of our family lodge. He looked old and grey and tired, but there was still a family resemblance.

"To see a face so familiar and so strange in that dreadful place was somehow reassuring. It enabled me to overcome my fear. Filled with wonder, I walked forward till I stood before him: that terrible, grizzled old man whose face was so like my own.

"For a long time, he simply stared at me. Then he smiled and started to laugh. He clasped me to his armoured breast and shouted that it was a fortunate homecoming. He seemed just as pleased to see me as I was to see him."

Cloud Runner paused, comparing his ancestor's return to his own. There was no laughter here as there had been among those Marines long ago. He understood now how glad the old man had been to see a familiar face. He was glad that Hawk Talon wasn't here now to see the destruction of their people.

"Of course, I was overwhelmed, standing among these legendary warriors, speaking with my ancient blood-relative. I knew they had returned to choose their successors in the Emperor's service, and forgetting everything else, I begged to be allowed to join them.

"The old man looked at me and asked me whether I had any reason to stay or any reason to regret going. I thought of Running Deer, and I hesitated, but I was a callow youth. Visions of glory and the wonders beyond the sky filled me. What did I truly know of life? I was being called on to make a choice that I would have to live with for centuries, although I did not know it.

"My ancestor did. He saw my hesitation and told me better to stay in that case. I would have nothing of it, and insisted that they put me to the test.

"They strapped me to a steel table and opened flesh with metal knives. I had endured the Weasel Claw ritual to prove my bravery, but the pain was nothing to what I then endured. When they opened my flesh, they implanted things which they said would bond with my flesh and grant me spirit power.

"For weeks, I lay in feverish agony while my body changed. The walls danced, and my spirit fled to the edge of the cold place. While I wandered lost and alone, one of the Brothers stood beside me reciting the Imperial litanies.

"In a vision, the Emperor came to me, riding Deathwing, mightiest of thunderbirds. It was different from that which had borne the Sky Warriors home. It was a beast of spirits; the other had been a bird of metal, a totem cast in its image.

"The Emperor spoke to me, telling me of the great struggle being waged on a thousand thousand worlds. He showed me the races other than man and the secret heart of the universe, which is Chaos. He showed me the powers that lurked in the warp and exposed me to their temptations. He watched as I resisted. I knew that, if I had given in, he would have struck me down.

"Eventually, I awoke, and I knew then that my spirit belonged to the Emperor. I had chosen to abandon my people, my world and my bride for his service. I knew I had made the correct choice." He shook his head and touched his charm of braided hair that he still wore round his throat. He wondered if he had made the correct choice all those years ago, if he would happier staying with Running Deer. The bright, bold vision he had possessed in his youth had faded and lost its glamour over the years of endless warfare. I never even said goodbye to her, he thought, and that somehow was the saddest thought of all.

He judged that he had swayed many of the Marines, but when Lame Bear leaned forward to speak; he knew that the struggle had only begun.

"I would speak of Genestealers, "the big man sad quietly. I would speak of Genestealers, their terror and their cruelty...."

Two Heads Talking wandered the nighted streets. They seemed empty now that the workers had returned to their barracks. A slight breeze had sprung up, bowing flecks of ash through the streets, clearing the smog slightly. A bitter ash-taste filled his mouth.

He passed by the factories where giant steam engines stood, still working. Their din filled the air. Their pistons went up and down like the nodding heads of maddened dinosaurs. He knew they never rested.

He strode down a street of rich mansions, driven by morbid curiosity. He felt as though he had been shown the pieces of a vast puzzle, and if he could only locate the last piece, it would all fall into place.

Each mansion he passed had wrought-iron gates which bore the signs of the Night-owl, the Puma and the Rat. These were the totem animals of the Hill Clans. Two Heads Talking wondered whether the chieftains of these people dwelled within. He could well believe that they might make pacts with whoever had done this. Those people had dark reputations.

He felt anger grow within him, driving out the sense of bewilderment. His life had been rendered meaningless. His people had been betrayed. His world had been stolen. Even the Dark Angels had been destroyed. Ten thousand years of tradition ended here. There were no more bold huntsmen of the plains for the Sky-Warriors to recruit.

The Chapter might continue, but its heritage had been destroyed - it would never be the same again. Two Heads Talking was of the last generation of Marines recruited from the Plains People. There would be no more.

As he moved beyond the mansions, toward the polluted river, his spirit senses warned him he was being followed. Part of him did not care, would welcome confrontation with whatever watchers shadowed him. From up ahead, he heard a groan of pain.

"We do not know where they come from," said Lame Bear. "Not even the Curators of the Administratum know that. They appear without warning, carried in the mighty space hulks which drift on the tides of warp-space."

A shiver passed through even these hardened Terminators. Cloud Runner saw the gaze of those who had faced the Genestealers turn inward. Their faces reflected the grim memories of the encounters.

Unconsciously, they sat up straighter and looked around nervously. For the first time, it was brought home to the Captain that they really did face the Genestealers once more. They faced a threat that could kill them. "They are dreadful foes: ferocious, relentless, knowing neither pity nor fear. They do not use weapons, perhaps because they do not need them. Their claws are capable of tearing adamantium like paper.

"They do not use armour, their hides are so tough that they can survive, for a time, unsuited in vacuum. They have the aspect of a beast, yet they are intelligent and organised. They are the most terrible enemies any Marine has faced since the time of the Horus Heresy.

"How do I know this? I have faced them, as have others here."

Cloud Runner shivered, recalling the times he had faced the Stealers. He remembered their chitinous visage, their gaping jaws and four rending claws. He tried not to recall their blinding, insect-like speed.

"It is not their fearsome battle prowess that makes the Stealers such dreadful opponents. It is something else. I will tell you of it.

"One hundred and twenty years ago, before ever I donned Terminator armour, I was sent with the fleet that investigated the strange silence of the hive world Thranx.

"The Imperial Governor had not paid tribute for twenty years, and the Adeptus Terra had decided that perhaps a gentle reminder of his sworn duties was in order.

"The fleet arrived bearing sections from the Dark Angels, the Space Wolves, the Ultramarines and an Imperial Guard regiment from Necromunda. As the fleet moved into drop position, we expected resistance, rebellion. But the orbital monitors did not fire at us, and the Governor spoke fairly to us on the comm-link."

"He claimed that the world had been cut off by warpstorms and Orkish raids. He apologised for the non-payment of tribute and offered immediate reparations. He suggested that Inquisitor Van Dam, who was in charge of the punitive expedition, descend and accept his obeisance.

"We were naturally suspicious, but Van Dam suggested that any chance to take a world back into the Imperial fold without the expense of military action should at least be investigated. He requested that the Dark Angels provide an honour guard. We set our locators and teleported down into the Governor's reception hall.

"Thranx was a world encased in steel. Its natives never saw the sky. The Governor's hall was so vast, though, that clouds formed under its ceiling and rain fell on the trees that surrounded the Ruler's Pavilion.

"It was a sight to stir the blood. Long ranks of guardsmen flanked the curving metal road that led to the pavilion. The pavilion itself floated on suspensors above an artificial lake. The governor sat on a throne carved from a single industrially cultured pearl, flanked by two beautiful blind maidens who were his court telepaths. He bade us welcome and showed us the tribute.

"It was brought from vaults by specially bred slaves, grey-skinned eunuchs with muscles like an Ogryn's. Even so, they could barely carry the chests. They paraded past us in a seemingly endless procession, carrying industrial diamonds, gold-inlaid bolters, suits of armoured ceramite and jade.

"All the time the governor, Huac, kept up an endless, amiable chatter. We watched, dazzled and beguiled by his smooth voice and affable manner. As the long day wore on, we began to accept that there was no need to fight, that we should simply take the tribute and go home.

"Our minds were pleasantly befuddled, and we were prepared to agree to anything our gracious host suggested when the great cryogenic coffins were brought forth. Huac claimed they carried his greatest treasures. It is a measure of how under his sway we were that we almost took them, without thinking.

"It was Two Heads Talking who said no. He stood there, for a moment, like a man bemused, and then he began to chant. It was as if cobwebs had been lifted from our eyes and we saw the snare that had been so subtly set for us.

"The spell of the Magus, for such was Huac, was lifted, and we saw to our honor that we had almost taken two Genestealer coffins back to our fleet. All that afternoon, as our minds had been lulled by the long, slow march, Huac had been inserting subtle, mystical tendrils into our minds.

"Still, so near to being enthralled were we that we almost protested when Two Heads Talking riddled Huac and his two apprentice with bolter fire. Only the Living Dreadnaught Hawk Talon joined in the firing. We reacted slowly when he warned us to defend ourselves. Huac's guardsmen almost had us.

"But we were Marines. No sooner had they opened up with their las- rifles than we returned fire with our bolters, cutting them down. Van Dam tried to contact the fleet but our comm-links were being jammed, and we could not teleport out. There was nothing for it. We had to fight our way to the planet's surface and hope that a dropship could reach us.

"It seemed as if the whole planet had turned against us, and that was more or less what had happened. Two hundred of us fought our way out of the audience room. We were met by armed men, unarmed children and their mothers. All threw themselves against us with insane ferocity. As we cut them down, they showed no fear – only a strange, unholy joy. The whole world had been infected.

"Our trip to the surface was a nightmare. We battled along dark corridors, crawled up access ladders and through narrow hatches never meant for Marines. I saw Steel Fist tumble back headless from one hatchway. Van Dam lobbed a handful of crack grenades through and we were spattered with the remains of a full-grown Stealer."

"My brother Red Sky was pulled down by a wave of feral children with explosives in their hands. They detonated them as they crawled over his body. He did not live.

"Twice in the endless corridors, we were almost overrun. It came to hand-to-hand combat with purestrain Stealers. Twenty of our brothers were cut down before Two Heads Talking's force axe and Cloud Runner's power sword carried us clear.

"It was while guarding the final hatchway that I lost the use of my leg. A Stealer cut right through the floor and grabbed me, trying to pull me down. I blasted frantically at it. The last thing I remember was its horrid, leering face as it pulled me down toward it. Around it was a group of Thranxians who stroked and pushed against it fondly.

"The others told me what had happened when I woke up in the medical bay of the ship with a new bionic leg. Two Heads Talking and Cloud Runner had pulled me clear and carried me to the roof of the world, where the dropship waited.

"There was only one thing to do: order the Exterminatus. The whole place was sterilised from orbit with virus bombs. Later, inquisitorial investigators ascertained that the whole business had begun only sixty years before, when an unrecorded space hulk had swung through the system.

"It had taken only three generations for the Stealers to infect a whole world. For that is how they reproduce - by turning people into hosts for their offspring. Their victims endure this willingly, due to the Stealers' hypnotic powers.

"Many nights I have lain awake wondering whether we could have saved the world if only we had arrived sooner. Perhaps if we had been able to eliminate the Stealers before the cancer had spread, we would not have had to order the Exterminatus.

Cloud Runner could see that the warriors had been swayed and angered by Lame Bear's tale. He could tell that they were considering the assimilation of the People as breeding stock and the possibility that, by swift action, they might prevent it.

"Let us go," said Weasel-Fierce, leaping to his feet. "Let us enter the city and kill the Stealers' spawn."

Several other warriors made to accompany him.

"Wait", said Bloody Moon. "The gathering is not over and I would speak...."

Anger and impatience drove Two Heads Talking toward the sound of pain. By the bank of the river, in the shadow of a monstrous factory, he saw that a group of bluecoats had pinned an old man against the wall and were slowly and surely beating him to death with their truncheons. One of their number held a lantern, occasionally giving a calm, precise order.

"Talk seditious nonsense, would you?" said one bravo. His stroke ended with the crack of breaking ribs. The old man groaned and fell to his knees. The other bluecoats laughed.

"Preach heresy against the Imperial cult and the warriors from the sky, eh? What makes you old fools do it? By the Emperor, I thought we had got the last of you."

Their victim looked up at them. "You are deluded. The Warriors from the Sky would not have built this place and herded us here the way elks are herded to the slaughter. Nor would they have broken the burial mounds of our people. Your masters are evil spirits summoned by the Hill Clans, not true Sky Warriors. Deathwing will return and rend them asunder."

"Silence. blaspheming no-name," said the leader of the bluecoats. "You wish to prove your courage, do you? Perhaps we should return to the old ways, drunkard, and practise the Weasel Claw ritual on you."

The old man coughed blood. "Do what you will. I am Morning Star of the line of Running Deer and Silver Elk. I have the Witching Sight. I tell you that the spirits walk. Ancient powers stalk the land. The red star bums bright in the sky. A time of trouble is coming."

"Is that why you chose to start ranting this night? I had thought the only spirits that talked to you came from a bottle," said another bluecoat, kicking Morning Star in the ribs. The old man groaned. Two Heads Talking made his way forward through the mist, till he emerged into the lantern light. The bluecoat leader spoke to him. "Go away, buck. This is Warrior Lodge business. If you don't want to join this drunkard in the river, you'll leave now."

"You dishonour the idea of the Warrior Lodge," said Two Heads Talking quietly. "Depart now, and I will spare you. Remain a heartbeat longer, and I will surely grant you death."

The old man looked up at him, awestruck. Two Heads Talking could see the winged skull tattoo of a Shaman on his forehead. A few bravos laughed. Some, the wiser ones, heard the soft menace in the Marine's voice and backed away.

The leader gestured for the bluecoats to attack. "Take him!"

Two Heads Talking parried the swipe of a truncheon with his forearm. There was a metallic ring as the bludgeon snapped. He broke the bravo's nose against the butt of his force axe then lashed out with his foot, driving it into another bluecoat's stomach with inhuman force. As the man bent double the Librarian chopped down on his neck, breaking it.

The bluecoats swarmed over him now. Their truncheons were as ineffective as twigs against a bear. A few tried to grab his arms and immobilise him. He shrugged them off easily, swinging killing blows with weapon and elbow. Where he struck, men died.

As the battlelust swept over him, he felt the bound spirits slip away. He knew that he stood revealed in his true form. The last of the bluecoats turned to run. Two Heads Talking hooked an arm around his neck and twisted. There was a crunch of shattering vertebrae.

The old man gazed on him with religious intensity. "The spirits spoke truthfully," he said, as if he did not quite believe it. He reached out and touched him, making sure he was real.

"You have come at last to free the People from their bondage to the false Emperor and lead them back to the plains. What is your name, Sky Warrior?"

"In my youth, it was Two Heads Talking, apprentice to Spirit Hawk. When I entered the service of the true Emperor, I took the name Lucian."

He could see tears running down the old man's scarred cheeks.

"Tell me, old man, what has happened to our folk? How did they come to fall so low?" "It began when I was a buck," said Morning Star, wiping his face. "One summer night, the sky burned, and there was a great roaring. A trail of fire raced across the sky, and there was an explosion. Where we are now was a vast crater, and in the centre, when the Temple of the Four-armed Emperor stands, was a great, red-hot pile of metal."

"Some people thought the Sky Warriors had returned, that the roaring was the voice of their thunderbird. The Shamans knew that this could not be so, for Deathwing returns only once every hundred years, in autumn, and it had been only fifty years since the red star was last visible."

"We were pleased because we thought that we might ride Deathwing. Most of us had reckoned on being old men when the Sky Warriors came again."

"Those who met our chiefs were not the armoured warriors of legend. They were feeble, pale-skinned men who claimed that they had come from the Emperor to show us the way to build an

earthly paradise. They preached the virtues of tolerance and brotherly love and an end to warfare. The chiefs sent them packing, which was a mistake, for when honeyed words did not succeed, they tried force of arms. They allied with the Hill Clans and gave them metal blades which our weapons could not withstand.

"Eventually, clans were forced to trade for the new weapons in order to withstand their enemies. Tales were told of how witching spirits with four arms and terrible claws destroyed our warriors. Soon, the pretenders ruled the Plains, taking slaves and destroying utterly those who opposed them.

"Then came the building of this great city, using slave labour and paying the freemen in trade tokens."

Suddenly, the old man's eyes went wide with horror. He was looking past Two Heads Talking and into the night. The Librarian turned, and from the mist, shapes emerged.

One was the fat man who earlier had been riding in the palanquin. Flanking him were two huge four-armed figures. Their carapaces glistened like oil. They raised large claws which glittered in the moonlight.

"We would have told you all this if only you had asked," said the fat man, gazing at Two Heads Talking with his dark, magnetic eyes.

The Librarian flexed his fingers, and his force axe hummed a song of death in his hand.

"It was in the time of Commander Aradiel, a hundred summers gone," said Bloody Moon. "We were aboard the battlebarge Angelus Morte on sector edge patrol when the alarms went off. Sensor probes indicated that a space hulk had dropped from warp space near us. Deep scanning revealed nothing. We were ordered to investigate.

"We crouched within the boarding torpedoes and were fired at the hulk. It was unpowered and dark when we disembarked, so helmet lights on, we moved to secure the perimeter. We met no resistance, but as per standard operational procedures, we proceeded with extreme caution.

"We identified the hulk as Prison of Lost Souls, an appropriate name as it turned out. We moved nervously through the shadowy corridors, for the taint of the warp still hung about the craft. It made us uneasy."

"At first, there was no sign of danger. Then we came across the bodies of some Space Wolves. They had been riddled with bolter fire. We could not guess how long they had lain there - perhaps since the hulk had last entered normal space. It might have been ten years or ten thousand - we did not know. The tides of warp space are unpredictable, and time flows strangely there.

"Brother Sergeant Conrad ordered us to be wary. Then a terrible thing occurred. A Space Wolf's corpse sat upright, its eyes glowing crimson. 'You are doomed,' it told us. 'Every one of you will die as I have.' We riddled it with fire from our weapons, but still its horrible whispers echoed in our minds.

"We began to fall back. All around us, Blips suddenly appeared on our sensors. They were running parallel to us, trying to cut us off from the boarding torpedo.

"At corridor intersections, we caught sight of armoured figures. We exchanged a few shots with them. I hit one and heard its scream over the comm-link. They were using the same frequencies as we were. When we realised that, our blood ran cold. We asked ourselves: could these be Marines?

"We did not have long to wait for an answer. They swarmed down the corridor toward us in a vast wave. They were garbed in the armour of Marines, but they were horribly mutated. Some clutched rusty bolters in tentacles instead of hands. Some had faces that were moist and green and slimy like toads. Some had claws and extra limbs. Some dragged themselves along, leaving a trail of mucus behind them.

"The mark of Chaos was upon them. They called on Horus and those powers that are better not named. And we knew them - they were renegades, survivors from the Age of Heresy who had pacted with Chaos in exchange for eternal life. The fighting became close and heavy. They had the weight of numbers, but we had our Terminator armour and the strength of righteousness.

"For a moment, it looked as though they might overwhelm us, but then our thunder hammers and lightning claws came into play, and we cut through them inexorably. They fought like daemons, and they had the strength of the damned, but eventually we won.

"I stood looking down at the body of my last foe, and a thought occurred to me: this man had once been a Marine like myself. He had undergone the same training and indoctrination as I had. He had sworn to serve the Emperor. And yet he had betrayed humanity. How could this be?

"How could a true Marine become forsworn? It seemed unlikely that he would suddenly turn his back on the pattern of a lifetime and pact with the Darkness. What had Chaos to offer him?

"Wealth? We have no use for the baubles that other men covet; we already have the finest of everything that a man could wish for. Sensual gratification? We are taught its transitory nature. Power? We know true power, which is the will of the Emperor. Who among us could equal his sacrifice?"

"No - as I stood over his body I came to understand. He had deviated not in one leap but in small steps, by increments.

"First he had come to place trust in the Warmaster. An easy step, for was not Horus the chief champion of the Emperor?

"Then he had come to follow the Warmaster. Who would not? A soldier follows his commander.

"Then he had come to believe Horus divine. An easy mistake. Was not the great Heretic one of the Primarchs of the First Founding, gifted with god-like powers second only to the Emperor himself?

"Thus did he stray from the path of truth, till eventually he lost both his life and soul. It is a way that is open to anyone, one small mistake leading to another until at last the Great Error is reached.

This I came to realise as I studied the body of the renegade on the Prison of Lost Souls. I resolved then and there to submit myself to the Emperor's will. I knew that all our regulations and our codes have a purpose, and it is not for us to question them, for they keep us from the path of the deviant. Around the fire, there was silence. Cloud Runner could tell that Bloody Moon's words had touched a chord within the Marines. He found himself examining his own conscience for signs of heresy. The implication of Bloody Moon's tale was quite clear: if they lapsed from the service of the Emperor, they were taking the first step down the road to damnation. He had also reminded them that they were Marines, the chosen of the Emperor. If they did not keep the faith, who would?

For a long time, all was quiet. Then Weasel-Fierce indicated his wish to talk.

"I will speak of death," he said, "the death of men and worlds...."

Two Heads Talking felt the impact of the fat Magus' will like a physical blow. The great, dark eyes seemed to swell, to become bottomless pits into which the Librarian fell. At his feet, Morning Star whimpered.

With a wrench, the Marine broke the psychic contact, thankful that his Librarian's armour was equipped with a psychic hood. The Magus was strong, and Two Heads Talking was already tired. The Stealers raced toward him. The Librarian raised his storm bolter and sent a hail of shells blazing out. Tracer fire ripped the night apart. The leading Genestealer was shredded by the heavy bullets. The other dodged with inhuman speed.

Morning Star leapt between the Librarian and his assailant. A claw flickered, and the old man's body was torn in half. Two Heads Talking lashed out with his axe, willing it to strike hard, and its blade burned coldly as it passed through the Stealer's neck. He leapt back to avoid its reflexive death-strike.

The Magus laughed. "You cannot escape. Why struggle?"

The fat man concentrated, and a halo of power played around his head. The Librarian hosed him down with fire, but some force intercepted the shells, causing them to explode harmlessly a few feet from their target.

Two Heads Talking strode forward, swinging the axe. He felt his own power build within him as the blade arced toward his target. Something stopped it a foot away from the Magus's head. Great muscles bulged under his armour as he forced it forward. Servo- motors whined as they added their strength to his.

Slowly, inexorably, the Marine forced the blade toward his enemy. Sweat ran down the fat man's brow as he concentrated. A look of fear passed across his face. He could not save himself, and he knew it.

He gave a single shriek as his concentration lapsed. The force axe sheared through him from head to groin. Two Heads Talking felt the Magus' psychic death scream echo through the night. He

sensed hundreds of minds answer it. In the distance, through the deadening curtain of mist, he heard the sound of scuttling, coming ever closer.

Knowing his only chance of survival lay in swift flight, Two Heads Talking turned and ran.

Our world is dead," said Weasel-Fierce. Some Marines muttered about the fact that he was addressing them directly, rather than keeping to the ritual. He silenced them with a short, chopping gesture of his right hand. When he spoke again, his tone was scathing and savage.

"This ritual is a sham. It comes from a time that is ended. Why pretend otherwise? You may wish to delude yourselves by keeping with the old ways, but I do not.

"You can speak in parables about our oaths to the Emperor, the horror of the Stealers or the nature of damnation. I choose to speak the truth.

"Our people are dead or enslaved, and we sit here like old women, asking ourselves what to do. Have we been put under a spell? When were we ever so indecisive? A true warrior has no choice in this matter. We must avenge our people. Our weapons must taste enemy blood. It would be the coward's way not to face them."

"But if we fail..." began Bloody Moon.

"If we fail, so be it. What have we to live for? How many summers have we left before we die of old age or are encased in the cold, metal body of a Living Dreadnought?"

He fell silent and glared around the fire. To Cloud Runner's surprise, he looked down, and the fury seeped out of him.

"I am old," he said softly. "Old and tired. I have seen more than two hundred summers. In a few more, I will be dead, anyway. I had hoped to gaze again on my kin before then, but it is not to be. This is my only regret."

Cloud Runner could see the weariness in him, felt its echo in his own mind. Every man about the fire had served the Emperor for centuries, their lifespans increased by the process that turned them into Marines.

"If I had remained among the people," Weasel-Fierce said, "I would be dead by now. I chose another path and I have lived long - longer perhaps than any mortal should.

"It is time for an ending. Where better than here, on our homeworld, among the bones of our kin? The day of the Plains People is done. We can avenge them, and we can join them. If we fall in combat, we shall have had warriors' deaths. I wish to die as I have lived: weapons in hand, foes before me.

"I believe that this is what we all want. Let us do it."

All was quiet except the crackling of the fire. Cloud Runner looked from face to face and saw death was written in each of them. Weasel-Fierce had voiced what they had all felt since first seeing the shattered lodges. They had become wraiths, walking in the ruins of elder days.

There was nothing left here for them, except memories. If they departed now, all that loomed before them was old age and inevitable death. This way, at least, their ending would have a meaning.

"I say we go in. If the contamination has not spread too far, we can free any survivors," said Lame Bear. Cloud Runner looked at Bloody Moon.

"Providing we command Deathwing to virus-bomb the planet if we fail," he said. The rest of the warriors put their right fists forward, signifying assent. They all looked at him, waiting to see what he had to say. He felt once more the pressure of command fall on him. He considered the destroyed lodges and his own loss and weighed them against his Imperial duty. Nothing could bring back the Plains People, but perhaps he could save their descendants.

But that was not all there was to it, he realized. He wanted the satisfaction of meeting his foes, face to face. He was angry. He wanted to make the Stealers suffer for what they had done, and he wanted to be there when they did. He wanted vengeance for himself and for his people. It was as simple as that. Such a decision was not the correct one for an Imperial officer, but it was the way of his clan. In the end, to his surprise, he found out where his true loyalty lay.

"I say we fight," he said at last. "But we fight as Warriors of the People. This battle is not for the Emperor. It is for our murdered clans. Our last battle shall be fought in accordance with our ancient ways. Let us perform the rite of Deathwing."

Two Heads Talking ran for his life. Through the darkened streets, Genestealers pursued, loping along, swift and deadly. He sensed their presence all around. He leapt over a pile of rubbish which lay in his path and swept round a corner into a main road. Two workers poked their heads through a doorway to see what was going on. They swiftly withdrew. Two Heads Talking ran wearily. His heart was pounding, and his breathing was ragged. The strain of maintaining the spell of concealment for so long had sapped his strength. He wondered how long he could keep up this pace.

He risked a swift glance over his shoulder. A Genestealer had just rounded the corner. He fired his storm bolter at it, but his shot was inaccurate, and the Stealer lurched back into cover. Sensing danger in front of him, he turned. From out of a shadowy doorway, a Stealer uncoiled. He had just enough time to raise his force axe before it sprang. He thrust the blade out before him, chopping into the monster's chest. The momentum of the thing's charge knocked him over. A claw cut into his arm, searing it with pain. If his blow had not landed cleanly, he realised, he would have been dead.

Ignoring the pain, he rolled onto his belly, catching a clear glimpse of his pursuers as they charged. He squeezed the trigger of his bolter and stitched a line of fire across their chests. The strength of the armour allowed him to hurl off the ambusher's carcass with ease. He continued on his way. Not much further, he thought, forcing himself to reel onward. He could see the huge walls jutting upward above nearby buildings. He recited a spell to free his mind of pain and made for the gates. His heart sank when he saw what awaited him - a mass of hunched, evil-faced men with dark, piercing eyes. Some held ancient-looking energy weapons. Some gripped blades in their three hands. Towering over them were purestrain Genestealers, flexing their claws menacingly. Two Heads Talking came to a halt, facing his foes.

For a moment, they eyed each other in respectful silence. The Librarian commended his spirit to the Emperor. Soon Deathwing would be carrying him off. His bolter was almost empty. With only his force axe, he knew he could not withstand so many.

As if at an unspoken signal, the Genestealers and their brood surged forward. A bolt from an energy weapon burned into his armour, melting one of the skulls on his chest plate. He gritted his teeth and returned fire, cutting a great swathe of death. There was a loud click as his bolter jammed. He did not have the time to clear it, so he charged to meet his foes, chanting his death-chant.

He rushed into a sea of bodies that pressed against him, hitting him with blades and rending claws. He summoned the last dregs of his strength to power his force axe and swung it in a great double arc. He lopped off heads and limbs with a will, but for every foe who fell, another stepped into place. He could not guard himself against all their blows, and soon he bled from scores of great wounds. Life fled from him, and overhead he thought he heard the beating of mighty pinions. Deathwing has come, he thought, just before a blow smashed into his head and all consciousness fled.

Cloud Runner paused briefly before he painted out his personal cloud-and-thunderbolt insignia on his armour's right shoulder. He felt changed. By blanking out his Imperial insignia, he had blanked out part of himself, cut himself off from part of his history. Slowly he began to etch in new totem signs on the armour, the marks of vengeance and death. As he did so, he felt the powers of the totem spirits begin to enter him. He looked at Weasel-Fierce. The gaunt man had finished painting out all the icons on his armour. It was now white, the colour of death, except on its left shoulder, where the skull had been left unchanged. It seemed somehow appropriate.

They performed a rite that dated back to ancient times, before the Emperor had come to tame the thunderbirds. Only once before had Cloud Runner seen it performed. As a boy, he had watched a party of old warriors, sworn to vengeance, paint their bodies white and go after a horde of Hill Clan raiders that had killed a small child. They had painted their bodies the funeral colour because they did not expect to return from facing so overwhelming a foe.

Bloody Moon looked over from beside the fire and gave him a weak grin. Cloud Runner walked over to him.

"Ready, old friend?" he asked. Bloody Moon nodded. Cloud Runner bent over the fire and put his hands into the ash. He pressed his palms, fingers together, flat against his face, making the sign of Deathwing on each cheek.

"I wish Two Heads Talking would return," said Bloody Moon, repeating Cloud Runner's gesture.

"He may yet surprise you."

Bloody Moon looked doubtful. Cloud Runner gestured for the warriors to assemble. They formed into a circle around the dead fire. One by one, they began to chant their death-songs.

Even as they carried him through the long steel corridors, Two Heads Talking knew he was dying. Life leaked from his wounds. With every drop of blood that dribbled over his bearers, he became weaker.

It felt like some evil dream, being borne down dimly lit tunnels by the hunched, daemonic figures of the Genestealer brood. The Librarian watched these events through a fog of pain, wondering why he was still alive. Part of his mind realised that he was within whatever vessel had carried the brood to his homeworld.

Agony lanced through him as one of his bearers jolted him slightly. It took all his will power not to scream. They entered a long hall in which a hunched, dreadful figure waited. He was placed on the floor in front of it. It cocked its head to one side side, studying him.

Tears ran down the Librarian's face from the pain as he forced himself to his feet. Genestealer guards raced towards him, but the huge creature glanced at them, and they froze in position.

Two Heads Talking stood unsteadily, knowing he faced a Genestealer Patriarch. He had heard dim legends of such things, the progenitors of entire broods, the most ancient of their lines.

He looked into his enemies' eyes. He felt an almost electric shock pass through his body as their minds made contact. The Librarian found himself confronted by a foe that was ancient, implacable, deadly. His mind reeled under the assault of its ferocious will. He felt an urge to kneel, to do homage to this ancient being. He knew that it was worthy of his respect.

With an effort, he managed to restrain himself. He reminded himself that this was the being that had destroyed his people. He made to throw himself at it, to aim a killing blow with his good arm. He sprang, but his legs gave way underneath him, and the Patriarch caught him easily, almost gently, and held him at bay with its claws. The long ovipositor on its tongue flickered out, but did not touch him.

Suddenly, he found himself engaged in a bitter, psychic struggle. Tendrils of alien thought insinuated themselves into his mind. He blocked them, chopping them off with the blades of his hatred. He countered with a psychic bolt of his own, but it was stopped by an ancient will that seemed impervious to outside influence.

The Patriarch exerted his full power, and Two Heads Talking felt his defences begin to buckle under the terrible pressure. The cold, focused power of the Genestealer was enormous. Even fresh, Two Heads Talking doubted he could have matched it. Now, strength fading because of his wounds, exhausted because of his earlier struggles, he could offer no contest at all.

His outer screen fell, and the Patriarch was within his mind, sorting through his memories, absorbing them into itself. For a second, while it was disoriented, he tried a psychic thrust. The Stealer countered easily, but for a moment, they met mind to mind.

Strange alien memories and emotions washed over the Librarian, threatening to drown him. He saw the Patriarch's past spread out before him. He saw the long trail that led through despoiled worlds and past many children. He saw the hive world it had fled from in a fast ship, just before the virus bombs fell.

With a shock, he realised that he had been there himself - on Thranx - and that the creature had recognised his aura from then. He saw the ship crippled by an Imperial battlebarge and barely able to make the jump into warp space.

He experienced the long struggle to return to normal space and the frozen etemities it took to escape and crash-land the crippled ship on a new, virgin world. He saw the pitifully few survivors emerge; only a few purestrains and three hybrid techs. He saw them make axes from the wreckage of the ship for trade with the tribesmen, and he watched them start the long struggle to establish themselves in a hostile world.

He was gratified as the web of psychic contact expanded with each new brood member. He felt cold satisfaction at the destruction of the tribes and the knowledge that soon a new industrial base would be built. The ship would be repaired. New worlds to conquer would be within reach.

For a bleak moment, despair filled Two Heads Talking. He saw the Stealers planning to spread to and infect new worlds. And he could do nothing to stop this old, invincible entity. He almost gave in. He could see no way out. Death loomed, and that thought gave him pause. He knew what he must do. Part of him gave way before the Patriarch's assault; another part willed his spirit towards oblivion.

He stood once more in the cold place, sensed far-off the spirit of the Emperor, bright and shining as a star. Near at hand were the angry ghosts. The Patriarch was a hungry, ominous presence, determined to enslave him. Somewhere in the distance, he could hear the thunderous pinions of Deathwing coming to claim him.

Too late, the Patriarch realised what he was doing and tried to break the link. Two Heads Talking focused all his hatred, anger and fear and held the link open, a task made easier by their earlier intimate contact. The Patriarch struggled frantically, but could not free himself.

The wingbeats came closer, drowning the Librarian in a roar that might have been a hurricane or his own last breath. From the middle of a vortex of agony, he was borne up into darkness. The maelstrom sucked in the Patriarch. It died, slain by the Librarian's death agony.

Briefly, Two Heads Talking felt his foe vanish, felt the sense of loss from its brood. As the Librarian's spirit rose higher, he reached out and touched the minds of his comrades, bidding them farewell, telling them what they must do. Then Two Heads Talking knew no more.

Cloud Runner felt the presence as he stared into the fire. He looked up and saw Two Heads Talking standing before him. The Librarian looked pale. His face was distorted by agony, his body gashed by dreadful wounds. He knew that this was a spirit vision, that the old Shaman was dead.

For a moment, he thought he heard the sound of titanic wingbeats and saw the mightiest of thunderbirds soaring toward the moon. The presence vanished, leaving Cloud Runner feeling cold and alone. He shivered in the sudden chill. He knew he had been touched by Deathwing's passing. He looked toward the others and knew that they had seen the same thing. He raised a hand in a gesture of farewell and then swept it down as a signal for the Marines to advance.

Filled with determination, the white-armoured Terminators marched toward the distant city.

Cloud Runner sat enthroned and looked down upon his visitors. His people were drawn up in long ranks, forming a corridor along which the Marines advanced warily. They were led by a Captain and a Librarian. From the doorway, the huge armoured form of a dreadnought performed overwatch.

Cloud Runner found the sight of that old, familiar form comforting.

He saw the uneasy, worshipful faces of his people look to him for reassurance. He kept his face grim and calm. He sensed the Battle Brothers' unease at the strangeness of the folk within the great lodgehouse. They held their bolters ready, as if expecting violence to erupt at any moment. Cloud Runner was glad to see them. Since Lame Bear's death, he had felt very alone. He spotted several familiar faces among the oncoming Imperial warriors. Memories of the old days in the Chapter House flooded back. He took three deep breaths, touched the ancient, white-painted suit beside him, for luck, and then spoke.

"Greetings, Brother Sky Warriors," he said.

"Greetings, Brother Ezekiel," said the Marine Leader suspiciously.

Cloud Runner rubbed his facial scar-tattoos with one gnarled hand, then grinned. "So they made you a Captain, eh Broken Knife?"

"Yes, Brother Ezekiel. They made me a Captain when you failed to return." He paused, obviously waiting for an explanation.

"It took you ten years to come looking for the Dark Angels' honour suits?" the old man asked with a hint of mockery.

"There has been war: a great migration of Orks through the Segmentum Obscura. The Chapter was called to serve. During that time the absence of our Terminators was felt grievously. You have an explanation for this, of course."

The Marines stared at Cloud Runner coldly. It was as if he was a stranger to these grim youths, or worse, a traitor. He remembered the first time he had stood among Marines and, for the first time in long years, became aware of their uncanny quality. He felt isolated and uneasy.

"These are not our people, Cloud Runner. What happened here?" asked a deep rolling voice. He recognised it as the dreadnought's. Suddenly, he did not feel so alone. Hawk Talon was there, hooked into the life-support systems of the dreadnought. There was at least one person present who was on his side, who was old enough to understand. It was like their first meeting under the shadow of Deathwing, when he had sighted that one familiar face among strangers.

"No, honoured forefather, they are not. They are the untainted survivors of the Genestealer conquest."

He heard the shocked murmur of the Marines, saw the way that they instinctively brought their weapons to bear on the lodge people.

"You had better explain, Brother Ezekiel," said Broken Knife.

Cloud Runner found himself telling his tale to the astonished Marines. He told them of the Terminator company's landing and of their discovery of the devastation that had been wrought by the Genestealers. He told them of the Gathering and of the choice the warriors had made - of Two Heads Talking's spirit walk and the Terminators' final march on the city. He spoke to them in the intricate syntax of the Imperial tongue, not the language of the Pains People.

"We marched through the black gates and were assaulted by Stealers. At first they seemed confused, as if they had suffered a great shock.

They attacked in small groups with no pattern and no guiding intelligence, and we cut them down.

"We pushed through crowds of screaming people as we followed our Librarian's locator beacon toward the city centre. Huge purestrain Stealers erupted from buildings as we advanced. They attacked with insane fury, but without thought, and so we bested them easily.

"In the centre of the city we found a temple - a building that obscenely parodied the Imperial cult, dominated by a huge four-armed statue of what was intended to be the Emperor. We toppled it into the street and beneath it found an entrance into the underworld.

"Down we went into the cold, metal corridors. We passed through airlocks and bulkheads. It was like a buried spacecraft. We still followed the locator fix, determined to reclaim Two Heads Talking's armour and avenge his death."

"At first we made easy progress against isolated Stealer attacks, but then a change occurred. For a while, there was peace.

"We exchanged wary looks. Bloody Moon asked if we could possibly have killed them all. I can even now picture the puzzled look on his face. It was still there when a Stealer dropped through an air vent and took his head off. I blasted the thing with bolter fire, reducing it to bloody mush.

"Now the Stealers began to attack again. But this time their attacks were co-ordinated, guided by some malign intelligence. It was as if they had been leaderless for a time, but a new fiend had now taken charge.

"They flanked us through parallel corridors, dropped through vents in the ceiling. Hordes of Stealers and their human brood attacked from all sides. Waves of them scuttled forward with blinding speed, threatening to overwhelm us with sheer numbers. It was a horrible sight, watching those great armoured beasts race closer, ignoring their kin as they were cut down.

"Still they came. Our point men and rearguard were ambushed and killed. The threats came so fast, we almost didn't have time to respond.

"I saw a score of them slain by flamer fire, and the stench that filled the air was indescribable. They spent their lives recklessly in their blind lust to kill us. There was a sense of terrible, oppressive anger in the air. It was as if they had a personal score with us and were all prepared to die to settle it.

"Any other squad, even other Terminators, would have been beaten back by the sheer, fury of their attack, but we wore the mark of Deathwing. Our funeral dirges had been sung - fear was not in us, and we had our own scores to settle. We pushed forward, inch by tortuous inch.

"Blood washed the corridors as we fought our way into a great central chamber. There we found the body of Two Heads Talking. He was dead, his body rent by great wounds. Nearby lay the body of the Patriarch, not a mark upon him.

"The hall was full of foes, purestrain and brood. A handful of us had fought our way into the throne-room. We faced many times our number. For a moment, we stood exchanging glares. I think both

sides sensed that they faced their ultimate enemy - that the outcome of that fight would decide the fate of this world.

"There was quiet in the hall, silence except for the cycling of our breathers. I could hear my heart beating. My mouth felt dry. But I was strangely calm, sure that soon I would be greeting the spirits of my ancestors. The Stealers formed up, and we raised our bolters to the firing position.

"At an unspoken signal, they charged, mouths open but making no sound. A few of the brood fired ancient energy weapons. Beside me, a Battle Brother fell. We laid down a barrage of fire that tore the first wave to pieces. Nothing could have lived through it. Everything we fired at died. But there were just too many of them. They swarmed over us, and the final conflict began in earnest.

"I saw Weasel-Fierce go down beneath a pile of Stealers. His bolter had jammed, but he fought on, screaming taunts and insults at his foes. The last I saw of him, he was tearing the head from a Stealer, even as it punched a claw through his chest. Thus passed the greatest warrior of our generation.

"Lame Bear and I fought back to back, circled about by our enemies. Power glove and power sword smote the Stealers as we cut them down. If there had been only a few more purestrain, things would have gone differently that day, but most of them seemed to have died in the initial futile attacks.

"As it was, things were close. Lame Bear fell, wounded, and I found myself breast to breast with a huge, armoured horror. The leader knocked my sword from my hand with a sweep of a mighty claw. I thanked the Emperor for the digital weapons in my power glove and sprayed the monstrosity's eyes with poisoned needles, blinding it. In the brief respite, I found time to bring my storm bolter to bear and slay it.

"I looked around: only Terminators stood in the hall. We whooped with joy to find ourselves still alive, but then the number of our fallen struck us, and we stood in appalled silence. Only six of us survived. We did not count the number of the Stealers fallen.

"In the world above, the children of the Plains People waited. A huge crowd had gathered outside the temple to see the outcome of our battle. They looked at us, awe-struck. We had destroyed their temple and killed their gods. They did not know whether we were daemons or redeemers.

"We looked on the weary creatures who were the only remnants of our former clans. We had won, and we had reclaimed our world. Still, our victory seemed hollow. We had saved our descendants from the Stealers, but our way of life was gone.

"As we stood before the assembled throng, it struck me what we must do. The Emperor himself provided inspiration in that moment. I explained my plan to the others.

"We drove the crowds from the city and assembled them on the plain outside. We searched for traces of the brood among them, but there were none. The Stealer taint seemed to have been destroyed in our vengeance war.

"I walked through the factories and past the toppled chimneys. Then we took our flamers and burned the city to the ground. We divided the people up into six new tribes and said our good-byes to each other, for we knew we would likely never meet again. Then we led our descendants away from the still-blazing city.

"Lame Bear took his folk to the mountains. I brought my people to my old village, and we rebuilt it. I do not know what became of the others.

"I have told these people that I was sent by the Emperor to lead them back to the old ways. I have taught them how to hunt and fish and shoot in the old manner. We do battle with the other tribes. One day they will again be worthy of becoming Sky Warriors."

Cloud Runner fell silent. He could see the Battle Brothers had been moved by his tale. Broken Knife turned to the Librarian. Cloud Runner felt the pressure of mind-to-mind contact.

"Brother Ezekiel speaks the truth, Brother Captain Gabriel," said the Librarian. Broken Knife looked up at the old Marine.

"Forgive me, brother, I have misjudged you. It seems the Chapter and the Plain's People owe you and your warriors a great debt."

"Semper Fideles," said Cloud Runner. "You must take back the suits. They belong to the Chapter." Broken Knife nodded.

"Perhaps a favour. In honour of our dead, leave the suits the colour of Deathwing. The deeds of our brothers should be remembered."

"It will be so," replied Broken Knife. "Deathwing will be remembered."

The Marines turned and filed out past the dreadnought. The mighty being stood there, watching Cloud Runner with inhuman eyes.

The Terminator's departure left Cloud Runner suddenly tired. He felt the weight of his years heavily. He sensed the dreadnought gazing at him and looked up.

"Yes, honoured ancestor?" he asked in the tongue of the Plains People.

"You could go back with us. You are worthy of becoming a Living Dreadnought," it said. He wished he could return and spend his last years with his Chapter, but he knew that he could not. His duty was to his people now. He must return them to the Emperor's way. He shook his head.

"I thought not. You are a worthy chieftain of the People, Cloud Runner."

"Any Sky Warrior would be, Ancestor. Few are given the chance. Before you depart, there is something I must know. When first we met, you told me I should not become a Sky Warrior if there was anyone I would regret leaving behind. Did you have any regrets about becoming a Marine?"

The dreadnought stared at him. "Sometimes I still do. It is a sad thing to leave people you care about behind, knowing they will be lost to you forever."

"Goodbye, Cloud Runner. We will not meet again."

The dreadnought turned and departed, leaving Cloud Runner enthroned among his people, his hands toying with a braid of ancient hair.

Names of the Deathwing and their Translations

Akkad (Stone Heart)

Ezekiel (Razor Wing)

Azrael (Weasel Fierce)

Sergio (Lame Bear)

Aradiel (Two Tongues)

Conrad (Bloody Moon)

Lionus (Long Spear)

Gabriel (Fire Walker)

Gideon (Hawk Talon)

Marcus (Lonely Hunter)

Lucius (Stalking Death)

Matthias (Red Fox)

Raphael (Grey Mane)

Nathaniel (Wind Runner)

Pluvius (Blood Blade)

Octavius (Swift Wing)

Antonius (Flying Eagle)

Caliban (Iron Fist)

Claudius (Red Crow)

Adonai (Stone Hand)

Uriel (Great Bear)

Sammael (Doom Walker)

Vicconius (Laughing Sun)

Saphon (Pale Crow)

Malloc (Rain Bringer)

Amael (Spirit Runner)

Bethor (Snarling Bear)

+++Leman Russ+++

Leman Russ is one of the most famous of the ancient heroes of the Imperium. Many legends tell of his deeds during the dawn of Imperial History.

He was one of the twenty bio-engineered superhumans who would become the founding fathers, or Primarchs, of the original Space Marine Chapters. They were created by the Emperor to be stronger and tougher than any Human before or since. From their bio-engineered genes the Space Marines were cloned. Yet even they were a pale reflection of their awesome progenitors, whose genetic material had to be diluted a thousand times for a single Marine.

Even before his birth, Leman Russ was the subject of titanic events. As the twenty foetal Primarchs slowly developed, suspended in their bio-support medium, Daemonic eyes observed them from the warp. The Daemons saw the pink and naked Primarchs lying in their amniotic tanks, and perceived the Emperor's plan. From the twenty Primarchs, a whole race of superhumans would be created. They would be Humanity's greatest champions and the scourge of aliens and Daemons alike. The Daemons saw this and raged. Aware that they could not face the Emperor himself, for he was a being of god-like power, the Daemons hatched a plan. Combining their strength, they broke down the mental barriers constructed by the Emperor to cloak the infant Primarchs, and, prevented from hurting them, sucked them into the warp. The babes were scattered throughout the galaxy, thrown onto twenty different worlds to be adopted by whatever parents they could find - parents that were not always Human.

Thus it was, on the planet of Fenris, that a mewling infant was discovered by a she-wolf as she hunted for her new-born cubs. A lesser child would have been torn apart by the giant wolf that stood as tall as a man, but no such fate would befall this golden man-cub with eyes like a wolf-king. Gently taking the child in her mighty claws, the she-wolf bore him back to the safety of her cave where he grew up amongst the wolf pack as part of the she-wolf's family. Within a few short years the child was an adult, for as a Primarch he was more than a normal man and grew as rapidly as his wolf-brothers.

He might have lived out all of his years with the wolves, had not Thengir, King of the people of Russ, sent his hunters into the forest to clear the pack from his land. The old grey she-wolf, and many of her cubs and claw-kin, died upon the spears and arrows of the King's hunters, but the wolf-man was spared, and brought, bound and gagged, before King Thengir himself.

The King took the wild man from the forests into his care, and named him Leman - Leman of the Russ. Amongst men for the first time in his life, Leman quickly learned their skills, showing a natural aptitude for the way of the warrior. He mastered their weapons - iron axes and swords - and won many glorious victories. Great tales were told of his strength and courage: how he could pluck a tree from the ground and break it over his knee; how he could stand against a hundred men in battle, and within mere minutes have them begging for mercy; and how he could consume an entire ox and wash it down with a whole barrel of beer. When Thengir died, Leman became King of the Russ. Under his leadership, they won many victories, for in battle Leman was all but invincible. When his armies marched, the howling of wolves heralded their path; when he fought, a pair of giant wolves battled by his side. Kings themselves, they were Freki and Geri, his wolf-brothers that had escaped from the King's hunters, and now had countless wolf-packs of their own to command.

The tales of King Leman were told far and wide, and came to the notice of the Emperor himself. Recognizing the power of a Primarch at work, he traveled to Fenris and confronted the Wolf-King, who blindly refused to pay him homage as the Master of Mankind. Challenged, Russ boasted that he could out-eat the Emperor, and proceeded to consume three whole oxen. Forcing the Emperor to back down, Russ boasted he could out-drink the Emperor, and drained the royal cellars dry to prove the point. Russ boasted he could defeat the Emperor in combat; the Emperor held his powerglove

aloft for a moment, and brought it down on the Primarch's head, felling him with a mighty blow which would have killed a lesser man. Leman Russ admitted defeat, acknowledged the Emperor, and swore to serve him faithfully.

Within years, all the Primarchs had been found, and became the fathers of twenty Chapters of Space Marines. Leman Russ became the progenitor of the Space Wolves. and was counted as a loyal servant of the Emperor.

Within a hundred years the Space Marines had reconquered the galaxy, and the Imperium was born. Throughout the Great Crusade the Space Wolves were at the front line, their leader at the head of the battle with two great wolves at his side, his coming announced by the howling of the pack.

On the world of Dulan, the Space Wolves and Dark Angels were to assault an enemy held fortress. Russ claimed the right to lead the attack, but 'Lion' El'Jonson, commander of the Dark Angels, refused and started the attack early. Russ was furious, and began a feud which was to continue for three centuries. The Emperor intervened to quell the fighting. and ordered that the disagreement be settled with a duel. Leman Russ faced his friend in combat and took a blade through the heart; the duel was declared a draw, and the normally fatal wound healed within weeks.

The Primarchs were to fight four more times before the death of El'Jonson. Friends to the end, they were united by shared rivalry and sense of honour. The feud would arise again. but not in Russ's lifetime.

Then came the betrayal. Like Russ, Horus was a Primarch. Unlike Russ he bore the title of Imperial Warmaster, and had complete control over five Chapters of Space Marines. Perhaps Horus was tainted by Chaos when abducted as a babe, or perhaps he was weakened by the exposure to the warp. Whatever the cause, Horus was responsible for the largest treachery Mankind has even known. In a single moment he threw away his love for the Emperor and the Imperium, he cast his pride into the dirt, discarded everything he stood for, and struck out. Across a hundred worlds, a thousand million men wept for their Emperor, who had been so cruelly betrayed by a man he called friend. For the first time, Marine would fight Marine in what would become known as the Horus Heresy.

+++The Fang+++

Towards the center of Asaheim there is a range of mountains taller than any others on the planet of Fenris. The tallest peak of all lies in the very middle of the range and rises like a single gnarled tooth above the surrounding mountains. This peak, and the Space Marine fortress that is built upon it, is called The Fang. The Fang is many times as high as the mountains around it, so that it stands alone as a citadel hewn from the rock. Like a dagger driven into the belly of the sky, The Fang pierces the atmosphere of Fenris.

The fortress of The Fang is clad in armour of immense thickness and strength and is cloaked by void shields more powerful than those found on even the most mighty of the Emperor's warships. Outside Earth, The Fang is said to be the greatest fortress in the human galaxy. Dark shafts cut miles into the mountainside, concealing laser cannons which are capable of crushing the most heavily armoured spacecraft. These huge weapons are as ancient as the Space Wolves Chapter itself, and the thermal reactors that power them are testament to the precious technology from the distant past. Upon the tip of The Fang is the Space Wolves' fleet dock, where hundreds of spacecraft are maintained in armoured hangars inside the mountain. From here the Space Wolves journey to distant battlefields throughout the galaxy.

+++The Planet Fenris+++

Fenris is one of the deadliest worlds in the Imperium. Its weather is infamous: winters are cold and icy; the brief summers are almost intolerably hot. However, once every few years or so comes the

season known as Helwinter. The planet's long orbit takes it far from the sun, and it becomes cold for many standard years. At the same time the planet passes through a swarm of meteors that bombard its surface like a rain of bombs. The contrails of the descending meteorites fill the night skies, and the impacts cause the earth to shake like a frightened beast.

During this period the tribes of Fenris take to their ships and search the icy seas for places of safety. Loading all their possessions onto their longships they navigate through the icebergs in search of safety. Some make their homes on the very surface of these floating islands of ice. Others are lost to the mighty tidal waves caused by the impact of meteors. Many more will die when attacked by ice whales and kraken.

Kraken are the most terrifying monsters of the deep. They come to the surface only during Helwinter which is just as well, for a full grown kraken can measure as much as five miles long with tentacles that drag a full twenty miles. Normally they dwell only in the deepest of ocean trenches but the tectonic shifts caused by the constant meteor impacts disturb them and cause them to rise. One of the most ancient tales of Russ tells of how he went fishing one day and caught the Father of Kraken, the legendary monster whose tentacles girdle the world and hold entire continents in their grip. Russ is said to have pulled the monster from the sea lifting it by its tentacles. When his awed comrades shuddered in terror, Russ declared that it was too small and threw it back, declaring he would return later when the tiddler was full grown.

Imperial scholars think that this story is mere legend but with a core of truth. Russ may have encountered a kraken and killed one. It would not have been beyond the power of a Primarch such as he. Indeed, this kraken may be the source of the so-called kraken's egg, a giant leathery piece of flesh more than fifty foot across that lies within the Trophy Room of The Fang.

+++The Mentor Legion+++

The Mentors are a relatively new Chapter. Formed in the Twenty-Sixth Founding, during the middle part of the current millennium, they received the number 888. This previously belonged to the Star Scorpions Chapter. The latter were a Chapter of the Twenty Fifth Founding and had the dual misfortune of producing redundant gene-seed and being utterly devastated by Warp entities when the Chapter's Fleet became trapped in Warp-space. The exact fate of the Scorpions is not known. However, the Emperor decreed that the chapter be considered dead.

The redundant gene-seed hampered Imperial efforts to rebuild the Scorpions Legion and eventually the Bio-engineers and Chem-architects of the Adeptus Mechanicus were forced to concede defeat. For a time it seemed that the number 888 would never be raised again, but some years later, a new Founding in the offing persuaded the Priesthood to revisit the chapter regalia. Thus the Mentors were born. They received the uniforms and number of the extinct chapter but instead of the redundant seed, they were given an entirely new generation of genetic material collated from the storage banks of the Earth laboratories.

+++LEGION OF THE DAMNED+++

In the year 963 of the current millennium, Space Marine chapter 'Fire Hawks' was ordered into the Crows World sub-sector. Crows World and adjacent planetary systems had fallen into anarchy following heavy raiding by Eldar Pirates. The 'Fire Hawks' intervention would drive the Eldar from the human worlds, restoring Imperial rule and teaching the alien invaders an important lesson. The entire chapter-fleet, including the chapter's mobile space-fortress, made a successful warp jump from the Piraeus system a mere 120 light years from Crows World. The five ships, over eight hundred brethren, and two thousand other personnel expected to reach Crows World years after the event the chapter was officially declared lost in the warp and presumed destroyed. The great Bell of Lost Souls tolled a thousand times, and it said that the Emperor himself ordered a Black Candle to be lit in the Adeptus Chapel of Fallen Heroes.

On 9667986.M41 a routine Imperial patrol passed through the Ork held system of Jakor-tal. The squadron uncovered altogether unexpected scenes of devastation. The limited facilities available to the patrol could uncover no clue to the identity of the attacking forces. The incident was noted and passed into the everlasting record of the Administratum.

A rash of similar incidents within the same and adjoining sectors soon began to arouse the interest of the Inquisition. Squadron commanders throughout these sectors were reinforced and ordered to double their routine patrols. The incidents continued pace, increasing rather than declining in frequency and destructiveness. Even so, no sign of the 3628987.M41, a patrol ship in the Maran sub-sector narrowly avoided a collision with a space-craft at the Cift jump-point. The patrol ship was entering the Cift system as the unidentified craft was leaving. Alerted by the close encounter, the patrol crew scanned the entire jump-area and discovered two long cylindrical objects within the intruder's projected flight-path. These were hauled aboard and proved to be standard space coffins without identification markings.

The coffins were shipped back to earth and opened by the Adeptus Mechanicus. The coffins themselves were identified as belonging to the Absolute, one of the spacecraft from the vanished Fire Hawk fleet. Inside were the armoured remains of two Space Marines. The unconventional armour colours and unofficial insignia puzzled the investigators, but serial numbers tallied with equipment made by or issued to the Fire Hawks. The armoured suits were expected to house members of the lost chapter, and were carefully broken open. The bodies within were human, but further identification proved impossible due to their advanced state of decay.

The full truth would not emerge until almost a year later when a besieged Imperial research station received unexpected help. The garrison had been attacked suddenly by Ork pirates. After three hours of fighting the situation looked hopeless. Then, without warning, the Orks found themselves attacked in the rear. The ferocity of the fighting appalled even the station's defenders. Within half an hour, several hundred Orks had fallen to the mysterious, power-armoured figures. Then, as suddenly as they had appeared, the warriors vanished. This time they left behind a banner - the gnarled chapter flag of the Fire Hawks - and inscribed upon it was the motto *In dedicato imperatum ultra articulo mortis* (*For the Emperor beyond the point of death*). As well as the banner there was a recorder and sundry other sealed items. These were immediately shipped to Earth.

From the data contained in the recorder the Administratum was able to determine exactly what had happened to the lost chapter. Following their warp-jump the entire fleet had been caught within a warp-storm of terrific intensity. Stunned by the power of the warp, the chapter was forced to endure the attacks of powerful warp entities. Ship after ship was destroyed and absorbed into the fabric of the warp. Soon only one craft remained. By a daring warp-exit maneuver the craft burst out of warp-space, emerging far in the galactic east, thousands of light years off-course and beyond even the psychic light of the Emperor.

The original survivors numbered two hundred brethren. All gene-seed had been lost, all initiates killed, and most of the chapter's masters were gone. None of the ordinary human staff have survived at all. To make matters worse the brethren had changed. This change became more obvious over the next few months. Skins began to blacken and blister, flesh began to fester and putrefy. Slowly they began to die. Within days of the transition into normal space it became obvious that the chapter had been exposed to some form of dangerous mutation or disease. It took many years to navigate a way back into the Imperium, during which time almost half the brethren succumbed to the malady. Those who remained were no longer sane. Pain and despair had driven even their hardened minds beyond the point of rationality. Doomed to agonizing deaths, they gradually became obsessed with their fate. Now they only wanted to die. But they were still marines, still loyal to the Emperor and humanity. They would not die without purpose.

So began the unstoppable war of the Legion of the Damned! The marines elected to remove all insignia from their armour. Instead their armour would be black, decorated by each brother with whatever emblems of death he chose (the accompanying illustrations show some typical variations). Most brothers employed a similar theme - skeletons, bones and skulls.

All ranks and companies were abolished, most of the chapter's officers were already dead and the remaining warriors were too few to make up a fully functional chapter hierarchy. All brothers were to be equal before death - leveled by the certainty of their assured extinction. The warriors decided to

expend their lives attacking enemies wherever they could be found. The disease had robbed them of their sanity, but not their loyalty! And their condition gave them powers - powers that endow them with incredible fighting abilities.

As the fatal malady takes a firm hold, the victim begins to degenerate and putrefy. However, even as his body decays, he grows in supernatural vigor. Even though the marine's limbs become rotten and twisted he gains strength far beyond that of a normal marine. These powers heighten as the disease rages through the victim's body. At the moment of death, each brother reaches a peak in power, at which point the raw energies of the warp transmute the death throes of the doomed marine into a berserk orgy of destruction. These changes are reflected by the profile and special rules given later. Make no mistake - the Legion of the Damned may be few in numbers, but their powers are awesome!

Just as their bodies are changed by contact with the warp, so their minds are hardened too. Brethren are completely immune to all forms of psychic attack or interference. They cannot be affected by the special psychic attacks of warp-creatures - although they may be harmed physically by physical attacks that such creatures may have. Astral specters and other immaterial creatures cannot harm them in any way.

+++The Draconians+++

The Draconians were created in the Second Founding from the geneseed of the Salamanders. They were given the world Draconus as their recruiting world, and to build their chapter fortress upon. From this world they take their name, and they recruit the hardened individuals who work the Great Forges of the world, and who have adapted to the great heat and dangers of a world that is covered with volcanic activity.

The Legion has fought continuously since its Founding in the service of the Imperium and to defend Mankind against the incursions of Chaos, the Ork Hordes, and the ravenous Tyranids. They have been called upon on many occasions to respond to Tyranid invasions due to their special affinity for fire and its effectiveness against the Tyranids. They have developed special tactics to take advantage of their preferred weapons, and the Techmarines have developed unique weapons and vehicles that use the eternal flames of Draconus.

For the thousands of years since the end of the Horus Heresy the Draconians have continued to faithfully serve the Emperor, and even during times of isolation from Earth, the Legion's loyalty and faith has never wavered. The history and lore of the Legion is filled with the heroic deeds of individuals and units as a whole in their service in the continuing struggles against the enemies of Mankind.

+++Ultramarines+++

The Ultramarines are a Codex Chapter descended from the Ultramarines Legion led by Roboute Guilliman (Row-baut Jewl-a-man). When the Primarch was rediscovered by the Emperor, Guilliman had ruled the planet Macragge for five years. In that short period of time, the planet had gone from a corrupt aristocracy supported by impoverished slaves, to a world where the people were prosperous and well fed. Guilliman destroyed the old social order, and in its place he instituted a system that rewarded honest and hard work, placing honorable men in charge of the government. It became a world whose "cities had been rebuilt in glittering marble and shining steel". Macragge's small fleet of spaceships ran regular trade routes between the local systems. Bringing raw materials, more people, and prosperity to Guilliman's thriving planet. "The Emperor was astounded to find a world so well ordered and prosperous, and realised at once that Roboute Guilliman was a Primarch of great ability and vision." During the Great Crusade, he commanded the Ultramarines whose base had been relocated to Macragge. His greatest talents were waging war, and he led the Ultramarines to many great victories in the Galactic South. Guilliman succeeded in liberating more worlds than any other

Primarch. In addition, through his organizational skills and tactical expertise during the Crusade, the Ultramarines suffered fewer casualties and grew to be the largest Space Marine Legion. Unfortunately, the great success of the Ultramarines had taken them to the southern edge of the galaxy just when they would be needed the most.

The 'Horus Heresy' plunged the Imperium into a savage civil war, far from the loyalist forces of the Ultramarines. The traitor Horus had moved with such speed, that even the news of his treachery did not reach Guilliman until Terra itself was under siege. Being so far out of position, the Ultramarines were unable to provide much help to those heroic forces fighting on Earth against far superior numbers. Their most notable action during those times was the destruction of a large force of Traitor Marines moving to reinforce Horus' position. (Most likely, of the Night Lords. Possibly of the Alpha Legion.) After the death of Horus and the retreat of the Traitor Legions, the Ultramarines liberated many human worlds from Chaos occupation.

Due to the heavy losses suffered by loyal Marine Legions during the Heresy, the Ultramarines were divided and deployed across the entire Imperium in order to keep or restore order. They defended much of the galaxy from Ork hordes, Eldar pirates, and other threats to Imperial order.

Roboute Guilliman is credited as being the primary author of the 'Codex Astartes'. The holy tome created subsequent to the Heresy which detailed the reorganization of Imperial forces. Its objectives included the recognition and correction of gene-seed defects revealed as a result of the corruption of the traitor marines by the Powers of Chaos. Seven years after the Heresy, the Codex was implemented in the Second Founding. The Ultramarines Legion was divided into a large number of 'Chapters', consisting of about one-thousand men. The exact number and names of Chapters created from the Ultramarines Legion has been lost through time. However, the 'Apocrypha of Skaros' is said to list the total as twenty-three, without listing the Chapters by name. Because the Ultramarines were divided into so many more Chapters than other Legions, their Gene-seed became the stock type for Marine Chapters.

In 698 M41 the Chapter was part of a combined Space Marine force led by Marneus Calgar, consisting of the Angels of Absolution, Lamenters, Marine's Errant, and the Silver Skulls. During this seven year crusade the force inflicted a series of major defeats on the Ork empire of Charadon "delaying the invasion by Waaagh Argluk by some thirty years."

+++Lamenters+++

The Lamenters are a Successor Chapter of unknown origins. However, the Blood Angels Chapter banner depicts Sanguinius wearing a robe with a symbol like the Lamenters Chapter badge. In 698 M41 the Chapter was part of a combined Space Marine force led by Marneus Calgar, consisting of the Angels of Absolution, Marine's Errant, Silver Skulls, and the Ultramarines. During this seven year crusade the force inflicted a series of major defeats on the Ork empire of Charadon "delaying the invasion by Waaagh Argluk by some thirty years."

During the Badab War, the Lamenters had, for some strange unknown reason sided with the Tiger Claws; along with the Executioners, and the Mantis Warriors. In 908 M41 the Lamenters were caught in an ambush by the Minotaurs Chapter, and "eventually surrendered after bloody ship-to-ship fighting." In 912 M41 they were granted the Emperor's forgiveness, and sent on a one hundred year crusade along the Eastern Fringe. After the chapter had been forgiven, the Chapter's banner was sent to the Adeptus Sororitas "to be restored and purified. Their handiwork was indeed inspired by the Emperor Deified, and it is said that they wept as they wove, contemplating the Emperor's great sacrifice for humanity. The banner became known as the Banner of Tears and was taken with the Lamenters on their penitent crusade."

In 992 M41 Tyranid Hive-fleet Kraken invaded from the Galactic East, the Lamenters and the Scythes of the Emperor Chapter were originally alone in dealing with this threat. During the fighting, Lamenters spacecraft "engaged ships of the Tyranid fleet. Boarding parties entered the immense alien craft, gathering vital information about the Tyranids and successfully destroying untold

thousands of aliens." But the Marines were outnumbered literally millions to one, and approximately nine-tenths of the Chapter was destroyed in the fighting.

Their current disposition is unknown. However, it is possible to raise an entire Chapter from two Zygotes in fifty-five years. Certainly, to completely rebuild the Lamenters would take considerable less time.

+++The Crimson Fists+++

The Crimson Fists are one of the oldest Space Marine Chapters, being part of the Second Founding in the 31st millenium. They are descendants of the original Imperial Fists Legion, which had the great honour of being based on Terra itself. The Crimson Fists took their name from the ritual which Rogal Dorn, Primarch of the Imperial Fists, conducted to initiate the new Chapter Masters. Both Dorn and the Chapter Master slit the palms of their left hands and clasped them together in a strong warrior's handshake; their blood mingled together, physically strengthening the Chapter Master's gene-seed and forming a symbolic bond between the Primarch and his genetic sons.

The endeavors of the Chapter have been recorded in the many volumes of the Rynn Chronicles, although much of this valuable history was lost with the unfortunate destruction of the Crimson Fists' Fortress-Monastery on Rynn's World. Those few burnt and tattered tomes that remain tell of nearly ten thousand years of illustrious devotion to the Emperor and unflinching prosecution of the Crimson Fists' duties.

"Once a Crimson Fist becomes a full Battlebrother, his left gauntlet is painted crimson. Upon becoming a member of the Crusade Company he is allowed to paint his right glove also. The most honoured Crimson Fist warriors are gifted with one of the Chapter's ancient power gloves as a symbol of their might at arms."

The most legendary campaign executed by the Crimson Fists was the Crusade of Righteous Liberation, conducted for three hundred years during the 36th Millenium. At this time, now known to Imperial historians as the Age of Apostasy, the Imperium was wracked by internal strife and physically disrupted by swirling warp storms. Much of the turmoil arose from a massive schism within the religious organisation of the Ministorum of Terra. After the arch-traitor Goge Vandire was finally killed, the Crimson Fists took it upon themselves to wrest back control of Imperial worlds that had fallen from the Emperor's grace. The whole Chapter left Rynn's World aboard its battle barges and strike cruisers and forged its way through the warp storms to liberate those planets which had fallen into anarchy or been invaded by alien races.

The first such world they came across was Welte, which they found subjugated by the Ork warlord Ghar Nazzghar - loathed by many at the time as the brutal Plunderer of Polemis. A force taken from four different Companies descended upon Welte, whilst the rest of the Chapter dropped back into the warp to locate other such stricken worlds. Led by the valiant Captain Sandriaz, the Crimson Fists fell upon Ghar Nazzghar like a blue storm. They struck at his ore mines, burnt the slave factories and wrecked the ramshackle convoys that transported food and weapons across Welte's treacherous dust bowls. Ghar Nazzghar's Orks soon found themselves scattered across much of the world trying to protect the few installations that still stood.

It was then that Brother-Captain Sandriaz mustered his force once more and attacked Nazzghar's stronghold in the ruins of what was once Welte Prime, the world's capital. With most of his warbands chasing ghosts across the dust bowls, Ghar Nazzghar could do nothing as the blue-armoured Space Marines advanced relentlessly through the shattered town. Nazzghar himself led a final counter attack, but he and his cadre of burly Ork warriors were wiped out as they ran the gauntlet of the Crimson Fists' deadly fire. With Ghar Nazzghar dead, the Crimson Fists left Welte, leaving the fragmented Orks to the Imperial citizens who had been so brutally enslaved and repressed.

Welte was just the first of eighty four worlds re-conquered by the Crimson Fists during the Crusade of Righteous Liberation. Over the Crusade's three hundred years, the Chapter's numbers dwindled through age and battle losses; whilst crusading, the Crimson Fists were unable to recruit initiates to replace their losses. Finally, after breaking the four-century long rebel siege of Barenthal on Excelsiva II, Chapter Master Kordova declared the Crusade of Righteous Liberation to have ended. Only one hundred and twenty eight Space Marines were left and ever since then, the numbers of the Chapter's First Company has always been kept at one hundred and twenty eight warriors, and its Captain is also always the Chapter Master. They are

known amongst the Crimson Fists as the Crusade Company, and it is considered a bad omen if the Chapter goes to war without the Company being at full strength.

Like other Imperial Fists descendants, the Crimson Fists have always been noted for their zealous devotion to the Emperor, even more so than other Space Marine Chapters. On at least two occasions this has led to the Crimson Fists being called upon by the High Lords of Terra to exterminate a fellow Space Marine Chapter. The first of these was the Sons of Gideon, who were deemed Excommunicate after a routine Inquisitorial inspection had found the Chapter's geneseed had been corrupted to such a degree that chemical imbalances in the Space Marines' brains had driven them insane. The Crimson Fists destroyed their homeworld of Gideon IV and then proceeded to hunt down the remnants of the Third Company which had escaped the attack and was butchering its way through the four billion inhabitants of the Colar star system. The second Chapter to have suffered the wrath of the Crimson Fists were the Marines Vigilant. The Chapter had fallen under the mind-control of a rare warp entity which had eradicated all martial instinct of the Space Marines, rendering them useless as a military force. The unfortunate Marines Vigilant put up no resistance at all as the Crimson Fists used orbital mass drivers to turn the renegade Chapter's verdant home planet into lifeless desert. The Crimson Fists' willingness to turn on their brother marines has earned them something of a reputation as the Adeptus Terra's lapdogs amongst the more unorthodox Space Marine Chapters, such as the Space Wolves, White Scars and Exorcists.

"Nothing is known of the fate of Rogal Dorn, Primarch of the Imperial Fists. Some myths claim that he yet lives, secretly commanding the Companions of the Adeptus Custodes - the exceptionally deadly warriors who guard the Golden Throne itself."

At the present time, the Crimson Fists are currently recovering from a catastrophic war against yet more Orks, during which a malfunctioning missile detonated the armoury of their Fortress-Monastery, totally destroying it and wiping out a large proportion of the Crimson Fists' initiates and stored geneseed. However, if there is one thing that rings clear in the annals of the Crimson Fists, it is their stubborn tenacity to fight to the end. Lord Kantor, the current Chapter Master, has already combated several attempts for the Chapter to be disbanded due to irrecoverable battle losses and has vowed bloody vengeance on all of Ork-kind; those who are wise in such things know that this is not an empty boast.

Chapter Organization:

The Crimson Fists are in most respects a Codex chapter. As a result of a large crusade the Crimson Fists were once reduced to a mere 128 Marines. From that day the chapter's 1st Company, known as the Crusade Company, has been kept at 128 Marines, and its Captain is also always the Chapter Master. It is considered a bad omen if the Chapter goes to war without the Company being at full strength.

Chapter Colors:

The Crimson Fists took their name from the ritual which Rogal Dorn, Primarch of the Imperial Fists, conducted to initiate the new Chapter Masters. Both Dorn and the Chapter Master slit the palms of their left hands and clasped them together in a strong warrior's handshake; their blood mingled together, physically strengthening the Chapter Master's gene-seed and forming a symbolic bond between the Primarch and his genetic sons. The Crimson Fists have also carried this on into their colours. Their basic armour colour is a deep blue, usually with metallic trimmings. Once a Crimson Fist becomes a full Battlebrother his left gauntlet is painted crimson, upon becoming a member of the Crusade Company he is allowed to paint his right glove also. The most honoured Crimson Fist warriors are gifted with one of the chapter's ancient power gloves as a symbol of their might at arms.

>>The Horus Heresy

+++The Corruption of+++

+++Warmaster Horus+++

On the feral world of Davin, the adjutant came smartly to attention before the vast wooden desk. "The local representatives are outside, my lord Warmaster." The Warmaster nodded once, without looking up from the stack of reports. "Thank you, Bejand. Make them comfortable and tell them I shall join them directly." Bejand cleared his throat nervously. "Permission to speak freely... my lord?" This time, the Warmaster looked up. The adjutant tried to hold his ice-blue gaze, and failed. "I know, Bejand," said the Warmaster. "You're not happy about this warrior-lodge initiation." "So soon after your illness, my lord..." "From which I am fully recovered. I had the Apothecaria of five Space Marine chapters fighting for the honour of healing me. I've been back to full duties for a week now, with no ill-effects. Your concern is touching, but unnecessary." Bejand shuffled uncomfortably. "But, my lord, we don't know what's involved..." "I have a reasonable idea. A little pain, to be endured without crying out; duels with a range of primitive weapons; trials of strength and speed; a few primitive rituals - little different from mystic warrior lodges in any other feral-world culture. You know Imperial policy; establish ties which can be exploited in later recruitment." He paused. "This really is bothering you, isn't it?" The adjutant tried to meet his gaze, and failed again. "Listen, Bejand. You are an outstanding staff officer, and I value your loyalty and concern. But why does one warrior-lodge initiation on one feral world disturb you so? I've gone through more than twenty of these rituals in the past. I've been a Space Marine and a commander of Marines for more than a century. You need have no fears for me." "My lord, I..." The Warmaster rose abruptly. "Enough." His voice was softer, more dangerous. "I am Horus, General and Warmaster. The first soldier of the Imperium, subordinate only to the Emperor himself. Shall it be said that Horus ran away from a hutful of savages?" Bejand struggled for words. "My lord... I have had - dreams..." His distress was genuine. Horus laid a hand on his shoulder. "Control yourself," he said gently. "You are excused for the rest of the day. Go to the Apothecarion for a psychological update. And then, perhaps, to the Chapel. A few hours' meditation will do you good. Unless you prefer to report these dreams and submit yourself to the Inquisition for psychic potential testing?" Bejand swallowed hard. "No, my lord." "Well, then." Horus patted his shoulder gently. "Go now, and we'll say no more. Meanwhile, I must meet the elders of the Knife of Stone." And in the Warp, something smiled

+++The Horus Heresy Campaign+++

Expansion & Conquest

The birth of mankind's Imperium began with the death of the Eldar race. The innate psychic powers of the Eldar brought about their own destruction by the forces of Chaos. Their psychic death scream was echoes in the warp by the birth of a new and terrible god of Chaos. This emergent entity was Slaanesh the prince of pain and pleasure, bane of the Eldar. The psychic shock of Slaanesh's birth

had two immediate effects. The catharsis effectively blew away the warp storms created by the millennia long build-up to Slaanesh's creation, thus ending Earth's long isolation. However, the unleashed energies were so great that they could not be wholly contained within the warp. Where the populations of Eldar were greatest, the warp literally spilled through their minds and mixed with material space. This created the scattered zones of warp overlap in the material universe, the largest and most significant of which is the Eye of Terror.

The Emperor of Mankind had long foreseen the creation of Slaanesh and had prepared for that fateful day. By the time that the warp storms were ended by the birth of Slaanesh, the Space Marines and other Imperial forces were ready to begin their reconquest of the galaxy. The forces of Chaos were already strong, and many human worlds had been taken over by Chaos Cultists or aliens. It was a long hard struggle, but with every victory the Imperium grew stronger as new warriors joined the Great Crusade.

Led by the Emperor himself and his mighty Primarchs the Great Crusade of mankind swept through the galaxy like a firestorm. Untold billions of humans on thousands of worlds were liberated by the triumphant Space Marine Legions. The dark and sinister hold of the gods of Chaos was shattered, alien domination was overthrown and the Imperium was forged in a heroic age of conquest and rediscovery. Humanity rose to the task of rebuilding its ancient heritage, and everywhere the alien oppressor was defeated and driven out. Chaos retreated to its own realms, to the zones of warp-real space overlap such as the Eye of Terror.

Pride and Betrayal

But the forces of Chaos were not quite so easily beaten. They whispered to the Primarchs from the warp, disturbing their dreams with promises of power, appealing to their pride, their martial prowess, and their courage. No single Primarch was wholly resistant to these unspoken temptations. The character of each was sorely tested, and fully half of them failed that test. So subtle was their temptation that they never even suspected how their own loyalties were changing.

For example, Mortation Primarch of the Death Guard Legion fully believed that he was the herald of a new age of justice, Angron of the World Eaters genuinely thought that he alone could save humanity from destruction. Horus too, the greatest Primarch of all, was convinced of the virtue of the martial ideals for which he fought.

By appealing to their virtue and courage, the Primarchs were tempted to lead their Space Marine Legions against the Emperor. Initially, even the Primarchs had little idea that they had fallen to Chaos, but when they rebelled their good intentions gradually fell away as Chaos saturated their souls. The Space Marine Legions that they lead also turned slowly but inevitably to Chaos. The corrupting influence of Chaos soon spread to the Imperial Guard and Adeptus Mechanicus forces, including the Titan Legions and the Legio Cybernetica. From there the rot spread further into the Imperium itself. Over half of the Adeptus Mechanicus alone were ready to join an Empire dedicated to Chaos.

The leader of the rebellion was the Warmaster Horus, the greatest and most trusted Primarch of all. He had stood by the Emperor's side throughout the long years of the Great Crusade. They had fought back-to-back at the siege of Reikis when the Emperor saved Horus's life. On the battlefield of Gorro, Horus had repaid the debt by hacking the arm from a frenzied Ork as it struggled to choke the Emperor's life out of him. The Emperor had entrusted Horus with leading the crusades along the Eastern Fringe while he returned to Terra to consolidate the rule of the vast Imperium now under his control.

In the Emperor's absence Horus's plans were just coming to fruition when the Imperial commander of Istvaan III declared the whole of the Istvaan system an independent principality. The Emperor, ignorant of the change in the Warmaster, ordered Horus to pacify the system. Horus chose to do so by virus bombing Istvaan III from orbit. The voracious life-eater virus slew every living thing on Istvaan III in a matter of minutes; twelve billion souls died with a death scream that pulsed louder than the Astronomicon. Whole continents and hive cities were charred to ash as the mass of oxygen released by the instant rotting of all organic material on the planet burned in the atmosphere and covered the world in a gigantic firestorm which raged for days. Before the last fires were out Horus despatched the Titans of Legio Mortis onto the planet's surface to root out any who had survived in protective shelters or underground bunkers.

During the bombardment a handful of Space Marines still loyal to the Emperor seized control of the Frigate Eisenstein. They had discovered the taint of Chaos spreading through Horus's command and as the Warmaster withdrew to Istvaan V to marshal his forces the loyalists fled into warp space to warn the Imperium.

Outright Rebellion

Horus's fall came as a great shock to the Emperor. He hesitated, stunned by the extent of the Warmaster's treachery, unable to believe that his friend and general was really gathering forces against him. The Inquisition began a purge of the Adeptus Mechanicus and Imperial Guard but fighting broke out almost immediately as both organisations were shattered into loyalist and rebel factions. On Mars Tech-priests fought with ancient, forbidden weapons as both sides strove to win dominance.

The corrupted Imperium tore itself apart as old feuds were revived and ambitious planetary lords seized the opportunity to declare their independence or join with the Warmaster. Many of them did not realise what manner of monster they were allying themselves with but others embraced Chaos wholeheartedly. Planetary battles raged across the galaxy as rebels attacked loyalists or vice versa. The Imperial fleet dithered and only succeeded in driving the rebel ships from the Imperial home system. In the process they suffered such heavy casualties that they withdrew to their Luna bases.

After an almost fatal delay the Emperor finally ordered seven Legions of the Adeptus Astartes to destroy Horus and his rebels. Only with the death of Horus, the figurehead and inspiration of the rebellion, would the revolt come to an end. But organising and mobilising such a crusade to the other side of the galaxy took precious months. Horus used the time well, consolidating his position and establishing his claim as the "New Emperor" within hundreds of systems. Wherever Horus was accepted, the worship of Chaos followed.

The assault of the loyalist Legions against Horus's strongholds on Istvaan V were a disaster. The Legions struck with their customary ferocity and cunning but this time they fought brother Space Marines. Both sides possessed troops as fully capable and hardened as the other, every stratagem and ploy was met and countered. In the end strategy was overturned by treachery as the initial wave of three loyalist Legions were first mauled during their landings and then destroyed in detail. Only five Space Marines, bearing the gene-seed of their departed brethren, eventually managed to escape and carry news of the disaster to the Emperor. Somehow Horus had managed to corrupt four of the seven Legions sent against him. After the initial landings the 'loyalist' follow-up waves had attacked their allies instead of the rebels.

Horus now controlled nine Space Marine Legions and had destroyed three loyal Legions.

Throughout the Imperium loyalists and rebels were fighting each other to a virtual standstill, although the tide of battle was turning, ever so slowly in the Emperor's favour. Horus knew that if he could crush the heart of the Emperor's resistance he could remould the Imperium in his own warped image. He ordered an assault on Earth.

Total War

The real tragedy of the Horus Heresy was the ruination of the Emperor's finest creations - not only the Primarchs but the Space Marines as well. The rebel forces spread the corruption of Chaos everywhere they went.

Throughout the galaxy the forces of Chaos became stronger as humans were seduced by the values represented by the Chaos Powers and even to their worship. The Emperor's great spirit was weakened as the better qualities of humanity were perverted and misdirected by the subtle warping influence of Chaos.

Such was the position when the forces of Chaos gathered around Earth. The Luna bases, the bastion of Earth's defences, fell to Horus after a hard fight, and the rebel fleet moved into Earth orbit. After a brief battle the Terran defence lasers were quashed by heavy bombardment from space. The last squadrons of the loyal fighters poured volley after volley into the huge ships but failed to penetrate even their shields. Once their last shots had been fired the pilots steered the fighters directly into the enemy craft. It was a gesture of defiance - no more.

Horus's drop ships fell like rain upon the Imperial palace, disgorging company after company of Traitor Marines. The palace spread over many square miles of bastions, walls, corridors, sky-

scraping towers, vast space ports and the fighting was fierce and determined. The Traitor Marines and rebel Imperial Guard units supported by Chaos Titans and huge daemon engines gradually forced back the loyal Marines and Emperor's Guards.

The defenders refused to give way, and the attackers were forced to win their way forward step-by-step over the casualties of both sides. In places the dead lay so thickly that corridors were blocked by the press of bodies. Still the loyalists could not prevent the battle becoming a siege, and fighting raged along the walls of the outer palace for over a month. Eventually Titans of the Legio Mortis demolished parts of the towering walls and the Traitor Legions poured through to assault the inner palace.

The Emperor at Bay

As the rebel forces slowly closed the drawstring upon the loyalist troops, the Emperor readied himself for the final battle with his bodyguard of Space Marines and Custodes. Two of his Primarchs stood by him: Rogal Dorn of the Imperial Fists and Sanguinius of the Blood Angels. The last hour of humanity had come and the few gallant defenders prepared themselves for certain death. It was then, when his victory seemed certain, that Horus made his one and only mistake.

Horus lowered the defense shields on his orbiting battle barge. At the time it seemed that he wished to use a psychic probe to witness for himself the final moments of the Emperor. It was his undoing, for as soon as the shields fell the Emperor became aware of his presence. The Emperor did not miss this crucial opportunity. Within a matter of seconds the teleport links were keyed to Horus's barge and the Emperor, his immediate entourage and the two loyal Primarchs, Rogal Dorn and Sanguinius, were transported right into the nest of Horus himself.

Horus was the greatest of all Champions of Chaos, an Arch-Champion and Captain of the Great Powers - a Chaos Lord of the highest rank. As the Emperor and his band of warriors materialised inside Horus's battle barge they saw for the first time the full extent of the Primarch's treachery. The ship had been transformed into something so horrible that some of the Space Marines were sent instantly mad. Their minds were completely blasted by the sight, they gargled incoherently as they crawled and twisted on the deck. The faces of men and daemons leered at them from the bulkheads, they had not bodies, their flesh melted into the slimy black walls. With a disgusting sucking sound the creatures heaved themselves into the corridors, clawing and grabbing at the members of the boarding party.

It took only a few minutes to reach the bridge, though many brave men died in those minutes and hordes of no-longer-human things perished amidst the flames and singing boltguns. There on the bridge the Emperor confronted his old Warmaster, only to discover Horus poised over the broken body of Sanguinius - the Primarch had found Horus first and had died at his hand.

The Emperor launched his attack, as much a struggle between two old friends as it was a struggle for the fate of humanity. Both knew that whichever of them won would inherit the rule of the galaxy and become the undisputed Emperor of Mankind. If Horus won then Chaos would reign supreme and mankind would join the Eldar as a dead race.

The Golden Throne

The fight with Horus was waged both in the material universe and in the warp, their bodies and their spirits battling for survival. Though Horus dealt him grievous wounds the Emperor fought not only for his life but for untold billions across the galaxy. It was Horus who faltered first, perhaps because some shred of humanity survived in the Primarch and betrayed him in the end. The Emperor destroyed his friend with the last vestiges of his strength, his body was all but destroyed, and his psychic powers were also dealt a severe blow.

With the death of the Warmaster the forces of Chaos on Earth melted away. Some of those not too long in the service of Chaos were suddenly free from its illusions and quickly switched sides, fighting with all the more vigour in their attempts to make amends for their treachery. Others whose corruption was more deeply rooted, seeing that all was lost, retreated to their ships and fled into open space. The Emperor's body was hastily returned to Earth and placed in a life-preserving stasis field.

The life support unit known as the Golden Throne was quickly built to encase the Emperor. His powers survived, but his body was shattered. At first he was able to communicate semi-coherently

for brief periods; later he lapsed into complete silence. That silence has remained undisturbed now for almost ten thousand years.

Bitter Defeat

As news of the Warmaster's defeat spread out from ancient Terra loyalists attacked rebels with renewed vigour. Hard on the heels of the news came loyalist reinforcements and the tide of battle turned decisively against the rebels. The battles still raged on long and hard for a full seven years before the last rebel formations were destroyed or exiled.

Those rebels that could flee to the Eye of Terror did so. Many had declared for the Warmaster without comprehending that daemon worship was the rebellion's cause. They rapidly fell victim to the Traitor Legions, who, it is said, grew bored of the diet of human flesh.

With the future of the Imperium assured the Emperor passed judgement upon the rebels. They had broken faith with him and trafficked with daemons. They had become enemies of humanity and could not be suffered to live in the Imperium of Mankind. All record of the Traitor Legions would be expunged and they were to be driven into the dust nebulae and hell worlds of the Eye of Terror, banished from the material universe and obliterated from history. It would be as if the Traitor Legions had never existed.

In this decision the Emperor tempered his vengeance with reality - the Imperium was so weakened by its inner struggle that no other punishment was possible. But the Eye of Terror remains a dreadful canker in the heartwood of the Imperium, an open wound that drips corruption into surrounding systems and serves as a haven for deviants and heretics. Worst of all, the Traitor Legions still lurk in the Eye of Terror, consumed with hatred of the Emperor, The Imperium and all mankind.

+++The Assault on Earth+++

On the thirteenth of Secundus, 30,014, the bombardment began. From orbit the Warmaster's ships laid down an unrelenting barrage of missiles and deadly energy beams. The aim was to cripple the defences around the Emperor's Palace and make possible a massive invasion of Earth. The lunar bases had already fallen and the defending fleets had been scattered. On Mars, as across the entire vast Imperium, bitter civil war raged.

On countless worlds blood-mad warriors clashed. Some had pledged loyalty to the Emperor. Others had sworn fealty to Warmaster Horus, and, through him, to the dark powers of Chaos. The Emperor's realm was in turmoil and some of the greatest battles in human history were being fought. On the hive-world of Thranx over a million warriors died in a single day on the killing fields of Perdagor. On the blazing deserts of Tallarn, at the Ka'an Sailer fifty thousand tanks clashed in the greatest armoured action of all time. During the spacedrop on Vanaheim three hive-cities were depopulated by rebel forces as a warning against resistance and still the defenders fought to the last man.

Like a cancer the Heresy infected the entire structure of the Imperium. Everywhere brave men gave up their lives to try and excise that cancer.

It was on Earth, at the very heart of humanity's realm, that the fate of the galaxy was to be decided. In those last days, the sky was black with dustclouds and the earth was split by gigantic fissures. Tectonic plates shifted under the stress of the bombardment. Mountain chains shivered and seas evaporated and became salty deserts. Rains of blood and ash dripped from the dark sky.

Everywhere oracles muttered evil portents and men went mad with fear.

Hideously twisted ships full of the lost and the damned hung in orbit over the ravaged world.

Shielded from the devastation by the cunningly wrought defences of the Adeptus Mechanicus a pitiful few stood ready to repel the invaders.

The embattled remnants of the Emperor's army were desperately trying to hold out until reinforcements arrived. The Emperor himself oversaw the defence of his fortress-palace, personally commanding the Adeptus Custodes, his elite guard. He was accompanied by Sanguinius, white-

pinioned Primarch of the Blood Angels and his Chapter of Space Marines. In the palace grounds stood the stalwart Adeptus Arbites.

The palace was not the only bastion of resistance. There were others; each an awesome fortified city filled with dauntless soldiers. Beneath their Fortress-Monastery, grim-visaged Rogal Dorn led the stern Imperial Fists in final prayers. Within the armoured factory complexes of the Adeptus Mechanicus, techpriests put aside their tools and girded on the fearsome weapons of their order. In the rubble of burned-out habareas Primarch Jhagatai Khan mustered the White Scars, the Chapter of Space Marines he had personally instructed in the art of lightning warfare. Three full Titan legions stood ready to defend their Emperor.

As the earth shuddered under the bombardment, tank divisions roared across the tortured landscape to take up their position against the coming invasion. Brave men checked their weapons and offered up last prayers. Defence lasers swivelled to face the turbulent threatening sky. Suddenly, the night was streaked by the plasma contrails of drop-pods. Within the Emperor's halls even the Space Marines shuddered damned brethren. The terrifying prospect of facing those corrupt Primarchs who had sold their souls to Chaos filled every man's mind with indescribable horror and dread.

* * *

The pods touched ground and from them erupted the mightiest champions of Chaos, the renegade Space Marines of the lost Chapters. These were no longer the fine human warriors of legend but twisted creatures, bodies warped by the energies of Chaos, minds twisted by their devotion to the dark powers. If what had happened to the Space Marines was bad then what had happened to their Primarchs was worse. They had been created higher in the Emperor's esteem and had fallen further. None of their former comrades would have recognised them - they had been transformed into creatures both daemonic and exultant.

Mighty Angron bellowed orders to his blood-drinking followers, the World Eaters. Brandishing his great runesword he led them against the defenders of Eternity Wall Space Port. Around his red-armoured followers bolter shots whined. Unflinchingly they advanced, determined to spill blood for the Blood God.

At Mortarion's soft-spoken command the Death Guard emerged silently from the festering cocoons of their drop-pods and advanced on their terror-stricken foes. The dread runes on Mortarion's scythe glittered eerily in the night as he gestured for them to advance.

Magnus the Red glared triumphantly about him with his one watchful eye before ordering the mage-warriors of the Thousand Sons to cast their spells of doom. A hail of deadly bolter shells cut down dozens of the Emperor's Children. Undeterred, the wounded howled with pleasure at the experience and chanted the praises of their Primarch Fulgrim. The Renegade Space Marines surged forward to carve a path through their foes.

Perhaps some defenders went mad with fear. Perhaps the corruption of Chaos ran deeper than anyone suspected. Perhaps some were foolish enough to think that they could negotiate with the ultimate enemy. Whatever the reason one last vile treachery was to take place. Many units of the Imperial army that had pledged loyalty to the Emperor turned blasphemers even as the Traitor Space Marines made their drop. It was almost as if it were a pre-arranged signal. In one of the basest acts of betrayal in humanity's history they turned their weapons on their brother warriors and cut them down like dogs. Thus did the Lions Gate Space Port fall to the rebels. As the heretics chanted and howled their mad prayers, the air shimmered and slaving daemons emerged from the warp to spread terror and dismay.

Then indeed did it seem to the defenders that they were living in the last days of mankind. Huge bat-winged Bloodthirsters swept triumphantly across the weeping skies. Clawed Keepers of Secrets danced lasciviously on piles of corpses. Great Unclean Ones chuckled as they lumbered through the ruined streets spreading trails of filth and slime and disease. Enigmatic Lords of Change perched atop the towers and statues and supervised the coming of Chaos to the heart of the world. Mighty ships began the descent from orbit, hoping to overwhelm the defenders by sheer weight of numbers. Unlike the drop-pods these presented fine targets for the weapons of the defenders. And thus did the battle for Earth begin in earnest.

Defence lasers blasted many renegade ships from the sky, sending thousands of tons of fused metal death raining down onto the ground below. One giant craft span out of control and crashed into a hab-unit, killing a hundred thousand people. Another was welded to the ground, disgorging its passengers into a lake of bubbling tar and plas-crete. The vessel of the Warped Dogs was vapourised and that Titan Legion's name passed into history.

As quickly as they disembarked the Traitors surged forth from the space ports to besiege the bastions of the defenders. Their first objective was to silence the defence lasers inflicting such casualties on their comrades. The rebels were met by a wave of Imperial defenders, desperate men who knew that they were giving their lives for their home and their Emperor.

In the tightly packed streets around the space ports the fighting was close and deadly. Bolters chattered and missile launchers delivered cargoes of death from building to nearby building. Traitor tanks rumbled through the avenues, turrets swivelling to bring weapons to bear on the hastily improvised barricades of their former comrades. Soon the defenders of Eternity Wall Space Port had been swept aside by the merciless assault and the hordes of the Warmaster were in total possession of the spacefield. More and more intricately wrought dropships descended from orbit. They towered over the landing ground like nightmare skyscrapers. The dark runes on their sides glowed evilly in the gloom. Hundred-meter high doors opened in their kilometre long sides. From their red depths Titan ten times the height of a man emerged. They were warped giants; the armour of their carapace fused and moulded into new shapes by the power of Chaos. Within them were men melded to their machines. Some of the hideous Titans had strange potent weapons, others were a bizarre hybrid of the organic and the machine. Metal tentacles lashed, spiked tails whipped back and forth. Engines roared like the voices of angry beasts. Banners fluttering, the Titans of Storm Lords and the Flaming Skulls legions marched forth. At Lions Gate Space Port the traitors welcomed the towering black war engines of the Khornate host. Minotaurs and trolls and cultists seethed like angry ants around their bases.

Reinforced by this fresh wave of troops the hordes of Horus swept on, driving through the exhausted and demoralised Imperial troops to the very walls of the Emperor's palace. Khornate warriors mounted on bestial daemonic Juggers raced towards the marble and steel outer ring. Hordes of horn-headed Tzeentchian disc riders soared on the wind, bolts of mystic power erupting from their clenched fists to rake the defenders. Slaaneshi beast riders swept aside the Imperial Guard infantry and reached the Saturnine Gate.

Round the walls bitter fighting ensued as the Imperials sallied forth, trying to drive the attackers back before the main body of the assaulting troops arrived. Men died in their thousands. From pillbox emplacements in the palace walls Imperial gun crews rained death down on the relentless attackers. Again and again the streets outside the palace were swept clear of heretics. Again and again new foes stepped forward to take their place.

Now indeed it seemed the tide of battle had turned against the Emperor. The space ports were firmly in the grasp of the minions of the Warmaster. Hundreds of thousands of troops poured down from orbit. Goat headed beastmen, gibbering mutants and hideous amorphous Chaos Spawn surged out of the drop ships. Under the banner of the great eye, the sign of Horus, the lackeys of the four Great Powers of Chaos marched united. Mounted on Rhinos, lurking within mighty Behemoths and clinging to the sides of gigantic war engines they made their way en masse to the Emperor's palace.

Looking down on the seething sea of foulness the defender's hearts went cold. Mingling with the daemons and the mad-eyed cultists, the trolls and the beastmen they could see heretical Space Marines and traitor Guardsmen. These were people they might have once fought alongside, who had once been as loyal to the Emperor as themselves. They looked upon a dark mirror of their souls. Down there they could see martial honour become berserk madness, human cleverness become sly treachery, hope become foulness and love become abominable lust. The brave men on the walls knew that there was no way out. Here they must stand and fight and die. There would be no mercy from those below. This was a war where there could be no honourable peace. It was destroy or be destroyed.

For a moment all was silence, then Angron strode forth. In his brazen voice he demanded that the loyalists surrender. He told them that their cause was hopeless, that they faced a foe who could not

be defeated. They were cut off, outnumbered, and defending a ruler too weak to be worthy of their loyalty. In that moment the men on the walls felt their resolve weaken. Looking at the transformed face of the Primarch who had been one of the Emperor's finest warriors, they saw an invincible, relentless foe backed by a numberless horde and all the daemonic might of Chaos.

There was a clamour on the walls as Sanguinius and the Blood Angels arrived. Standing on the wall, the angel-winged man glared on Angron with angry contempt. For long moments their gazes locked. Each Primarch seemed to be measuring the other, searching for chinks in the armour, for any sign of weakness and lack of resolve. Who knows what they saw there? Perhaps they communicated telepathically, brother Primarch to brother Primarch. The truth will never be known. Eventually Angron turned and walked back to his lines. He told his troops that there would be no surrender; they should kill everyone they found within the palace. No stone should be left upon stone.

With a roar the horde advanced towards the walls. Great Lords of Battle lurched forward on iron wheels, crushing anything in their way, unloading racks of missiles and turning the area on the top of the walls into blazing storms of death. Doom burners sent tongues of superheated metal licking out at the emplacements. Molten brass filtered through the windows and scalded those inside. Multi-tracked Cauldrons of Blood squirted jets of obscene daemonic ichor onto the defenders. Enormous fleshhounds of Khorne loped forward in their wake. Titans armed with specially constructed siege weapons lumbered into position. Battle cruisers dropped megatons of explosive death onto the defenders.

Every loyal warrior knew that he was already dead; that there was no way he could survive the coming of the daemonic army. The soldiers fought with the desperate ferocity of hopeless men, firing until their weapons were empty, snatching up the bolters of the fallen, and facing monsters with the butts of their guns when all ammunition was exhausted. Three times the horde managed to scale the walls, and three times it was driven off by the valiant efforts of Sanguinius and the Blood Angels. Wearily the Primarch marshalled the defenders, rallying the broken, speaking words of comfort to the mortally wounded, fighting with cold, implacable fury when he was called upon to do so. Slowly though, despite his efforts, the Chaos forces managed to erode the defence. They seemed numberless as the grains of sand on a sea shore and Horus spent their lives carelessly. Outside the walls Imperial forces frantically raced from their bastions to try and relieve the palace. Titan legions boldly cut their way towards the centre of the rebel army. The Whitescars harried its flanks. No attempt to break the rebel line succeeded. Breaking through that blood-mad horde was a near impossible task. All four of the daemonic Primarchs inspired their followers to feats of fiendish bravery. For every Chaos warrior who died it seemed two more stood ready to take his place. In orbit the Warmaster watched approvingly. If the palace fell and the Emperor died loyalist legions across the galaxy would lose heart and the war would be over. Without the psychic shield of the Emperor's power, humanity would swiftly fall prey to Chaos. Horus would stand triumphant amid the rubble of humanity's greatest empire. He would become a new and angry god. If he did not win soon reinforcements would filter in from the corners of the Imperium, and his attack would falter. For the Warmaster this was the desperate ultimate gamble. Everything was staked on this attack. It had to succeed, and at that moment it looked as if it might.

Day by day the siege wore on, casualties rose from the thousands to tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands. Bodies had to be bulldozed from the accessways to the Saturnine Gate by war machines. Chaos Titans blazed at the walls, specially constructed missiles ripping great chunks from the masonry. The Titans of the Fire Wasps answered their fire with volcano cannons. The smell of burning flesh filled the air as the corpses of the dead were incinerated in funeral pyres a hundred foot high. Obscene ash parched the throats of the defenders. The World Eaters built a pyramid of scorched skulls sixty foot high in Temple Square. By night the chants of degenerate cultists echoed through the streets and daemons flitted among the ruins of Earth.

Slowly, foot by torturous foot, the defenders were forced back. The great walls of the palace were riddled with hundreds of kilometres of bulkheads and corridor. Within this maze bitter hand to hand fighting ensued till entire sections of passage were filled with bloated corpses. Feeling progress was too slow, Horus ordered the Titans of the Death's Head Legion to demolish entire sections of the

wall. Despite taking tremendous casualties the great Warlord Titans broke through, and the forces of the Warmaster flooded into the palace grounds.

While all this was taking place Jhagati Khan had implemented a change of plan. Rather than throwing away his forces against the near invincible bulk of the main Chaos army he launched a lightning raid against Lions Gate Space Port. This night attack was spearheaded by the shaven-headed warriors of the Whitescars, who led the remnants of the 1st Tank Division and elements of the surviving Gurad armies against the surprised heretics. Khan threw a defensive perimeter around the space port and held it against all counter-attacks. The flow of men and materials towards the palace was halved at a stroke.

This success gave heart to the defenders. They swiftly attempted to seize Eternity Wall Space Port but here the forces of the Warmaster were better prepared. The attackers were ambushed and driven back by traitors. Horus knew it was imperative to keep his beachhead secure. The final push on the inner palace had begun.

The battle raged across the grounds of the Inner Gardens. What had once been a vast parkland was swiftly turned into a killing ground. Men used statues for cover and monuments for bunkers. Blood swirled in the waters of the ornamental lakes. Groves of ancient redwoods burned. The smell of the burning mingled with the acrid odours of weapons and engines and death. Red-eyed, snatching sleep when they could, both sides fought a total war. Tranches were hurriedly excavated in the meadows. Snipers killed men as they tried to sip brackish water from the ruined fountains.

Both sides fought with unimaginable naked ferocity. Both sides sensed the end was near.

Eventually Sanguinius was forced to retreat to within the palace itself, personally holding the Ultimate Gate against the oncoming horde while the last of his wounded men was carried through.

Just as the giant ceramite gate was about to close a Bloodthirster of Khorne leapt upon him. The daemon's huge talons closed around his throat. Sanguinius took to the air. Angel and daemon wrestled over the warring armies. Both sides halted for a moment to watch the titanic struggle. It was a conflict such as has been rarely seen; two beings of awesome power wrestled.

Sanguinius was weary and near the end of his strength and the daemon gouged great wounds in his flesh. The heretical throng roared its approval as the Primarch was cast to the ground, the impact splintering the granite. For a moment the Primarch lay still and a groan rose from the Blood Angels, the daemon stood over him and howled in exultation. Then slowly and painfully the Blood Angel rose and seized the creature, raised it high and broke its back across his knee. Then with a halo of power playing round his head he tossed its broken carcass back amid its followers. They beat their chests and rent their hair and wailed in dismay as the Ultimate Gate shut.

The great Sky Fortress bore Rogal Dorn and the remnants of the Imperial Fists to the inner palace. The loyal old general was determined to stand and die with his Emperor in the final hour. The Sky Fortress raced away from the palace in a desperate attempt to reach Jhagatai Khan and return him to the palace. It was destroyed by a blaze of fire from the Death's Heads Titan Legions. Even in death its commander wrought havoc on the enemy, bringing the crippled vehicle down into the entre of the Chaos Horde. It seemed as if a new sun was born on Earth as the plasma reactor exploded, blasting out a crater three kilometres across. Those within the palace knew they were cut off; now they were truly alone. Only a miracle could save them.

Now the final siege began. Through great breaches in the outer walls more and more armaments and reinforcements were brought to bear. The Warmaster himself prepared to teleport down to the surface and supervise the destruction of his former lord. Then a daemon from the Warp whispered to him the words that he had dreaded.

A loyalist fleet under Leman Russ and Lion'el Johnson bearing a fresh army of Space Wolves and Dark Angels was only hours away. It would take days to break humanity's last citadel, even with Horus leading his troops. It seemed that time had run out for the Warmaster, that his gamble had failed.

Horus was first among the fallen, with the power of a god and the cunning of a daemon. He resolved to try one final desperate gambit. He could still kill the Emperor. He ordered all comm-net communications blocked so that the defenders would get no word from their rescuers and then he used his psychic powers to the full to prevent the Emperor becoming aware of this. Finally he dropped the shields of his command ship. It was an invitation and a personal challenge that he

knew the Emperor could not resist. He was being offered a chance finally to smite the foe who had harried him for so long.

The Emperor rose to the challenge, and he and his surviving Primarchs teleported aboard the Warmaster's battle barge. Horus used his powers to separate the Emperor from his loyal followers. The loyalists were transported to different spots within his hideously altered ship. Sanguinius he had brought directly to his throne room. In his evil cunning the Warmaster offered the Blood Angel a chance to switch sides, reasoning that the winged Primarch's followers would be useful when the Space Wolves and the Dark Angels arrived.

Sanguinius refused. Horus grew wrathful and attacked him. At the peak of his powers the Blood Angel would have been no match for the Warmaster and now, sorely wounded and weary he had no chance at all. Horus strangled him with his bare hands before the throne the Powers of Chaos had gifted him with.

The Emperor found Horus shortly after this and what happened next is the subject of legend. The two mightiest beings in the history of mankind clashed. They met blade to blade, power to power, mind to mind and tested sinew and psychic power to the ultimate.

+++Aboard the Warmasters Ship+++

Even through the shields the impact makes the Imperial Palace shake. With a Screech of tortured stone an angel topples from its alcove high on the throne room wall and crashes to the marble floor a kilometre below. It shatters into a million pieces. Splinters of stone flash across the hall like shrapnel.

From his throne the Emperor watches his warriors mill around in confusion. This hall holds ten thousand men, seasoned veterans, and all are now panicking. He knows they are more frightened by his silence than by the enemy. They look to him for leadership and he can give them none. For the first time in his millennia-long life the Emperor knows despair. The magnitude of his defeat stuns him. The lunar bases have fallen. Most of the Earth is under the Warmaster's heel. Rebel Titans surround the palace and are held at bay only by the desperate efforts of a few loyalists. It is only a matter of time before the palace's defences fail and the last bastions of resistance fall.

"Sire, what are your orders?" asks Rogal Dorn, massive dark-haired Primarch of the Imperial Fists. His golden armour has lost its lustre, is dented in a dozen places by bolter shells. The Emperor doesn't answer. He is lost within himself seeking answers to his own questions.

He has come at last to the dark place, the time of testing, the era hidden from his precognitive vision and beyond which he cannot see. The moment he has always dreaded has arrived. Is my time over, he wonders? Is this where it all ends? Is this why I have reached the limits of my prophetic powers. Is this where I die?

He feels bewildered. Even now, with the Traitor Warmaster's forces battering at the gate, he finds it difficult to believe that he has been betrayed.

Horus was more than a trusted comrade, more like a favoured son. Of all the Primarchs the Emperor relied on him most. Not for a second had the Emperor doubted him, not even when word had come from the Savage Worlds that the Warmaster was gathering forces. He had deluded himself that Horus must have good reason to do so without consulting him. I should have been warned by the failure of my precognition, he thinks.

"Sire, what are your orders?" asks Kane, acting Fabricator-General of the Adeptus Mechanicus. He stares at the Emperor, a trick of the light turning the glass slits of his brass mask into accusing eyes. Once more the Emperor does not reply. Kane's presence reminds him that not even the head of the Adeptus is to be trusted. His superior, the former Fabricator-General, has chosen to side with Horus.

On Mars civil war rages between factions of Tech-Priests. Ancient, forbidden weapons are being deployed. Viral plagues kill millions. Fusion bombs scar the earth.

So much will be lost. He thinks of the slow piecing together of the old science. The Librarium Technologicus is in flame now, ancient core data systems in meltdown. The Great Crusade, as

much a quest for knowledge as a war to reclaim the human worlds, is ended. The Warmaster's treachery has seen to that.

"Sire, what are your orders?" Asks Sanguinius, angel winged Primarch of the Blood Angels. He gazes at the Emperor with blazing eyes, his face a mask of terrible beauty.

The Emperor knows they rely on him for guidance. They still believe in him. They think he can lead them from this trap. They are wrong.

Horus is the greatest general the galaxy has ever known. Who should know better than his creator? He is schooled by a century of warfare. There will be no way out, no loopholes, no flaws in the plan. The Warmaster would have to be mad to leave one.

The Emperor looks down on the faces of his followers, sees the trust written there, feels the weight of responsibility it brings. He knows that for their sake he must try, even if it is hopeless.

He casts forth his clairvoyant sight, lets his mind drift beyond the ruined gardens of the palace, over fields where colossal Titans battle by the twisted light of the sculpted moon. He sees the whole war spread out beneath him, his pitifully outnumbered legions being mowed down by the traitor hordes. He reaches up to the sky, where he senses the fleet of battlebarges that rain orbital doom upon the tortured Earth. Amid those thousand glittering points he finds the Warmaster.

Hope flickers within him. The shields of Horus's ship are down. Briefly he wonders why. Is the traitor's confidence so overwhelming? Does he wish to witness the battle himself. Or is it a trap?

The Emperor touches the ship and recoils from what he senses within. How could Horus have done this, make a pact with the ultimate abomination?

The Emperor comes to a decision. Trap or not, this is the only opportunity he will get. He has no option but to seize it; the position is so desperate. Even as his spirit returns to his body, the ominous thought strikes him that the Warmaster must know this.

"What are your orders, Sire?" Sanguinius asks again. The Emperor's eyes snap open. His voice is full of authority.

"Prepare to teleport. We will take the battle to the enemy."

The men smile confidently. They now have a purpose. While he reels off the teleport co-ordinates they move, without question, to obey.

A flash of light, a feeling of coldness. They have teleported into the Warmaster's ship. The Emperor takes an instant to reorientate himself and realises that something has gone wrong. He stands in a vast, warped chamber with only a few marines in attendance. The Terminators and the Primarchs are not present. How is this possible he wonders. Could Horus have disrupted the teleportation beam? Is he so powerful?

Insane voices gibber madly inside his skull. There are figures trapped in the stone walls of the vast room. Hands reach out for him, grasp at him with rock-like strength. He shrugs them off easily. His comrades are not so lucky. Bolters chatter and flash as the marines attempt to fight off their daemonic assailants.

A man screams as he is drawn into the dark and slimy walls. As he vanishes, ripples spread from his point of disappearance. The Emperor's sword lashes out, severing limbs, freeing trapped marines. He summons his psychic energies. A nimbus flickers around his head as he unleashes his power. A tidal wave of destruction rips through the daemons, leaving his own men unscathed. He scans about him, seeing the Primarchs but the walls of the Warmaster's Battle Barge are resistant to his mindsight. He gestures for the surviving Marines to follow him.

They wonder through a ship distorted beyond all recognition by the warping power of Chaos. Great sphincter-doors distend from walls of flesh-like stone. Transparent veins bear rivers of blood along conduits in the floor. Carpets of mucous cover a road of tongues.

Winged and distorted things that might once have been human flit through archways of bone and perch on ledges of rib. The marines gasp in horror. He exerts himself to calm them, psychically soothing their fear of this dreadful place. All the while he scans the area looking for the spoor of Horus. He knows now the nature of the pact the Warmaster has made and the dreadful consequences of his victory.

They pass pits that gape like glistening gullets in the floor and echo the beats of a distant giant heart. They are showered by waterfalls of stinking yellowish liquid that cascades down cliffs of

carved cartilage. Sometimes they hear weapons fire but when they arrive at the source they find nothing.

Mists of rainbow vapour drift across their field of vision obscuring corridors of carnivorous stone. Clouds of insects swarm over their faceplates and choke the extractors of their airpipes. They switch over to internal oxygen supply.

They are ambushed by scuttling skull-faced things in the armour of marines. They fight hordes of mutated beasts. One by one they die. In the end the Emperor stands alone. Then and only then is he allowed to enter the presence of Horus.

The Warmaster bestrides the body of a broken angel. Behind him the tortured Earth fills the viewport, a bauble for Horus to seize with one clawed hand. Corpses of massacred marines lie everywhere.

Face glowing with internal bloodlight, Horus speaks. "Poor Sanguinius. I offered him a position of power in the new order. He could have a seat at the right hand of a god. Alas he chose to align himself with the losing side."

The Emperor stands transfixed, trying to force frozen words from his tongue. In the end he can only whisper; "Why?"

Mad laughter rings out. "Why? You ask me why? Have all those millennia taught you nothing?

Weak fool, your timidity prevented you from binding the forces of Chaos. You shied away from the ultimate power. I have bound it to my will and will lead humanity into a new age. I, Horus, Master Of Chaos."

The Emperor looks at his former friend and shakes his head. He sees the trap that has ensnared Horus. "No man can master Chaos," he says quietly. "You have deluded yourself. You are the servant not the master."

A look of rage transfigures the Warmaster. He stretches out a hand and a bolt of force leaps forth. The Emperor screams as agony wracks his body. "Feel the true nature of my power then tell me I am deluded," roars Horus, in the voice of an angry god.

Beads of sweat stand out on the Emperor's forehead, he steels himself against the pain. "You are deluded," he says.

Once again Horus gestures and lances of pure poison sear through the Emperor's veins. "I let you come here, old friend, so that you could witness my triumph. Kneel before me and I will spare you. Acknowledge the new master of mankind."

Desperately the Emperor summons his power and lashes out. Lightning flicker between the combatants. The stench of ozone fills the air. The Emperor leaps forward, sword raised. Weapons clash as the battle is joined on every level: physical, spiritual, psychic.

Bolts of force flicker as mortal gods clash, balancing the fate of the galaxy on every blow.

Runesword and lightning claw ring against each other with a sound like thunder. Energies potent enough to level planets are unleashed.

A backhand buffet from Horus knocks the Emperor through a stone bulkhead. The counterstroke tears a supporting column out of the ceiling as the Warmaster ducks.

In the warp the Emperor hears the Chaos Powers howl as they feed their pawn more power. The Lord of Humanity stands alone against their massed might and knows that he is losing. Somehow he cannot bring his full force to bear on the Warmaster. Horus shows no such restraint.

A lightning claw cuts the Emperor's armour as if it were cloth, sheers through flesh and bone. The Emperor ripostes with a psychic stroke intended to disrupt the Warmaster's nervous system. Horus laughs as he deflects it.

His claws take the Emperor across the throat, opening windpipe and jugular. Another blow severs the tendons of his wrist, causing the sword to drop from nerveless fingers.

Insane laughter echoes round the chamber. Horus breaks several ribs with an almost playful punch. A surge of energy sears the Emperor's face, melting the flesh till it runs, bursting an eyeball, sets the hair alight. The Emperor stifles a whimper, wonders how he can be losing. Blackness threatens to engulf him.

Horus grasps his wrist, splintering bones. Blood pumps from the Emperor's throat. Horus lifts his foe above his head and brings him down across his knee, breaking his spine.

For a second the Emperor knows only darkness then a flare of agony brings him back to consciousness as Horus rips his arm from its socket. The Warmaster howls with bestial triumph. Suddenly the battering stops. Through his good eye the Emperor sees a solitary Terminator has entered the room. The marine charges toward the Warmaster, stormbolter blazing. Horus looks at him and laughs. For a moment he stands triumphant, allowing the marine to see what he has done to his Emperor.

The Emperor know what is going to happen next, sees the gloating triumph on Horus' face. There is no trace of his friend left there. There is only a daemon driven by insane destructive fury.

Horus turns his burning gaze on the Terminator and the marine's flesh flakes away to reveal his skeleton then even that is gone, reduced to dust.

The Emperor sees the trap that has been set for him. He has been restraining himself, trying not to hurt one who has been as a son to him. Now he sees that there is no trace of his trusted comrade left. He knows that he must stop this semblance of his former friend and avenge the fallen Terminator. He must strike one deadly blow. He will get no other chance.

He gathers every particle of his power, focuses it into a mighty bolt of pure force, more coherent than a laser, more destructive than an exploding sun. He aims it at Horus, a lance of power destined for the madman's heart. Horus senses the upsurge of energy and turns to face the Emperor, a look of horror on his face.

The Emperor lets fly. It strikes the Warmaster. Horus screams as destruction rains down on him, twisting and writhing in titanic agony. He strives frantically to counter the Emperor's deathblow but his struggles become ever more feeble as the lethal energies play over him.

Driven by all the force of his rage and pain and hatred the Emperor wills Horus's death. He senses the forces of Chaos retreat, disengaging themselves from their pawn. As they do so sanity returns to the Warmaster. The Emperor sees realisation of the atrocities he has committed flicker across Horus' face. Tears glisten there.

Horus is free but the Emperor knows he himself is dieing and that the Powers Of Chaos may once again posses the Warmaster and he will not be there to stop them. He cannot take that risk. Horus must die. Yet for a second, looking into his old friends face, he hesitates, unable to do the deed. Then he thinks of the slaughter that still goes on outside, may go on forever. Resolve hardens within him.

He forces all mercy and all compassion from his mind, empties it of all knowledge of friendship and love.

His eyes lock with Horus and see understanding there. Then with full cold knowledge of what he is doing the Emperor destroys the Warmaster.

Rogal Dorn enters the chamber. Horror fills him as he sees the mutilated form of the Emperor and the shrivelled husk inside the warmaster's armour. He curses himself for taking so long to fight through the Chaotic hordes. He knows now why their attacks ceased and why the ship is reverting to normal.

He rushes to the Emperor's side, detecting the faint pulse of life. Perhaps there is yet hope. Perhaps the ruler of the Imperium may live. Dorn will do his best to ensure it

+++The Death of Sanguinus+++

During the dark days of the Horus Heresy the Blood Angels Chapter of Space Marines found itself embattled upon Earth itself. The full force of Chaos was arrayed against them, and as the armies of Horus fought their way toward the centre of the Emperor's palace, all appeared lost. Yet, as the most lowly Adept of the multitudinous offices of the Adeptus Terra knows, in the end the Earth was saved and Horus defeated, though at a terrible cost. The story of the Death Company of the Blood Angels is just one of the many echoes of those great events which still affect the Imperium today.

As the forces of Horus closed in around the Emperor the position seemed hopeless. The battle, and with it the fate of humanity, would be resolved within a matter of hours at the most. The outcome seemed no longer in any doubt, and the Emperor and the remnants of the loyal Space Marine Legions prepared for final stand. They were doomed and humanity was condemned to eternal damnation in the hells of Chaos, yet they were determined to prove their defiance to the last. If Chaos must triumph, as it surely would, then it would do so only in the face of the greatest resistance possible.

The Blood Angels had fought long and hard since the bombardment began. They were already battle weary, but within them the human spirit burned as vigorously as ever. The winged Primarch Sanguinius seemed to be everywhere at once. Wherever the fighting was thickest he appeared, soaring over the battlefield and swooping down upon the daemonic hordes below. Together with his Space Marines he had defied the might of Angron, the Chaos Primarch of Khorne whose World Eater Chaos Space Marines had devastated a hundred human worlds. Yet the onslaught was too great, and the Blood Angels had been beaten back to the Ultimate Gate in the Emperor's Palace.

As the Emperor and his Primarchs gathered for a final stand, Horus made the fatal mistake which cost him victory. To this day no-one can say why Horus chose to drop the defensive shields around his ship, allowing the Emperor to teleport aboard and destroy Horus. Historicii of the Adeptus Terra point to the expected arrival of the Space Wolves and Dark Angels Legions, maintaining that Horus was deliberately throwing down a challenge to the Emperor in an attempt to lure him into a trap. If this is correct, Horus was determined to resolve the conflict before the arrival of the other Space Marine Legions. But it seems unlikely that Horus did not know the relief force was still several days away. Even with these additional Space Marines it is hard to imagine how the Emperor could defeat the inexhaustible hordes of Chaos. The Ecclesiarch Deacis IX wrote, "Perhaps it was some vestige of humanity within the monster that he had become which finally betrayed Horus. His love for the Emperor, once sincere but long since turned hate, may yet have overcome Chaos in the end." Maybe it was so. The veil of history was drawn over those events 10,000 years ago, and such things will never be known for certain.

According to all records of those troubled times the Emperor, Sanguinius, and a small force of Space Marines in Terminator Armour boarded the Warmaster's space fortress. The story has become part of the folk-myth of the Imperium, and is told a hundred different ways, but on the following details most versions agree. As they materialised the boarding party found themselves divided, and Sanguinius was positioned closest of all to Horus himself. It is said that the Warmaster offered Sanguinius a place beside him, a Princedom in Hell, and everlasting life as a minion of the Chaos Gods. For the last time in his life Sanguinius renounced Chaos and prepared for battle. Horus was once the most mighty of all the Primarchs. Now he bore heinous marks of his Chaos Masters. He was swollen with power, gigantic of size and distorted in his daemonic form. Now he was more powerful than any mortal creature. For his part Sanguinius still bore the wounds of his battle on Earth. He had fought Daemons and survived, but against Horus he was as an insect to a hungry and gigantic monstrosity.

It was a short and bloody battle before the brazen throne of Horus. The blade of Sanguinius sang as it spun through the air, cutting and stabbing at the Warmaster's Armour. The armour of Horus bled where that blade touched it, for now the Warmaster and his armour were one, it had grown to be part of him. It was not for long that Horus endured this whirling dance. He lashed out clumsily. Lightning Claws arced through the air, catching upon bulkheads and doors, tearing great gashes and sending molten metal shrieking across the floor. Soaring over Horus' head, Sanguinius easily avoided those sluggish strokes, and eagerly sought out a weak spot in Horus' defenses. As he flew he spotted a damaged link of armour on the Warmaster's neck, and Sanguinius stabbed out with all his remaining strength. His blade lodged at once in the Warmaster's armour. Horus screamed more with anger than with pain, and reached out to strike the winged Primarch. Steel talons dripping with plasmic energy closed upon the winged Angel of Baal.

According to some versions of the tale it was this wound that Sanguinius struck which opened a chink through the armour of Horus, enabling the Emperor to slay his enemy. The Blood Angels certainly say as much in their doctrine. They pray to Sanguinius as they do to the Emperor, for he remains their patron and

guide in death as he once was in life. In any case, when the Emperor found the Warmaster it was as he stood over the broken body of Sanguinius, the Primarch's wings twisted and feathers still at last. The rest of the tale has no direct bearing upon the future of the Blood Angels and is well known. Suffice to say the Emperor defeated Horus after a long and hard-fought battle in which the Emperor was himself mortally wounded, and after which he was placed in the eternal stasis of the Golden Throne from which he has ruled the Imperium ever since.

After the final battle was over, and the forces of Chaos were retreating towards the Eye of Terror, the established Space Marine Legions were reorganized into the smaller Space Marine Chapters. The Blood Angels had lost many warriors in the war, but worst of all the genetic banks which provided their implants had been partially destroyed. The only way to make good the damage was to reculture gene-seed from the body of Sanguinius, the Primarch whose genetic structure had been used to create the Blood Angels. Live germ cells were isolated within Sanguinius' body, and eventually new implants were cultured. In this way the Chapter was rebuilt using the gene-seed of Sanguinius taken from his dead body. At the time all seemed well, and it was only over the following millennia that the gene-seed showed traces of mutation. Such matters are not unusual. Every Chapter's gene-seed is subject to a process of evolution or decay, and so must be vigorously examined and periodically purged of fault. As a result most Chapters have idiosyncrasies, but in the case of the Blood Angels these were to prove very strange indeed.

Excerpt from 2nd edition Wargear

Of all the sorrows of the Horus Heresy the doom of the Emperor weighs most heavily. Yet even this woe would have been greater were it not for Sanguinius Primarch of the Blood Angels, the Winged Angel at the Emperor's right hand, and foremost Guardian of the Master of Mankind. As battle raged across the orbital fortress of Horus the Great Betrayer, Sanguinius found and fought the enemy, and was destroyed by the Warmaster, a broken angel cast down at the feet of abomination. This was how the Emperor found his greatest enemy and his most loyal friend, and so began the battle for the Heart of Mankind, over the body of the Winged Angel.

It is said it was through the chink in Horus' armour opened by Sanguinius that the Emperor was able to deliver the fatal blow. Thus the brightest of all the Emperor's host did not die in vain, crushed upon the steps of Horus' foul altar, but dying gave the Emperor the one chance to destroy forever the Great Betrayer.

Of all the Primarchs of the Space Marines it is Sanguinius whose temples rise aside those of the Emperor, and whose name is cherished by ordinary folk in gratitude for the life that was taken and the life that was spared. Alone of all the Primarchs his memory is honoured by a sanctified day of celebration, the Sanguinala, when Adepts across the galaxy wear upon their breast the red badge of the Lord Angel.

>>The Imperial Guard

+++THE IMPERIAL GUARD+++

The Imperial Guard is not a single army but many armies of countless millions of men and fighting machines. At any one time the Imperial Guard fight across a hundred warzones and upon ten thousand planets. Its forces may be fresh and hopeful of a quick victory, or they might be waging wars that have been going on for centuries and claimed billions of lives. Each army and each war is unique in at least some respects.

The Structure of the Imperial Guard

Imperial Guard armies are amassed to take part in specific wars or campaigns and are usually recruited as close to the fighting as possible. For example, during the brief but bloody war against invading Orks on the world of Ryza, an army was raised from worlds such as Catachan, Ulani, Barac and Dulma'lin, all of which lie within ten thousand light years of Ryza.

Ten thousand light years can be traversed within 10-40 days by warp-capable spacecraft. By the time ships have been moved into position, munitions collected and troops assembled, the response time over this distance is in the order of between 30 and 120 days, typically about 75 days. This is the standard response time for the raising of Imperial Guard armies, though for prolonged conflicts troops may be brought in from much further away.

It is the speed of space travel that has shaped the way in which the Imperial Guard operates. The distribution of the fleet and settled human worlds is such that armies can be assembled only slowly. This process is too slow to guarantee the safety of any individual world at any moment. Fortunately, the Imperium has other forces which can react more rapidly, such as the fleets and Space Marine Chapters. In any case, a planet's initial lines of defence are its orbital fortresses and its own Lord's troops. These defences have only to hold out long enough for an Imperial Guard army to be collected together and transported into position.

Recruitment

Every planetary Lord in the Imperium recruits, equips and maintains his own planetary defence forces. The number and types of troops vary tremendously from world to world. The forces of a multi-billion population hive world like Necromunda are vastly different from those of a sparsely populated forest world like Ryza. Regardless of the size of its armies, each world is obliged to make 10% of its total armed forces available for recruitment into the Imperial Guard in any year.

An army is gathered from a number of worlds, usually over a radius of no more than ten thousand light years, and its theoretical size is a tenth of the entire armed forces of those worlds. In practice, planetary Lords are often called upon to provide greater forces and more frequently, especially if the immediate danger is great. On the other hand a planet which is far from any war zone may not be called upon to provide troops for many decades.

Troops recruited from a world at one time are formed into a single Imperial Guard regiment. As a result there is no such thing as a typical size for a regiment. Regiments can consist of a few hundred men or hundreds of thousands, depending on the size of their Lord's armies.

When a regiment is recruited it is named after its home world and given a number, such as the Necromundan 9th, the 1st Catachan, and so on. Regiments continue to serve until they are disbanded, after which their number is given to the next regiment to be recruited from their home world. In this way regiments acquire a degree of continuity and tradition, even though successive regiments bearing the same name and title are recruited at different times. Some regiments have acquired common nicknames such as the Necromundan 8th which is recruited only from the Palatine hive of Necromunda, and which is always known as the Spiders. Another example is the 3rd Attilan, which is known as Jakai's Raiders after a notoriously savage former colonel of the regiment.

Equipment

Regiments join the Imperial Guard uniformed and equipped as their planetary Lord's own forces. Inevitably this means that the appearance of regiments is very varied. Jungle Fighters from the steaming death world of Catachan are hardly likely to wear the heavy insulating cloths and cloaks of the Valhallans whose world is covered in thick ice and where anyone caught on the surface would quickly freeze. Similarly the barbaric skins and furs of the nomadic Attilans are a far cry from the glittering formal uniforms of the Mordians.

Regardless of their appearance almost all newly recruited troops carry the universal lasgun. This weapon is easy and cheap to manufacture and maintain, and hence ideally suited to the needs of planetary forces. Other weapons are more-or-less standard across the Imperium although individual planetary forces may favour one kind over another. The Emperor's demand is simply that troops be equipped and trained ready to fight in his armies.

As well as providing troops a planet's Lord may be called upon to provide heavy equipment in the form of locally built tanks, artillery, troop carriers, etc. As with lighter armaments these tend to a standardised basic form across the Imperium, with only minor variations in design and build quality.

Indeed, planetary Lords are obliged to provide heavy weapons of a basically standard type for the Imperial Guard, as well as stocks of spares, fuel processors, and logistic support as appropriate. Although a planet's defence forces will almost certainly include locally designed vehicles, often of the most wild or specialised kind, these are almost never recruited into the Imperial Guard because of the difficulty of maintenance and impracticality of keeping them running.

Gathering The Armies

Once an army is recruited its first task is to rendezvous near to its destination. The Adepts of the Departmento Munitorum must organise the recruitment and transportation of new regiments and their supplies. Sometimes the fleet will detour to a nearby Forge World of the Adeptus Mechanicus to take on extra heavy weaponry, siege machines and super-heavy tanks as well as fuel and general munitions.

While travelling through the warp the new regiments continue to train and receive many hours of induction from the fleet's Commissars. Inquisitors keep a wary eye upon the recruits for signs of psychic disturbance or daemonic possession. Equipment is checked and passed for Imperial use, or else found wanting and discarded to be replaced by more suitable items. Tanks and other vehicles are repainted in campaign schemes.

By the time it reaches its destination the new army is ready for battle. Many wars are mercifully short. The sledge-hammer of the Imperial Guard comes down upon the enemy with such force that all resistance may be crushed within a matter of days. Other wars drag on year after year, decade after decade, becoming bogged down in a stalemate with no foreseeable respite.

Once a war is underway it will absorb fresh Imperial Guard regiments from all over the galaxy. If victory is not swift the Departmento Munitorum will draw in regiments from beyond the normal 10 thousand light year range, including troops from worlds in the relatively peaceful Segmentae Solar and Pacificus.

War Zones

Once a regiment has been raised it does not normally return to its home world. If it is victorious it will be moved from one war zone to another. Casualties will inevitably reduce the size of a regiment over time. Regiments that fall below combat strength, or which lose their senior officers, are placed under the command of other regiments and effectively incorporated into them. This is very common practice in permanent war zones, so that a typical regiment may in fact consist of the remnants of many regiments, all gathered under the command of a surviving colonel.

Regiments which have served for more than ten years are usually transferred from protracted war zones into armies of conquest. Not only are these the best troops but they are also the oldest, having fought gallantly for the Emperor for a decade or more. Their reward is to take part in the conquest of a new world. If they are successful the entire regiment earns the highest honour the Imperium can bestow, the gratitude of the Emperor and the right to settle a new planet. All over the Imperium there are worlds which were originally populated in this way. Their people are the hardy descendants of victorious Imperial Guard regiments.

Long wars lead to high rates of attrition of both men and their equipment, so that regiments gradually lose their distinctive appearance as their original gear wears out and is replaced.

Regiments that have been in the field for several years may bear little resemblance to the units which left their home worlds. Replacement clothing may not match their original uniforms, or it may have been adapted from that of other regiments. Improvisation to suit the local conditions will undoubtedly change the appearance of units, especially if the battle zone is radically different in climate or bio-type to the regiment's home world.

Abhuman Regiments

The incorporation of abhuman regiments into the Imperial Guard is a controversial matter.

Abhumans are human descended creatures such as Ratlings, Squats and Ogryns, whose physical appearance and mental capabilities are quite different from those of their human ancestors. They represent the descendants of the first wave of human exploration into the galaxy. Over tens of thousands of years of isolation they have evolved into creatures capable of living in high-gravity worlds, in deep space, and in all kinds of polluted or dangerous environments.

Today it is generally accepted that abhumans are a part of the human race and not aliens. Many thousands of years ago the Inquisition led wars of destruction against human-descended creatures

which its masters deemed unworthy of full human status. When human settled worlds were discovered the Inquisition would conduct a lengthy process of DNA analysis to determine if the population was still fully human by the Inquisition's stringent standards. As a result the populations of many planets were eradicated and their worlds resettled.

In time the Imperium developed a much broader definition of humanity. Ogryns, Ratlings and Squats came to be regarded as fully human. Other individual abhuman mutations were treated with comparative toleration. However, even today the Inquisition is distrustful of these newly evolved races and of those in the Adeptus Terra who advocate the integration of newly discovered abhuman races into the Imperium of Man.

The Departmento Munitorium recruits from all worlds in the Imperium regardless of human type. As a result the Imperial Guard includes Ogryns as well as Ratlings. Nowadays there are no Squat Stronghold planets in the Imperium itself, the last having seceded during the Age of Apostasy. Ogryns are characteristically large and tough if somewhat stupid. Their combat role tends to be as close assault troops where their bulk, determination and lack of imagination give them a considerable advantage. Ratlings, on the other hand, are too small and slight to make good troops, although they are famously good shots. Because Ogryns and Ratlings have very specific areas of competence it is quite usual to divide regiments into smaller units which are placed under the command of other regiments in the field.

The Strategic Command

The strategic command of the Imperial Guard is provided by the Departmento Munitorium of the Administratum. This department of the Adeptus Terra forms the general staff of the Imperial Guard responsible for munitions, supply, recruitment, training, transportation and all aspects of the Imperial Guard establishment.

The chief of strategic staff of the Departmento Munitorium is the Lord Commander Militant of the Imperial Guard, a powerful official and often one of the High Lords of Terra. Within each of the four outlying Segmentae of the Imperium there is a separate strategic command base alongside the fleet bases at Cypra Mundi, Bakka, Kar Duniash and Hydraphur. The fifth base is on Earth in the Segmentum Solar. Each of these has its own strategic command staff and reserves. The Lord Commander of each Segmentae is in charge of all military operations within his area, an awesome responsibility indeed.

In any active war zone there are hundreds of senior commanders with thousands of personal staff. In addition there are tens of thousands of scribes, observers and organisational officers of the Departmento Munitorium. Indeed, for every fighting man there stands behind him a virtual army of bureaucrats and support personnel whose efforts keep the armies going. However, within the Imperial Guard itself there is a complex system of high ranking officers responsible for the strategic and grand tactical military operations.

These staff officers rarely take part in the fighting. Occasionally an Imperial Guard general might find himself embroiled in the action, but this is likely to be by accident rather than by intent. The only staff officers who regularly fight at the front are Commissars.

Commissars

Imperial Guard regiments are recruited from all over the human galaxy. Warriors from one planet speak different, sometimes unintelligible, dialects or practice strange customs which are baffling to soldiers from other worlds. These vast differences make it hard for some regimental commanders to operate closely with troops from different worlds. If colonels, captains and lieutenants are to function as part of a cohesive army they must be united in their common purpose no matter how culturally diverse their backgrounds might be.

Commissars provide the link between regimental commanders and strategic officers. Commissars have to be tough. Some regiments are composed of savage former gang fighters, or vicious barbarians, who are naturally antagonistic to authority. The colonel of such a regiment is likely to be as wild and anarchic as his men, if not more so! The loyalty of such troops must be earned and the Commissar must be prepared to demonstrate his courage in battle.

Commissars are recruited into the Departmento Munitorium from the Schola Progenium, the rigorous orphanages for families of Adepts run by the missionaries of the Adeptus Ministorum. Many serve as Storm Troopers before becoming Commissars, so they are hardly strangers to

warfare. Every regiment has at least one Commissar and many large regiments have several who remain with the regiment while it is deployed in a war zone.

The chief task of the Commissar is to preserve the fighting spirit and loyalty of the regiment. If discipline is lax the Commissar will step in to reinforce it. If the regiment's officers are incompetent or lack courage the Commissar must retrain and fortify them or, failing that, allow the regiment's squads to be dispersed to other commanders. If troops are rowdy and troublesome the Commissar must keep order. A Commissar knows that the best troops are the hardest to keep in line. He embodies strength, bravery and loyalty, and serves as the ultimate example of human courage. Commissars are also zealots fiercely loyal to the Imperial Cult. In the Schola Progenium they are schooled to love the Emperor and desire nothing more than to serve to the best of their abilities. They tolerate no disloyalty and remain vigilant for spies, mutants and agents of chaos that may have infiltrated the men under their charge. They are versed in the Imperial scriptures and will frequently give readings before battle is joined. Most of all they despise the Emperor's enemies and desire nothing more than the chance to crush the foe beneath the righteous heel of Imperial might.

+++Storm Troopers+++

The Storm Troopers are the Imperial Guard's best fighting regiment. Unlike other regiments they are recruited from all across the Imperium, from the very best Imperial Guard units. Companies or battalions of Storm Troopers are sent to war zones to bolster the fighting strength of other Imperial Guard regiments. In combat, they provide a core of well-trained, well-equipped squads that can be deployed amongst other Imperial Guard regiments as needed.

Storm Troopers are also recruited from the orphan sons of Imperial officials from all over the galaxy. The families of men who die in the Emperor's service are looked after very well by the missions of the Imperial Cult, the most famous of which is the Schola Progenium. Here young orphans are schooled to love the Emperor. They are shown the many ways in which they can earn the Emperor's gratitude and thereby attain the highest honor in the Imperium. They gladly embrace a demanding and unrelenting regimen of prayer, study, and physical training. Though hard, the path is trod willingly for all know that those who excel are marked for greatness.

Many students of the Schola are recruited into the Inquisition, the Ecclesiarchy, the Guard Staff Officer Corps, and the Storm Troopers. The best of these often attend the School of the Commissar, and become the Emperor's representatives on the battlefield.

+++Imperial Guard Rough Riders+++

ROUGH RIDERS

There are many worlds in the Imperium where the horse is still widely used. Not all of these are feral or mediaeval worlds. Some, like Avar III, have a privileged class which spends a great deal of time on horseback, whiling away their leisured hours with equestrian sports and hunting. Others, like New Klondike, have rough terrain and low native fuel resources, which make the horse a more practical form of transport than a motorized vehicle.

Even among the feral and mediaeval worlds, there is an enormous range of cultural types which may give rise to elite cavalry forces. There are the outriders of nomadic herding cultures, as on Dolgan IV and Temujin's World; there are mounted raiders such as the Horse Lodges of Cochise and the *kozaki* of Novgorod; and there are formalized horse-warrior aristocracies such as the Holy Orders of Avalon and the *badokai* of Epsilon Tokugawa III.

Common to all these planets with diverse cultures and customs is their equestrian elite, a warrior class that has accumulated generations of experience and tactical wisdom in the use of cavalry on the battlefield. These horse-warriors are always subject to close inspection by the Imperium, and

they are frequently drafted by the Imperial Guard when a regiment is raised from their home world. On the more advanced worlds, cavalry units are always incorporated into the Planetary Defense Force and it is from this that the Guard recruits. On some of the more primitive worlds, the Guard recruits directly from tribes and clans of horse warriors - legends and great epics are born at these times, and tales of undying heroes joining the Star Riders to battle on the Fields of the Night are commonplace.

The bond between a rider and his mount is not easily broken, and the horse-warriors are not recruited merely for their courage or skill at arms. The Guard does not overlook their specialized skills, and riders are always accompanied by their mounts when they are drafted into a regiment. After retraining with the weapons and tactics of the Imperium, these horse-warriors are formed into mounted platoons, universally known as Rough Riders.

I have seen war in all its forms, I have seen feral world savages braining each other with stones, and I have monitored the death of a whole planet at the hands of a virus bomb. I have seen Space Marines drop to certain death, and win. I have seen Titans crush whole platoons underfoot. But there is no more stirring sight in war than the charge of massed cavalry. Dravin Gratz, 14th Tharinga. Regiment, Imperial Guard

TRAINING

During the long period of transit to their regiment's posting, Rough Riders are trained in the use of Imperial Guard weapons and tactics, just like their infantry counterparts. They are also trained in the use of the Imperial Guard hunting lance with its shaped-explosive head, and in advanced cavalry techniques. Imperial Guard transit ships are large enough to provide extensive training areas even for mounted units, as well as the stabling and accommodation needed for the horses and their riders.

It is not only the riders who learn new skills - their mounts are given biochem treatment and extensive training to prepare them for modern battlefield conditions. Once they arrive at the combat zone, months or years after leaving the familiar terrain of their home world, Rough Rider horses will not panic under fire, or shy away from unusual sights and smells such as Orks and Dreadnoughts. Over the cratered terrain of a battlefield that has suffered a heavy bombardment, horses have often proved superior to motorbikes or armoured vehicles. A platoon of skilled Rough Riders can be an effective assault and skirmishing force, able to move rapidly over the broken ground, and equally able to climb steep slopes as to gallop along narrow ravines. And when they finally confront the enemy, Rough Riders can charge into the opposing lines with their explosive lances, quickly changing to chainswords and laspistols after the initial onslaught.

CUSTOMS AND RITUALS

Like other members of the Imperial Guard, Rough Riders retain many of the customs of their home worlds. The use of tattoos, ritual scarring, unofficial uniforms and tribal symbols is widespread amongst the Riders, and many platoons retain the pennants of their old tribe or unit, flying them from their lances below an official Guard banner. The horses of the Rough Riders are freeze-marked on the rump with Imperial Guard insignia: the freezing brand painlessly destroys the pigmentation of the hair and leaves a permanent mark in the shape of a stylized eagle surrounding the head of a horse. Many horses also retain the brands and markings they carried before recruitment to the Guard; among some of the Riders drawn from more barbaric cultures it is even the custom to ritually scar or tattoo the mount along with its rider, leaving raised welts or colourful markings to commemorate the platoon's most heroic actions.

In many regiments, the officers of the Rough Riders are drawn from a long-established ruling elite. Despite their recruitment into the Guard and their official ranks, these nobles are regarded by both themselves and the other troops of the regiment as natural leaders, able to command the service and respect of their home world inferiors beyond the call of duty. It is common for these noble Riders to pass their leisure time in the hunt, using infantrymen as beaters to flush out the exotic wildlife of the planets on which they are stationed. Their training and the use of explosive lances hardly makes for a fair competition between hunter and hunted, and it is usually considered poor sportsmanship to arm the lance unless the prey is especially large and ferocious.

Other customs are upheld even on the battlefield, and the Guard may condone unusual tactics by Rough Rider platoons if the skills of their home worlds are shown to be effective against the Imperium's foes. The most common Rough Rider tactic is to charge the enemy with explosive lances, switching to chainswords and laspistols once the platoon have made their initial breakthrough. Some Rough Riders, especially those who were accustomed to fighting with cavalry sabers, prefer to arm themselves with chainswords, slashing fiercely to either side as they contact the enemy. Other units tend to stand off, firing at their opponents with lasguns, often galloping past and making themselves hard targets to hit. Whatever their tactics, the mobility and speed of Rough Riders always make them a potent force on the battlefield, able to spearhead an attack as easily as run a flanking maneuver, thus keeping enemy commanders on their toes watching for unexpected attacks by the mounted Guardsmen.

+++WHITESHIELDS+++

The air was bright with laser fire above Three Platoon's position. The Whiteshields watched as four Ork Dreadnoughts lumbered through the smoke - an armoured spearhead, trying to break through the Imperial Guard line.

Super-attack Onslaught, Yarren though automatically: two power claws, one las-cannon, one heavy bolter. And they were heading straight for Three Platoon.

Six las-cannon fired almost together. Two Dreadnoughts fell amid crimson sheets of flame, but the other two kept coming. A deadly curtain of bolter fire wiped out half of A and B squads.

Yarren darted out from behind a heap of rubble, zigzagging through the smoke and fire to the wreckage of the Command Section. Captain Mordin was dead, and Commissar Traidir was seriously wounded. Yarren prised the platoon's standard from the dead fingers of the Orderly, and knelt over the Commissar.

"Permission to advance, Commissar?" he asked. His eyes were bright - here was his chance to prove himself.

The Commissar raised his head a little, and smiled weakly.

"The Emperor guard you." he whispered horsely. Then died.

Children, you call them! They pull a trigger just as well as veterans, and they have the spirit of a bull narthax. Call them children if you wish - I call them troops. Good troops. -Colonel Marus Cullen 5th Pannonia Regiment

When the youngsters come of age - the precise age varies according to the regiment's homeworld culture - they begin their training as Guardsmen. During their training period they are officially designated probitors; in practice, they are given names from the regiment's homeworld culture, such as Cadets, Probationers or Gun Babies. But by far the most common name for probitors, especially in regiments from feral or mediaeval homeworlds, is Whiteshields. On these worlds, the young warriors carry shields with no markings - not until they have proved themselves in battle can they claim the right to display the tribe's colours or the heraldry of their fathers. This practice has been continued in the Guard, and all probitors have blank insignia: they show neither regimental, company nor platoon symbols until they earn the right on the battlefield.

In most regiments, recruitment to the Whiteshields represents the first phase of the youngsters' passage into adulthood, and is accompanied by appropriate rituals from the regiment's home culture. Whiteshields continue to perform menial and support duties, but combat training takes up an increasing proportion of their time, until they are Judged to be ready for action. Finally, they get a

chance to prove their mettle in combat and to demonstrate that they are worthy of becoming true warriors in the Guard.

Regiments of the Imperial Guard are generally posted to combat zones immense distances from their homeworlds, and it is rarely practical to recruit from the homeworld to make up for combat losses. The Guard therefore uses various other methods of bringing regiments up to strength, depending on the circumstances: amalgamating depleted regiments into a single fighting force is common practice, especially when the regiments are being constantly transported to new battle zones. Regiments that are left to garrison a world they have conquered, on the other hand, recruit from local sources - the most common method (and by far the safest on hostile planets) is to draft the sons of the regiment into the Guard when they come of age.

The children fathered by members of an Imperial Guard regiment are usually brought up completely within the regiment itself. It acts as a kind of extended family, infusing the youngsters with the culture of the homeworld they have never seen, and assigns them menial and support duties which would otherwise eat into the regiment's fighting strength.

rites of passage

It is often observed that Whiteshields work faster, train harder and fight more fiercely than most experienced Guardsmen. For a Whiteshield, passing from probitor to true Guardsman is far more than a simple promotion; it is their entry into adulthood - this gives them the status and respect due a Guardsman and, most important, the right to bear the regimental insignia and the ritual markings of a warrior.

When a Whiteshield takes to the battlefield, he is driven by a desire to prove his courage and skills that borders on the fanatical. Whiteshields are fearless in the face of enemies that older, and wiser, Guardsmen treat with caution. For a Whiteshield, failure to win his colours is a terrible blow - showing cowardice is unforgivable, and an honourable death is certainly to be preferred to the dishonour and ridicule heaped upon the weak-hearted.

Whiteshields serve alongside the other squads in their regiment, distinguished only by their bravery, and the white badges and helmet stripes on their uniforms. Each Whiteshield squad has an experienced sergeant to guide it through training and in its first battles. The squads are usually put into a normal platoon to learn from the example of the troopers around them - occasionally a company will form up a platoon solely of Whiteshield squads, trusting that their courage will compensate for lack of experience.

Only those who distinguish themselves in battle are allowed to become Guardsmen proper. Some regiments merely demand that a Whiteshield take part in a battle without giving way to fear. Many only accept those who have drawn blood or killed an enemy, sometimes requiring the young warrior to collect a trophy to prove his claims: an opponent's back banner or weapon perhaps, or a more gruesome and bloody memento taken from the body of a fallen enemy.

At the end of his training, after he has shown his skill, a Whiteshield is ceremonially awarded his colours: his blank, white badge is replaced with the regimental number and the colours of his platoon; he takes the shoulder motif of his company; and the helmet markings of the squad to which he is assigned. More important than this, however, are the unofficial rituals in which the new Guardsman is welcomed by his fellows into the regiment. These rituals are taken from the regiment's homeworld culture and vary widely throughout the Guard; tattoos and ritual scars are common and receiving these marks without a cry of pain is as much a test of the youngster's courage as his bravery on the battlefield.

At last the Whiteshield emerges from his training as a full member of the Guard, wearing his scars and tattoos with as much pride as the uniform of his regiment, ready to return to the battlefield with his new experience and, perhaps, a little more caution.

Only in the Space Marines of the Legiones Astartes are courage and expertise perfectly blended. In other troops they are present in varying degrees and proportions, and many scholars have debated their relative merits. For my own part, I come down on the side of courage. For courage can sometimes make a virtue of inexperience. I myself have commanded Imperial Guard troops whose probitor units have achieved great things, because their courage was infinite and because they were too inexperienced to realise that their goal was impossible - Leman Russ DC Natura Belli, Book XIV

Every man in the regiment who could stand was in the assembly hall. Yarren stood at rigid attention in front of the dias, along with the other two survivors of the Whiteshields. His body felt like one huge bullet-hole, and he was dizzy from loss of blood, but elation forced everything else to the back of his mind. He hardly heard Colonel Tarvit's words.

"...Because of Probitor Yarren's courage and quick thinking, and the dedication of the Whiteshields following his example, the Ork spearhead was destroyed. It is my judgement that the Whiteshields have proved themselves worthy of full Guard status. I order that the survivors be assigned to One Platoon to replace losses, and the others buried with full regimental honours. Does any man here know of any reason why this order should not be carried out?"

Silence.

"Then let it be done." The Colonel's orderly came forward, and removed the blank white badges from the chests of the three Whiteshields. Yarren found himself holding his breath as the Regimental colours were affixed to his flak tunic.

"When they are judged to be fit, these three men shall receive the scars they won today. And Guardsman Yarren shall be inducted into the High Eagle Lodge, under my own patronage."

The hall resounded with cheering as the three were led away to the med-bay. Yarren thought of the rituals of full manhood that awaited him, and of the mysteries of the High Eagle Lodge, most respected of the regiment's warrior lodges. He had proved himself today.

But now he was tired. More tired than he had ever been.

Yarren gritted his teeth against the pain and concentrated on staying perfectly still. Not only was it a disgrace to flinch or cry out, it was also dangerous - and he didn't want to end up with a severed artery instead of the first scares of manhood.

At last, Adjutant Morth straightened up, wiping his Torathim hunting knife. Yarren relaxed - and then yelped in pain as the two sergeants rubbed a black powder into the cuts.

"This will sting a little." said Sergeant Raddon in his deadpan voice, and Sergeant Ferth laughed. Yarren Reddened.

"Don't worry, little warrior." said Ferth cheerfully. "They all jump a bit - I did - but the powder makes you scare well."

"Well." said Morth, stepping back, "You're no longer a child, Yarren. You have your uniform, you have your lasgun, and when those cuts heal you'll have your first scars." He sheathed his knife and stood at attention. "Report for training, Guardsman."

Guardsman. The word echoed round Yarren's head as he marched down the corridor, flanked by the two sergeants. From now on, there would be no more kitchen duties. He had proved himself in the field - he was now a Warrior.

+++Penal Legions+++

"The Penal Legions are made up from the scum of civilisation, the heretical, criminal element that is active on every planet across the galaxy. It is the Adeptus Arbites who deal with these lawless souls, and the best way is to send them to the Penal Legions."

There are those who serve the Emperor unwillingly. Those that are disloyal and rebellious. Those that are willing to spread anarchy and dissension through the ranks of the Imperials. These men and woman are rounded up by the Emperors police force.

The Adeptus Arbites, and shuffled off into dank dark cells never to be heard from again. Those that are lucky enough, the toughest of criminals are inducted into an organisation like none-other. The Legions Penatante, or the Penal Legion as it is more commonly known. The Penal Legions ranks are swelled with the undevout. Mass-murderers, rebellious PDF, thieves, rapists, and hijackers all form the Penal Legions for their sins.

The Penal Legion is not an army in its own right, but is useful where greater numbers are necessary to win the day. New troops have their heads shaved and tattooed with unit insignia, and explosive slave-collars are put around their necks. The collars are a disciplinary device rather than a means

of turning the troops into Human Bombs. The Penal Legions are part of a regular fighting force of the Imperial Guard, and a commander who regards Penal troops merely as cannon-fodder and uses them wastefully is liable to end up in a Penal Legion himself.

"There are those who undervalue the Penal Battalions. But they should consider this: should a man who has wronged the Emperor be allowed to wrong him further? For each man executed is a man who can no longer serve, and to fail in service to the Emperor is the greatest of sins" -Leman Russ, Meditations on Imperial Command, Book XXI

This Penal Legion....Legion 999 was formed from the scum in the Segmentum Solar. Men, women and beasts (unusual, yes...), prisoners all, during the Dark Founding, were gathered, and rather graciously granted a trip among the stars with Crusading Marine Chapters. Many agreed, and adventure and terror would be kinship to them all..... Dimitri lowered his rifle, 'damned his foolishness on Armageddon, running from the Orks was folly. And what's worse was surviving the Commissars Bolt Blast to the back. If one thing was certain the Emperor's divinity was involved'. He had been placed among the thieves and cut-throats, to serve out the rest of his miserable life among the legions of Penal warriors. He was better than that. Or so he thought. Large of stature, Dimitri had been a Heavy weapons trooper with F Company 3rd Platoon 9th Armageddon Army. Dimitri clutched the Las-rifle. 'So small' he thought. Nothing like the Heavy Bolter he used to tote. A noise followed him out of past thoughts, a clanging from the claxon above his head. This had been a damned upset. Everything had run smoothly for 7 months. Up until now. Now the ship was being boarded, but by what? Screams were heard on decks above, getting louder. The fighting had begun. Arbitrator Malux clutched his Bolter and belted out commands. 'Ah right ya lads, it's been quite a picnic for you so far. Let's give these pirates, these scallywags a whipping they've never had. Let's send 'em back to the ships they've come from' Dimitri looked at the young Arbiter and grinned. 'Just a boy' he thought 'but devout'. The noises grew louder, and seemed a bit discerning, growling? With that the Arbiter released the blast doors, they heaved open under the pressure of steam, smoke and fire. 'What a mess....' Dimitri was cut short. 'CHARGE!! ya rabble...its into the mouth of Hell for ya!!' With that the Penal Squad lunged forward. Smoke filled the room and nothing could be seen. Dimitri grasped his weapon tight. Aboard the Obsidian tooth, Chapter Master Kabal felt an emptiness in his bowels. The adept's voice was monotone on the PA. 'Penal Ship 305- mark Alpha registered Segmentum Solar overrun.'

+++Ogryn Fighters+++

Ogryns are an invaluable asset to the Imperial War Machine. Ogryns come from cold, harsh worlds with barren and rocky. To survive these adverse conditions, their bodies have adjusted admirably. Their stocky frames are accustomed to long periods of starvation and prolonged darkness. With this physical enhancement, their mental abilities have also diminished considerably. However, they are excellent fighters. Specially trained Commissars spend long periods of time patiently training these lumbering beasts, and instilling the necessary procedures to handle their weapons in their simple minds. There are two qualities which make Ogryns excellent fighters:

- 1) They are absolutely without fear. No psychology affects them whatsoever, and they cannot be broken under any circumstances.
- 2) Once befriended, they are absolutely loyal. They will go to any measures to please their masters.

+++COMMISSAR TRAINING SQUADS+++

The Schola Progenium teach and train orphans of Imperial Officials until they are ready to become Cadet Commissars. As such, their training continues on the galaxy's battlegrounds where they are formed into special squads. Fighting alongside Imperial Guard units, they are completely devoted servants of the Emperor whose loyalty and bravery know no bounds.

Devotion to the Imperial cause, sound judgement, unshakable resolve and honour are the qualities required in a Commissar. Personnel selected to become Cadet Commissars are drawn from schools run by Missionaries of the Ministorum. There are many such schools throughout the Imperium, known as Schola Progenium. Here, orphans of Imperial Officials who gave their lives in the service of the Emperor are educated by the Missionaries. They soon learn to regard the Emperor as their spiritual father and build a strong personal devotion to the Imperial cause. Their sole ambition is to serve the Imperium and Humanity in some way, and the special qualities of theft education make them well suited for service in the Imperial Guard or the Inquisition as Cadet Commissars.

It is the duty of the Commissars in the Imperial Guard to maintain the highest standards of discipline and inspire the troops by their own example. They have the power of absolution in order to restore the morale of the troops at critical moments on the battlefield. Commissars are both feared and respected. They do not often need to exercise their powers because their presence among the troops is enough to instil devotion and confidence.

It is important that Commissars remain aloof from ordinary troops in the Imperial Guard.

Commissars need to exercise authority over ordinary officers, often in front of the officer's own unit. The Commissar must be seen as representative of the Emperor and thus a superior authority to any officer. Furthermore, a Commissar is required to deal with troops from many different tribal and racial origins, so cannot be associated with any particular group himself. Consequently, the origins and recruitment of Commissars is of vital importance to their efficient exercise of discipline.

COMMISSAR TRAINING SQUADS

CADET COMMISSARS

The Commissar-General of an Imperial Guard Regiment selects the most promising recruits from those recommended to him by the schools of the Ministorum. After basic Imperial Guard training these become Cadet Commissars and proceed to special training for their demanding responsibilities as Commissars. The best way to achieve this is for the Cadets to be instructed under battlefield conditions.

For a Cadet Commissar to learn how to function according to his vocation, he must understand the nature of the troops for whose morale and spiritual welfare he is accountable. You cannot teach in theory what has to be practised in a storm of energy beams, was how Commissar-General Obin Heethe summed UP the need for Cadet Commissars to live, fight and if necessary die alongside the troops they were supposed to inspire. For this reason, Cadet Commissars use the same standard weapon as Imperial Guardsmen, the lasgun. This training forms the basis of much of the respect accorded to Commissars by Guardsmen, for they know that only those Cadets who have shown bravery and devotion in the face of enemy fire are selected.

For an experienced Commissar, there is no greater recognition of his service to the Emperor than to be deemed worthy of instructing a new generation of Commissars.

Commissar Training Squad

The Commissar-General is the senior Commissar of the regiment with the longest service and most extensive campaign experience. He assigns Commissars to Imperial Guard officers according to his Judgement of the battlefield situation or the character of the Imperial Guard Officers in question. Cadet Commissars are allocated to Commissar Training Squads by the Commissar-General of an Imperial Guard regiment. These squad members are identified by a blue uniform trim and Cadet badge.

The Commissar-General assigns one of his Commissars to take the regiment's Cadets and form a tactical unit in its own right, known as the Commissar Training Squad. The unit is made up of one Commissar and nine Cadet Commissars. The Commissar Training Squad accompanies Imperial Guard forces into battle and takes part in some of the fiercest fighting.

The training of a Cadet Commissar has no fixed duration. A Cadet qualifies as a full Commissar on the judgement of the Commissar-General. He will be awarded his Commissar status as soon as he is deemed worthy of it by his actions. This provides great inspiration to the other Cadets on the battlefield. The new Commissar can then be allocated Commissarial duties in his own right.

Commissar Training Squads are highly motivated fighting units, respected by all other troops in the Imperial Guard. Any Imperial Guard force accompanied by such squads will consider itself fortunate and probably destined for victory.

When a Commissar decides that a Cadet has failed in his duty, but has not shown cowardice or insubordination, the Cadet is relieved of his position and duties. Commissar Cadets who fail their training can often get a commission in a penal battalion. Others volunteer for service in a Rogue Trader entourage. Sometimes, their destiny will be decided by the Commissar-General or Commissar under whom the ex-Cadet trained.

COMMISSAR TRAINING SQUADS IN ACTION

The Commissar Training Squad is often deployed in the most critical zone of the battle or with the most hard-pressed detachment of the Regiment.

Qualifying as a Commissar

Players who deploy Cadet Commissars in their Imperial Guard force may check to see if any qualify as fully fledged Commissars during the action. A Cadet must accumulate 25 merit points to be deemed a full Commissar by the Commissar-General. If these are accumulated during a single battle, the Cadet can be awarded battlefield promotion. Otherwise merit points can be carried over into another game and accumulated during a series of battles. Merit points are earned by the following actions:

- Restoring the morale of a faltering unit ...5 points,
- Slaying an enemy personality2 points,
- Surviving a battle1 point,
- Capturing an enemy standard or personality.. 3 points,
- Assuming command of a halted or retreating unit 1 point,
- Bearing the Commissar Standard 3 points,
- Character judgement of Commissar-General D6 points * Roll once for this at the end of the battle.

When a Cadet is promoted his qualities are sometimes tested by his appointment to different kinds of unit. Qualified Commissars are often attached to Abhuman units, Rough Rider units, Ogryn and aerial units. Those who have performed in an outstanding manner can be seconded to, the Secutor regiments of Titan Orders. A Cadet Commissar, who achieves battlefield promotion continues to function, normally for the duration of that battle, acting as adjutant, to the Commissar commanding the squad..

Commissar Standards

The Commissar Training Squad may carry a standard. This standard bears a motto chosen by the Commissar-General. The standard marks the position of the Commissar Training Squad on the battlefield. It may be borne by one of the Cadet Commissars as a test of character and must never be allowed to fall into enemy hands. It is entirely up to the player as to whether his squad carries a standard.

COMMISSAR TRAINING SQUADS

Retreating Ork units returned to their battered stronghold by passing through a breach in the wall. Guard units followed up mercilessly and now intended to swarm into the stronghold by the same route. C and K Companies engaged Orkish defensive units on the flanks while the recently reinforced E Company drove straight into the heart of the remaining enemy firepower. Commissar-General Tagullen allocated his Training Squad to E Company for the assault.

Frask listened to the muffled sounds of battle get louder and clutched his lasgun as the lumbering Rhino shook up its occupants. Your sacrifice does not go unnoticed, he thought as he looked at them. He knew few of them by name but it did not matter that the faces changed. It was the expression those faces held that was important. He saw devotion in their eyes and he knew that the Emperor was with them.

The machine lurched once more and halted. The driver's voice shouted over the intercom. 'Disembark The heavy door of the carrier opened and the terrible roar of weapon fire bit the troops. The unit ran from the rear of the vehicle. Other troops were disembarking from their carriers too. The Rhinos had halted halfway up a steep pile of rubble and debris that had once formed part of the fortress wall.

One squad scrambled most of the way up the slope immediately but were cut down by a sudden intense burst of boiler fire. Frask was with another two squads of Guardsmen who threw themselves to the ground as frag grenades exploded around them. Frask picked himself up and quickly glanced around. The troopers saw him and rose to their feet, shouting cries of Imperial loyalty and charging forwards. The cadet saw no doubt in the eyes of his comrades and he ran with them. And they were united as they surrendered themselves to the embrace of the Emperor's will.

+++THE BATTLE FOR ARMAGEDDON+++

On the day of the Feast of the Emperor's Ascension, 40,941, a massive Ork assault on the hive world of Armageddon began. System ships from space hulk Alveus Alpha Alpha Sextus smashed through the orbital cordon of the planet, annihilating the obsolete orbital monitors. A massive space drop swiftly overwhelmed most of the western continent of Armageddon Prime. Lightning assaults by the highly mobile Ork forces encircled hive after hive. Tens of thousands of Ork Boyz blasted through the hives' outer defences and massacred or enslaved the populations within.

Across the continent the forces of humanity were driven into retreat. Due to criminal negligence on the part of Overlord von Strab (cross-reference to Administratum file: Armageddon 40004, Prosecutions for war-crimes), the ill-prepared human forces were nearly swept away under the green tide. Divisions of the Planetary Defence Force were sent out piecemeal by von Strab only to be outflanked and destroyed by the enemy.

Endless columns of Ork war machines raised plumes of dust hundreds of metres high as they raced across the ash-wastes of Armageddon Prime. The voices of a hundred thousand Orks roared their brutal cries of victory. Reports came in from battlefield after battlefield where the blood of brave human warriors stained the multi-coloured sands. It became obvious that von Strab had seriously underestimated the cunning and strategic ability of his foe Warlord Ghazghkull Thraka, Overboss of all the Goffs, Prophet of the Waaagh!

Von Strab fled to the relative safety of the south, to Armageddon Secundus, the industrial heartland of the hive world. Two days later the Orks invaded Armageddon Secundus and the true battle for Armageddon began. Armageddon Secundus contained 80% of the world's industrial capacity, vital not only for fighting the campaign in hand but also for securing surrounding star systems against alien threats. Ghazghkull wished to rip the industrial heart out of his foe. The only hope of relief was from the Space Marine Chapters but von Strab refused to call for help, still believing he could defeat the Orks and claim victory for himself.

The Orks' assault started in the Season of Shadows when the volcanic mountains of Armageddon erupt, sending great clouds of smoke and dust swirling across the turbulent blood-coloured skies. Massive armoured columns smashed into the thinly-held Imperial border positions. War buggies raced across the blazing sands towards the human lines. A howling mass of green-faced devils overran the hard-pressed human defenders. By the flickering light of the Palidus Mountains, as Mount Eschatus itself erupted and lava bubbled and hissed down its slopes, man and Ork fought and died. Bolters thundered relentlessly. Gargants lumbered forward, dwarfing fleeing human warriors, myriad turrets spitting death. The Orks punched holes through the human lines and drove south. Two tribes swept east of the Palidian range heading south towards Hades hive. The remaining Ork tribe struck out west towards the port of Helsreach.

As the Season of Storms broke, blowing the clouds from the sky, the Orks' drive south continued. They punched through the pitiful improvised defences the human survivors had built along the riverbanks and swept round the Palidus Mountains to Infernus hive. Demoralised by continuous news of defeat, with no faith in the promises of the planetary overlord and dismayed by the sheer size of the mechanised Ork hordes, the Governor of Infernus surrendered without a fight. Bike-mounted Ork outriders harried the hundred kilometre-long refugee columns that fled the city, herding them back to Infernos and slave labour in the factories.

Given the fact that the Orks measured senior citizens, women and children against their own inhuman standards of toughness, hundreds of thousands were to die in captivity.

Soon Hades hive cluster was besieged and the site of the heaviest fighting yet seen during the campaign. The legendary Commissar Yarrick supervised the defences. In those dark days he seemed to be everywhere, supervising the welding shut of the great blast portals, personally negotiating treaties of allegiance with the hive gangs and inducting them into the army, raising the spirits of a people demoralised by starvation and defeat with his own unquenchable belief in ultimate victory. Amazingly he welded together a ragtag army capable of standing off the Orks. At Hades they halted.

One can only imagine what it must have been like. The hundreds of kilometres of earthworks hastily thrown up by the slave gangs overseen by whip-cracking Ork Runtherdz, the giant Gargants blasting away at the distant hive spires, guns thundering like the laughter of mad gods. Hundreds of thousands of red hate-filled eyes glaring at the prize, so near and yet so unreachable. The human population scuttling through the shadows of the hive, endless kilometres of corridor darkened from the need to save power. Thousands starving or eating rats and roaches. Who knows what feats of heroism and horror took place in that place, at that time? Those who survived do not talk much about it, save to praise the bravery of Yarrick.

In the west the defenders of the port of Helsreach, heartened by the resistance in Hades, put up a brave fight. They defended the dock yards and refineries bravely. Street gangs using improvised weapons ambushed the Orks at every turn. Hastily converted armoured supertankers were pressed into service to evacuate non-combatants. There was not enough room to take everyone so lots were drawn for berths on the ships. Weeping families parted knowing that they probably would never see each other again.

Once the last ship had sailed the defenders knew there was no refuge for them; each member of the assembled Hive Defence Units swore a mighty oath to sell his life as dearly as possible. Driven by hate and rage they fought the Orks with the fury of a berserk rhinodon. Suicide bombers leapt amid Ork patrols and detonated their chest bombs. The corridors of Helsreach ran with blood. The drivers of the great loading cranes in the harbour welded themselves into their vehicles and attacked the Gargants. Wave after wave of Ork attacks were repulsed until even the Ork generals began to doubt the wisdom of their attack. Messages of hope from Hades hive were broadcast over the comm-net in Helsreach.

It was the people of Helsreach's darkest hour when the port finally fell. Defeat, when it came, arrived from a most unexpected quarter. Ork Weirdboyz summoned a monstrous psychic storm. Waves of pain burst into the minds of the hive's defenders. Some went mad, some died of shock, the heads of some exploded. Under cover of this storm the Orks entered Helsreach and wiped out the defenders to the last man. When word of the fall of Helsreach reached Hades Commissar Yarrick ordered an hour of silence and then locked himself in the Emperor's Chapel to pray. Some say that the old man communed with the deity and found fresh inspiration. Those who knew him well say he wept.

Ghazghkull himself arrived to supervise the siege of Hades. He had heard tales of bitter human resistance and thought he'd better oversee the defeat of Yarrick personally. For weeks a long duel was fought out under the dreadful yellow sky. Ghazghkull tried every stratagem. He feinted assaults on one part of the hive while the main strength of his troops attacked elsewhere. He airdropped Stormboy kommando units onto the peaks of the hive spires and ordered them to seek entrance through the ventilation system. He ordered his Mekboyz to build him mighty siege engines, enormous towers with huge jackhammers, modified Gargants with earthmoving blades and great scoops, giant earthboring drills which sought to eat through the surface of the hive.

For every strategy implemented by the Orks Commissar Yarrick found an answer. Mobile reserves used the hive's transport infra-structure to respond to the feints. The kommandos were met by volunteer cadres of tunnel fighters, drug-crazed madmen chosen from the depleted ranks of the city's maintenance engineers, many of whom had lost all their loved ones during the siege. These men slipped into the maintenance shafts stripped naked, armed only with bolt pistol and knife and an extensive knowledge of the system that enabled them to lay traps and ambushes. These men fought a lonely and unsung war in the terrible darkness but they did their job. Not a single Ork kommando emerged from the air shafts alive. Suicide squads from the Hive Defence Force sallied out at night and assaulted the siege machines with melta bombs and power axes.

While the siege of Hades continued Ork columns rolled south from Helsreach and Infernus. They were heading for Acheron and what appeared to be the last bastion of human resistance. It was the beginning of the Season of Fire and temperatures outside the hive cities had started to soar. The hardy Orks and the specially equipped human military didn't have to worry but the refugees who had escaped the Orkish net began to die in droves.

The Acheronians steeled themselves for battle. They knew their time had come. Looking out through their hive's ocular monitors they could see the endless ranks of Orks approaching. Horn-helmed bikers, kustomised war buggies and great siege engines stretched out to the horizon. The only promise of support they had was from Overlord von Strab. It consisted of his personal good wishes and twenty of his elite personal bodyguard who had displeased him. With an earthshaking roar the Orks advanced, the air itself vibrating with the thrum of thousands of powerful engines. They swept through the outer hives of the cluster and laid siege to the core hive itself. Poorly provisioned and inadequately armed as his forces were, the hive governor refused to surrender. *"We will fight to the last man,"* he announced. *"And then our ghosts will come back to haunt the Orkish scum."*

The Orks charged, confident of victory. Suddenly great holes were torn in their ranks. Mighty explosions tossed their vehicles into the air like chaff. The inhabitants of Acheron looked on in amazement as the orbital bombardment continued. Great ships filled the sky and Imperial Thunderhawk gunships dropped earthward, delivering advance squads of Space Marines into the fray. Taken by surprise, the Orks reeled back. The Space Marines continued to pour from their landing craft, bolters spitting death. The hive defenders rallied and emerged to aid their saviours. For the first time since the campaign started the Orks tasted defeat.

A relief force headed by the Salamanders, the Ultramarines and the Blood Angels raced north in an effort to relieve Hades hive. Just as the Space Marines broke through the Ork front lines, Hades fell. Ork boyz scoured the corridors, the last blast doors were cracked and fighting raged through the former homes and workplaces of the people. In the last few hours the fighting was deadly and virtually hand-to-hand as battle raged through the last secure areas of the hive. Commissar Yarrick was one of the few survivors. His terribly wounded body was found in the ruins, dozens of Ork bodies heaped about him. Fortunately for the Imperium this exceptionally brave warrior lived to fight another day.

In the west a new wave of Ork reinforcements had arrived and a massive push against Tartarus hive began. The Imperial lines had been stripped bare in order to mount the ill-fated relief operation on Hades hive and the Orks easily broke through and pushed on south to besiege Tartarus hive.

Ghazghkull himself took personal command of the assault and launched his last desperate attempt to win the war. For days everything hung in the balance. If the Orks could take Tartarus they could break the back of Imperial resistance, devastating the South's industrial base to the point where the war would become unwinnable. It looked for a while as if the Warlord might succeed as headlong assaults swept over the city.

In a desperate gamble the Blood Angels returned to their ships. The Space Marines descended by drop pod and Thunderhawk gunship behind the main body of the Ork spearhead, cutting off an entire Goff Ork tribe and Ghazghkull himself. A thin line of red-armoured Space Marines held the handful of intact bridges across the viscid flow of corrosive sludge known as the Skeletus river.

Unless they recaptured the bridges over the Skeletus the Orks could not retreat from the trap Tartarus had become and would soon run low on food and ammunition. Soon the Salamanders, Ultramarines and Imperial Guard forces returning from Hades hive would crush the Orks once and

for all. The only way the Orks could escape would be to overrun the bridgeheads and fight their way across the Skeletus.

+++COMMISSAR YARRICK+++

The Saviour Of Armageddon

Commissar Yarrick was an old man when Ork Warlord Ghazghkull Thraka attacked the world of Armageddon and the siege of Hades began. His years with the Imperial Guard had been eventful ones for he had seen action on a dozen warzones with regiments from Necromunda, Luther McIntyre, and Armageddon. His last mission was to run the Departamento Munitorium recruitment program on Armageddon, where the 4th regiment was being reformed. Armageddon being a large and populous world with a substantial military recruitment base, the 4th Armageddon was a big regiment – almost an army in its own right.

In his youth Yarrick had learned the Ork tongue whilst fighting on V'run. Since then he had made a study of the creatures and was considered an expert on the Ork mind. During the battle for Armageddon this knowledge was to prove invaluable, though it undoubtedly could have been used to better effect were it not for the stubbornness and arrogance of Herman von Straab, the Lord of Armageddon. Rather than listen to the advice of the old Commissar, von Straab had him banished to Hades, a sprawling hive complex away from the seat of government. As it happened, this was probably the best decision von Straab made during the whole war.

The Ork assault was swift and seemingly unstoppable. Von Straab's armies were by no means small or poorly equipped, but they could not stand before the savage Ork advance. Only when the Orks reached Hades did the surging tide come to a halt before the well ordered defences that Commissar Yarrick had quickly put into position. Even so, the initial Ork attack led by Warlord Ugulhard would have swept away human resistance were it not for the presence of Yarrick himself. The Ork Warlord glimpsed the Commissar across the battlelines and drove his forces directly to where Yarrick stood. With a barbarous roar the Ork threw himself upon the Commissar. He swung his snapping battle claw at Yarrick and severed his right arm at the elbow. The Warlord's bellow of victory was cut short as Yarrick, fighting the pain and shock as no normal man could, swung his chainsword in a crimson arc and severed Ugulhard's bony head from his shoulders. The Ork's body collapsed to the ground whilst the head continued to sneer and curse momentarily until the creature's extraordinary metabolism finally conceded that it was dead. Yarrick calmly reached down and plucked the battle claw from the Ork's twitching body. He held it aloft so that all the green-skinned warriors could see it and know their champion had suffered defeat. A hush fell over the battlefield as man and Ork gazed in silence upon the gnarled old man brandishing the bloody claw. Then the humans cheered and the Orks wailed in horror, and all at once the defenders leapt upon the aliens with indomitable vigour. Only when the Orks had been beaten from Hades did Yarrick allow himself the luxury of passing out.

News of this incident spread like wildfire amongst the Orks. They said that Yarrick could not be killed and that his gaze was death to even the most powerful Ork. Wherever Yarrick fought the Orks would flee in terror, or whatever passed for terror inside their inhuman green skulls. Yarrick understood the Ork mind well and exploited this weakness to the full. He had Ugulhard's battle claw fabricated into a prosthetic limb to replace the arm the Warlord had taken from him. Later he lost his left eye to a splinter shot from a laser, and had a bio-implant made that projected a pulse of laser light. This terrified the Orks even more and they called him the Bale Eye who could kill with a glance.

For six months following the fight in which Yarrick lost his arm the defenders of Hades held out against further attack. Those who survived paint a confused picture of heroism and dark savagery as the Orks gradually infiltrated the hive complex. But all agree that it was Yarrick who kept the defenders together, who brought them back from defeat time and time again, and whose dogged

belief in ultimate victory gave others the strength to go on. The time that he bought was to make all the difference. By the time relief forces of Imperial Guard and Space Marines arrived the Orks had been worn away by the human defence. Even as Yarrick and his few remaining defenders gathered for the last stand the Ork armies were crumbling away.

Yarrick was one of the few survivors of the fighting around Hades. His barely living body was found by rescue searchers amongst the ruins, dozens of Ork corpses heaped at his feet. It took Yarrick many months to recover from his injuries, by which time the Orks had been defeated and a new Lord installed in place of the insane and incompetent von Straab. The old Commissar accepted nominal retirement and a training post on Armageddon where the planet's armies were being reformed. However, the knowledge that the supreme Ork Warlord Ghazghkull Thraka was still living proved too great a distraction for Yarrick. After only a few months of peace he strapped on the Ork battle claw and reported for duty, vowing that he would not rest until Ghazghkull was hunted down and destroyed at last.

+++LORD COMMANDER+++ +++SOLAR MACHARIUS+++

Macharius was one of the greatest war leaders the Imperium has ever known: a military genius of the highest calibre, a ruthless and ambitious commander whose dreams of conquest reshaped the Imperium at the beginning of the forty-first millennium.

After millennia of disorder the Imperium was finally united in more than name. At the Conclave of Gathalamor held in the shadow of Mount Amalath at the tomb of the Great Confessor, on the Day of Ascension itself, over eight hundred Masters of the Space Marine Chapters gathered to reswear their oaths of loyalty.

The old power of the Ecclesiarchy was waning and with it the introspective and self-destructive habits of mind that had divided the Imperium over the previous centuries. The schism of the Apostasy was fading from memory and few remained to champion a cause that seemed increasingly irrelevant. The hard-core of Bucharan dissenters had fled far and wide into the Eastern Fringe away from the Imperium and the persecutions of the Ecclesiarchal Confessors.

Mars and the Empire of the Tech-Priests, for centuries divided from Earth by religious wars and intolerance on both sides, reforged its old alliance at the Treaty of Ceres. In the past the Tech-Priests had found good reason to distrust the Adeptus, and had wisely remained aloof from the turmoil that had enveloped an unstable Imperium. Yet even the Techno-Magi could see that the Imperium had emerged more strongly united than ever. From the Forge Worlds poured armaments and ships to equip the Imperial armies and carry them to new worlds.

Onto this stage strode Lord Commander Solar Macharius and behind him marched the greatest armies of conquest the galaxy had ever seen. The growing anarchy of the previous centuries had left many old worlds abandoned by the Imperium. Some had fallen to Orks, others to enemies unknown, whilst hundreds had simply stopped paying tithes and had effectively slipped beyond the control of the Adeptus. It was these worlds that felt the first blow of the new armies of reconstruction.

New Imperial Guard armies swept down upon the enemy without warning or mercy. Planets were laid bare, invaders destroyed and human worlds swiftly brought under the Imperial yoke. Inquisitorial teams which followed in the wake of the conquering forces reported scenes of devastation and suffering worse than that caused by rampaging Orks. Missionaries from the Adeptus Ministorum set about restoring the faith amongst the survivors, but so appalling were the conditions left by the conquering armies that many millions died from hunger and disease.

However, it was years before rumours of Macharius' uncompromising campaign reached the Adeptus of Earth. At first all the Adeptus Terra had were reports of worlds newly liberated and alien hordes defeated and of ancient human communities rediscovered and brought back into the light of

the Emperor. Many fierce battles had been fought and at each encounter the new Imperial Guard armies of reconstruction had performed brilliantly. Macharius' strategy of sudden and decisive attack was working better than could have been imagined. A hundred worlds fell to him in one year, three hundred the next, and in the third year of the campaign nearly seven hundred planets were taken by the combined forces of the fleets of the Segmentum Solar and the Imperial Guard.

It seemed that nothing could stop Macharius. Within five years his armies reached the old borders of the Astronomican. They found planets which had not seen an Adept for over five thousand years, where tales of the Emperor, of Space Marines, and the dark days of the Horus Heresy were treated as myths. They found worlds where humans had turned to the dark certainties of science, and created many new and wondrous machines. There were worlds which welcomed Macharius with open arms and others which resisted the forces of the Imperium in vain. The Adeptus Mechanicus long lamented the destruction of Adantris Five whose hyper-technology kept the Imperium at bay for two years before it was destroyed in the conflagration of a re-directed comet. Of its secrets nothing now remains.

At the edge of the galaxy Macharius' armies stood undefeated. But the long battles had taken their toll. His troops had suffered years of constant warfare and had travelled so far from home that communication and supply were no longer practical. It was as if they had left human space altogether, so dimly did the Emperor's light shine at the fringes of the Astronomican. Even the ships' Navigators could sense only darkness around them. Macharius pressed forward, into the thin halo of Old Stars that surround the galaxy. These are ancient worlds where men have never known the Emperor. Their ancestors left Earth over thirty thousand years ago at the dawn of human history. At this point Macharius' generals wavered. They pleaded for him to reconsider. His men, tired and ageing, hesitated. The halo was dark and forbidding. Navigation was slow without the guiding beacon of the Astronomican. The Astropaths were virtually beyond range of psychic communication. There was a sense of growing unrest amongst the armies and fleets. Macharius knew that the end was come. His armies had simply run out of energy at the moment of his greatest challenge. To make matters worse, some of the exploratory teams had failed to return from their missions, whilst others reported mysterious phenomena. The troops whispered that the Old Stars were haunted, that the worlds which orbited them were inhabited by ghosts, and that the halo was not a place for living men.

Macharius locked himself in the state rooms of his capital ship and drank himself into a stupor. His generals waited. They had shared in their commander's dreams. For years his ambition has carried them across the depths of space and to the edge of the galaxy. But now they would not go on. Could not go on. Drunkenly Macharius accused his men of betraying him and now he brooded in silence over his maps and charts, reports of new civilisations, and tales of the greater mysteries that lay amongst the Old Stars.

When he reappeared it was to order the fleets back into the Imperium. His soldiers cheered their hero. His generals sighed with relief. But Macharius was a broken man. He had dreamed of boundless conquest and had awoken to find human fear and frailty. On the return journey Macharius died. The apothecaries said it was a fever contracted in the jungle fighting on Jucha. Those closer to him said he had died so that he could be with the heroes of old who never balked at danger or shunned the unknown. His troops wept openly at the news of their leader's death, for though they had refused to follow him into the void, they revered him almost as a god.

Macharius' body was carried in stasis to the supply base he had created at the launch of the campaign decades before. Over the interim the world had grown into a busy port through which poured Adepts, ministers of the Imperial Cult, Tech-Priests, and many others all journeying to the new worlds that Macharius had unveiled. The base had been named Macharia by the captains of the fleet. Now the Lord Solar's body returned to Macharia and was interred in a great sepulchre that had been prepared for it. At his funeral march a million men filed past his tomb and a hundred generals laid their swords upon his sarcophagus.

It is said that the whole Imperium wept for the fallen commander, though it is doubtful if the populations of some of the worlds he conquered ever felt so kindly towards him. In truth he was a brutal conqueror and a ruthless soldier, though he was often generous towards his troops and even to conquered worlds whose defenders had impressed him in some way or other. He was certainly a

charismatic man, and one for whom others proved willing to lay down their lives. No-one has led the Imperial Guard to more victories or greater conquests, nor won so many worlds for the Imperium, nor taken armies beyond the edge of the galaxy and the light of the Astronomican.

After his death Macharius' old generals could not hold his conquests together. Their own rivalry erupted into civil war, and the conquered territories found themselves divided into warring military empires led by Imperial Guard generals. Some of the newly assimilated planets took the opportunity to secede from the Imperium altogether believing that with the death of Macharius the Imperium's power had been broken. The Macharian Heresy, as this period of struggle is called, was finally ended by a Crusade in which almost a hundred Space Marine Chapters took part. It lasted for nearly seventy years after Macharius' death, a testament to the astonishing speed and wide extent of the Lord Commander Solar's conquests. Though many of Macharius' most distant conquests were lost to the Imperium forever, the majority were pacified successfully. Today these worlds form a substantial and prosperous part of the Imperium.

+++Tallarn+++

The world of Tallarn was once a fertile planet bathed in the gentle orange light of its twin suns. Oceans, plains and lush jungles covered its surface, and its people prospered. The world was a virtual paradise. All of this ended during the Horus Heresy.

CHAOS ATTACK!

In a devastating surprise attack, the Iron Warriors Chaos Space Marines struck the planet. Thousands of virus bombs rained down on Tallarn and the people ran to their enviro-shelters, deep beneath the surface. As they hid, safe from the devastating bio-infestation, the deadly coils of DNA mutated as they were programmed to do. Animals, plants, even insects died as the virus did its work, destroying the planet's ecosystem and leaving an empty shell devoid of life.

After seven weeks of isolation the virus had run its course and the remaining people of Tallarn emerged upon the surface. They found a world covered with the acrid slime of plants and corpses not yet decayed - for the world was completely sterile, without even bacteria to aid the decomposition of its dead. The stench was strong, and more than one person died from it.

The Iron Warriors sent their task-force to repossess the world for the Dark Gods of Chaos. From underground bunkers the Tallarn forces emerged to do battle with the invaders. Soon, reinforcements from both sides arrived, rival space fleets bringing vast armies to fight over the worthless remnants of the dead planet.

The Battle of Tallarn raged for many months and was the largest armoured conflict of the Horus Heresy. Outbreaks of viral infection from rogue DNA residue made it almost impossible for infantry to operate outside their protective shelters. The battle was finally decided by armies of tanks. When the fighting ended the empty, putrid wastes of Tallarn were littered with the wreckage of more than a million shattered vehicles.

A HOLLOW VICTORY

Chaos was driven from Tallarn at great cost, yet for all the millions that died there seemed little gained from the fight. The planet was destroyed and rendered useless for large scale habitation, industry or agriculture. The armies of the Imperium might well have given up Tallarn had their commanders realized the extent of the devastation, but once the armies were in motion there was no going back.

At the time the Chaos attack made little sense. It seemed insane that even the fickle Gods of Chaos should expend such energy fighting over a devastated world of no particular strategic significance. But in the aftermath of the Horus Heresy there were few left to ponder such questions. Amongst the evils of the time it was just another demonstration of the random destruction of Chaos.

TALLARN SURVIVES

Within a thousand years of the Horus Heresy Tallarn evolved into a very different world from the prosperous planet of former times. Deserts of sulphurous sand stretched from pole to pole and all

water disappeared except for a thin residue in the atmosphere. No vegetation remained on the surface exposed to the blistering, wind-blown sands. All that grew was the carefully husbanded crops of the Tallarn themselves, sheltered in their protective horticultural domes.

The surviving Tallarn now lived in domed towns or in natural caverns hollowed out in the planet's rock. Fierce winds drove the Tallarn into their shelters, corrosive sulphur storms made all travel risky, and eventually a system of tunnels was built to facilitate travel beneath the surface.

Above their settlements the Tallarn built vapour traps to catch water from the thin atmosphere.

These tall towers still stand above their domes to this day, and all the water they use is caught by these cunning devices and channelled into subterranean holding tanks.

A SECRET UNCOVERED

During the construction of an arterial tunnel, Tallarn miners struck an outcrop of hard black rock. They were unable to break through this strange substance which was quite unlike any other they had encountered. After some days they decided to divert their tunnel to go around it. As they did so they discovered something very strange. At first the black wall seemed like a natural formation, but soon they realized they had uncovered a deliberate construction.

The initial excavations revealed a huge wall of strange black rock carved over its entire surface with weird entwined figures. The figures were human sized yet not entirely human, possessing a grace and beauty which rendered their grotesquely inscribed cavorting all the more perverse. Giant earth movers were brought in to dig out the layer of sulphur sand in which the wall was buried, and bit by bit it was slowly and painstakingly exposed to the daylight.

The Tallarn soon discovered the wall was not straight but curved, in fact part of a huge circle.

Carefully their most skilled technicians worked to uncover the entire thing, a huge ring-shaped mound almost half a mile across.

THE DANGER AWAKES

It was not until the whole circle was exposed that the disaster happened. With a blast of power the circle screamed and writhed, its inert form turned suddenly to moaning flesh. Where before there had been carvings now there were the creatures themselves, Eldar creatures, yet twisted with an uncanny evil, locked together by some sorcerous bond into a sickening embrace of depraved passion.

Within the circle itself, blackness boiled and stars wheeled - stars that belonged in another part of the galaxy altogether.

THE DARK LIBRARY

In the Dark Library of the Eldar a custodian shivered as he felt an unaccustomed surge of power. Adrift from time and space his mind searched the endless, strands of probabilities and found the thread that led to Tallarn. After so long it had been discovered: the Cursus of Alganar, legend of evil from before the Fall, vortex of unimaginable power, one of the three mythical Gateways of the Gods. His mind shifted into synchronicity with the Farseers of his race, tracing the paths that linked his mind to the Craftworlds of the Eldar. When that knowledge touched the Farseers the Avatars of Khaine would wake. And Khaine would recognise the work of his ancient destroyer Slaanesh - Bane of the Eldar, Prince of the Chaos Gods.

ELDAR ATTACK

The Eldar struck from the skies without warning or explanation. To the Tallarn it was an unwarranted act of aggression. Little could they imagine that the fate of the entire Eldar race was bound up with their strange discovery. To the Eldar there was no time for explanation or discussion. They couldn't know whether the Tallarn were in league with Chaos or whether the fierce desert people were unwitting pawns in the Dark Gods' game. As far as they were concerned the only option was to attack, to destroy the Cursus if they could before it was too late.

The Tallarn fought back with characteristic ferocity. Years of living upon the burning sulphur deserts had honed them into resilient fighters. To the Eldar the deserts were an unknown quantity. Even the hardy Aspect Warriors died under the heat of the sun, whilst the Eldar Guardians fell to the lightning raids of the human fighters. But the Eldar did not give up. They could not afford to abandon their attack. The survival of the galaxy depended on it.

THE DARK GODS AWAKE

But it was already too late. The gateway that was the Cursus grew in power by the minute. Its screams and wails filled the desert as the dark light brightened and fluxed within its core. Lights and stars swirled and clashed, fountains of spinning incandescence spat into the night sky. The laughter of gods rebounded across the sulphur dunes and Eldar and humans alike shuddered in terror.

From the Cursus poured the minions of Chaos. There were things indescribable to men. Things that awakened primal terrors in Eldar hearts - horrors of slime and flame that cackled and bounded into battle, transparent bodies of pure energy dividing and reuniting in a cascade of colours, vile fleshy things that pulsed with inner power and sucked at the air with poisonous lips. Long-legged abominations carried slender and elegant creatures upon their backs, beautiful and yet sickening to look upon. It was as if all the 4aemons of hell had fallen upon Tallarn.

THE BATTLE FOR THE CURSUS

The human commander called a truce and hurried to the Eldar lines where the alien Seers sat waiting. Knowledge had finally opened their eyes. The runestones lay cast upon the desert floor. Hope in union was predicted. Division would lead to damnation, darkness and death. With their fates so clearly predicted, the Eldar and Tallarn joined forces.

The two races fell back before the Chaos onslaught. Many were caught and destroyed in the early confusion, but the Chaos advance was slowed by the merciless hit and run tactics of the desert raiders. Humans led Eldar jet-bike riders into the attack, and soon the Tallarn and Eldar were able to regroup.

As the daemon hordes advanced beyond the Cursus their power waned, as if they were dependent upon its proximity for their power. And so it was, for the tendrils of Chaos though long are very tenuous, and only blood-letting and victory can sustain the link between the Dark Gods and their minions.

CHAOS DEFEATED

With skill and cunning the Tallarn drew out the Chaos battle lines. Choosing their targets carefully the Tallarn launched one attack after another, always retreating before the Chaos hordes could turn to meet their fire. It was a tactic calculated to drain the power of the horde, and it worked better than even the wily sons of the sulphur desert could have hoped.

The Eldar Seers saw the runes change, saw the opportunity develop. The daemons were fading fast, their glittering bodies growing ever more transparent, their cries ever weaker. Now was the time to hit them hard.

With a furious charge the Eldar and Tallarn threw their remaining strength against the gibbering horde. It was a last effort that would result in absolute victory or utter defeat. The Chaos hordes shuddered and the bodies of the daemons seemed to fade and dull. The crackle of energy died and the spark of life vaporised into the oily air.

Many lay dead, human and Eldar, gored by monstrous claws, crushed by the sensual caress of a poisoned tongue, or torn apart by razor sharp teeth. Many Eldar waystones were collected from the field, and many Tallarn taken back to their domes to surrender the water from their bodies to the hydrotanks. But it was victory nonetheless.

THE CURSUS

Once the Eldar had departed in peace, and the people of both races had exchanged their promises of friendship, the Tallarn returned to the Cursus. They found the black stone cold and lifeless once more, just as it was when they had first uncovered it. However, they knew now that the stone was not dead but merely sleeping, awaiting its time again, waiting for the call of its evil masters.

The Tallarn buried the Cursus beneath the sulphur sands once more and placed within its circle the mysterious devices that the Eldar had given them for that purpose. Then they sealed the surface with plascrete and turned their backs upon it.

+++Cadia+++

Cadia is just one world amongst many thousands in the Imperium of Mankind, but it has a special and honoured place in the history of Mankind. Cadia stands upon the edge of the Eye of Terror within a narrow corridor of stable space known as the Cadian Gate. This forms the one and only truly predictable passage between the Chaos-infested daemon worlds of the Eye of Terror and Earth. There are other routes, but these are less stable, inherently unpredictable paths that will scatter fleets through time and space. No battlefleet of any size can rely upon these unstable passages, but must pass through the Cadian Gate. Cadia is therefore one of the most strategically important planets of the galaxy, and its defence is vital to the survival of the Imperium of Mankind.

Chaos Raiders

On several occasions the forces of Chaos have moved against the world of Cadia, and raging battles have been fought in the rings of Rouran and even on Cadia itself. A large part of the Imperial fleet is stationed at Cadia or nearby. Such huge battles are rare, but the constant intrusion of Chaos raiding craft is commonplace. Chaos Space Marines make frequent forays onto the surface of Cadia, and must be hunted down and destroyed before they can entrench themselves.

As recently as five years ago, a large force of Chaos Space Marines penetrated the defences of Cadia undetected, and went into hiding in the uplands of the Dorac Alps. Unknown to the Cadians, these troops dug themselves in and established a formidable fortress. Soon they were joined by reinforcements and their forces increased until a large army was ready to attack. Fortunately, the Chaos Space Marines were detected when a ship carrying more raiders was intercepted in orbit. The Cadians' own defence troops were able to contain the invaders and eventually defeat them. Such incidents are not rare by any means, and the Cadians have developed a powerful army which is expert at rooting out and destroying the invaders.

The Cadian Shock Troops

The most powerful fighting formations of the Cadian forces are called shock troops. They are chosen from the fastest moving and hardest-fighting of the Cadians. As all Cadians must train in the defence forces, all the best fighters are quickly identified and inducted for further training. When Chaos raiders are discovered the shock troops are sent to hunt them down, and only if the force is particularly large or well equipped will the Cadians send for help. Even the Space Marines that have come to destroy especially large Chaos forces have found the Cadians impressive and powerful allies.

The Cadians manufacture excellent weaponry and other military equipment. the world itself is heavily industrialised and has many large cities with highly skilled populations. This is reflected in the Cadians' armament and wargear, which is made in uniform patterns and camouflaged in a manner most suited to the mixed terrain of the Cadian wilderness.

+++The Planet Valhalla+++

VALHALLA

The planet of Valhalla was once a temperate paradise of forests and broad fertile plains. There is no record of its settlement, but legends recall a world ripe for colonization and development. Its people spread across the world and prospered. The planet's main land masses were distributed more or less evenly, one centered at the northern pole and the other at the south. The equatorial regions themselves were dominated by a huge warm ocean eleven thousand miles wide.

Approximately ten thousand years ago, Valhalla was struck by a comet of immense size and weight. The planet's defense lasers poured shot after shot into the comet. This did nothing more than break off several smaller fragments of what proved to be virtually solid iron. A mile wide fragment struck the northern continent causing massive earthquakes and destruction, but the main comet body landed in the sea.

At first the confusion and devastation made it hard to gauge the full effect of the strike. The boiling seas, clouds of vapor and pall of dust cut off the light. Temperatures plunged to freezing over the whole planet. Even more significantly, the impact had knocked the whole world from its orbit. For ten years Valhalla spun eccentrically until it finally settled some fifteen million miles further from its sun. By then the planet was a very different place indeed.

ICE WORLD

Valhalla had become a frozen world of ice. The survivors of the disaster found themselves pushed further and further towards the equatorial oceans as glaciers engulfed the polar continents.

Eventually, there was no more land left, and they were forced to live upon the ice itself. Though 99% of all life had been destroyed the people struggled through, building their cities deep inside the ice, beneath the glaciers and upon the frozen ocean. What little life remained they carefully cultivated, growing nutrient slimes and algae in vats hewed by thermal stills.

Fate had dealt the world a cruel blow but had not finished with Valhalla. Just as the threat of starvation seemed to be receding, another and equally dangerous foe appeared. Orks came in their thousands, their damaged space fleet blown upon the winds of the warp to the ice world. Finding little to sustain even their undemanding appetites, the Orks launched themselves upon the Valhallans with a ferocity sharpened by hunger. It was a fight for survival. The Orks were marooned and the only food on the whole planet lay inside the cities of the Valhallans - the precious organic cultures and the inhabitants themselves!

A DESPERATE STRUGGLE

The fighting raged throughout the sub-glacial cities of the Valhallans. The thermal stills which rose above the ice were easy targets for the Orks, but the green-skinned creatures ignored them and battered their way through the duck plasteel shutters that protected the access tunnels to the ice cities. Yelling their foul war cries, the Orks charged downwards instead, right into the heart of the cities. The fighting raged through the galleries and tunnels of Valhalla. The defenders knew every inch of their frozen domain, every gallery and shaft, and they made good use of their familiarity in each encounter. As the Orks fought their way inwards they found themselves constantly ambushed, or led unwittingly into dead ends where tunnels would be collapsed behind them.

By the sixth week of fighting the Orks reached the main food chamber with its hundreds of nutrient slime vats. Almost half the Orks had been killed, but the remainder were every bit as determined as ever. The scent of the bubbling green slime assailed their keen nostrils and they licked their scaly lips in anticipation. The Valhallans prepared to put up a final resistance. If the chamber was captured they would starve within a week. Every man, woman and child that could carry a gun crowded into the chamber and its surrounding galleries. The battle would decide which race would survive on Valhalla.

THE FINAL BATTLE

The Orks attacked in a great mass. The green-skinned warriors were maddened with hunger and no longer seemed capable of rational thought. If the attack had been better planned it might have succeeded, but as it was the Orks were repelled, though at great cost. Almost half the defenders were slain or hurt. The Orks retreated and prepared for another rush.

The second Ork attack came in two simultaneous thrusts. The first was repelled easily but this proved to be nothing more than a feint. The second was directed against a small side chamber, part of the nutrient packaging plant that adjoined the main production vats. The packaging plant eventually fell to the Orks, its defenders dead at their posts after exacting a heavy toll amongst the enemy.

From their newly won position the Orks rapidly moved reinforcements forwards. The humans found themselves in a crossfire, and were soon forced to give ground in the main chamber itself. The Orks were amongst the huge vats. These were pits hewn into the ground and filled with the sticky green algal slime. The raised sides of the pits provided cover for attacker and defender alike. The fighting intensified as the Orks struggled forward, pit by pit, and the humans gradually retreated or fell at their places.

VICTORY!

After three hours the Orks had lost half their number but had forced the Valhallans back against the ice wall. The defenders' prospects looked grim as they prepared for a fresh assault, determined to sell their lives as dearly as possible. As the Orks rose and howled their battle cry, a mighty explosion tore through the cavern. Ice pillars toppled and fell into the nutrient pools, and the floor heaved and broke under the Orks' feet. The Valhallans rose in their turn and with an almighty scream fell upon their attackers. The Orks broke in confusion as fiery machines smashed through the floor, and the broken cavern floor swam in a mixture of slime and green ichor.

The Valhallans had won the day because se their stiff resistance gave their engineers time to bore an ice shaft under the cavern floor. At the vital moment the old ice burners, industrial machines used to form the sub-glacial chambers themselves, had been allowed to burst through and run amok amongst the Orks. The intensely hot burners, carried by their own high pressure steam, had terrified the Orks. Those who did not run were badly burned or melted, and those who escaped were cut down by the vengeful Valhallans.

Though the planet of Valhalla is no longer a populous or affluent world, the Valhallans are famous throughout the galaxy. After destroying the Orks on their own world, regiments of Valhallans joined with other Imperial Guard to rid many worlds of the Ork invaders. Always the Valhallans fight with the same grim determination they displayed in the ice cities of their home world. In battle their courage and -tenacity earn them the respect of other regiments from all over the Imperium.

+++MORDIAN+++

In the long and sinister annals of the Inquisition there are many tales of treachery and horror, of the destruction of worlds and the triumph of man's greed and foolishness. It is a record of human weakness and the power of the Dark Gods of Chaos.

Yet amongst that record of lost planets and mortal defeat there are a few stories of human victory - rare cases where the daemonic army of Chaos has been turned aside at the moment of success and driven back into the void from which it came. One such place is Mordian - the World of Eternal Night.

The Mordian day is the same length as the Mordian year, the small planet turning upon its axis once each time it completes a circle of its sun. As a consequence, one side of Mordian is constantly burned by the fierce heat of the sun, whilst the other side lies in eternal darkness. The scorched side is lifeless and barren, a desert of splintered rock and canyons where mighty armies clashed during the Age of Apostasy many years ago. On Mordian, all life is on the dark side. The slow revolution of Mordian does little to stir its thick atmosphere, so the weather is constantly hot and still with no natural breezes to move the oppressive air. In the sultry darkness the Mordians go about their daily lives. Ancient and ruinous cities sprawl across the planet's dark surface. Pyramidal, multi-leveled towers reach for the sky and rise like mountains towards space. Hundreds of millions of people exist upon a land surface barely one tenth the size of earth.

Mordian is a world that seethes with people, a crowded and dark world whose rulers, the Tetrarchs, must fight a constant battle against anarchy. Only the most careful husbanding of Mordian's resources keeps its massive population alive. All food, all clothing, all essential resources and supplies are strictly controlled, rationed and recycled. This enables the Mordians to survive albeit with the utmost effort and in considerable impoverishment.

Such harsh and demanding conditions naturally breed discontent. Few people really understand the predicament they or their planet is in. Others care nothing for their fellow men and seek only to accrue personal wealth and power regardless of consequences. In the decaying, multi-levelled cities crime is rife. Gangsters and criminal warlords rule an underworld where life is cheap and where the desperate are merely pawns to be expended as their masters please.

THE IRON GUARD

The Mordian Iron Guard stands between order and anarchy. They are the champions of the Tetrarchy of Mordian, uniformed in bright colours and fiercely loyal to their cause. Their enemies are all those who would divert the scant resources of Mordian or threaten its continued existence. They fight a constant battle against the criminal warlords of, the undercity, insane gangs of cannibals and misguided rabblers who would sooner see universal destruction than endure the sacrifice necessary for the survival of the world.

The Iron Guard are ruthless in pursuit of their enemies. Their discipline is legendary and their training is as rigorous as possible. All who fight in the Iron Guard understand full well the horror that would engulf their world if they were to fail in their duty. Their loyalty and determination is all that keeps Mordian from plague, starvation and savagery.

THE CONSPIRACY OF CHAOS

The greatest threat to Mordian came one hot summer. The stifling heat was unusual even for Mordian, and the planet seethed with unrest. Beneath the streets brooded a secret conspiracy that posed a threat far greater than any seen before. In the depths met a dark conclave, a group of men who knew the extent of Mordian's wealth and wanted it for themselves. Away from the sight of saner citizens they made their incantations and called upon the Dark Gods of Chaos.

A spell was begun. It is impossible to say how much innocent blood was spilled to fuel their sorcery, or what sinister pledges were made to their dark masters. Those who cast the spell sought only personal enrichment, their lust for power knew no bounds. They would destroy the planet itself if they had to. They cared no more for its teeming millions than did the Chaos gods.

The summer grew hotter as the spell neared its completion. Many strange things were reported in the capital. The cannibal mobs and criminal gangs were restless. Men saw winged monsters hovering in the city lights. People disappeared without trace.

A SKY OF FLAMES

At last the spell was complete and suddenly the world shook as its sky erupted into flame and disgorged the Warlords of Chaos itself. From the Eye of Terror distorted and ugly spacecraft soared into the Mordian skies to rain fire and destruction upon the world. Chaos Space Marines poured into the city slaying all around in a great and bloody sacrifice to their gods. Daemons stalked the burning towers and hunted the souls of those that fled from the devastation below.

From their dark hiding places the servants of Chaos crawled to the surface to bathe in the fire and terror of the world confident of their masters' favour now that their work was done.

CHAOS WAR

As the sky exploded into flame the Tetrarchs of Mordian ordered their Astropaths to send psychic calls for help. The power of Chaos was so strong that the Astropaths' minds melted with the effort. It was impossible for anyone to say whether the messages got through or if help was on its way.

Meanwhile, the Iron Guard fought a gallant resistance against the daemonic assault. Whilst lesser men fled in terror before the might of Chaos the Iron Guard stood their ground, pouring volley after volley into the enemy ranks. At last the Iron Guard captains were forced to give the order to withdraw. Though their men would stand until the end they could achieve little against the hordes that opposed them. Reluctantly the Iron Guard regrouped around the capital, abandoning the rest of the planet to the enemy.

Whilst the forces of Chaos rampaged throughout Mordian the Iron Guard prepared the capital's defences. Every building became a fortress, every tower a strongpoint, and every street and plaza a killing-zone for the Iron Guard's carefully sighted weapons. At the center lay the Tetrarchal palace itself, from which the defence of the capital was coordinated.

When the attack began the Iron Guard was well prepared. Chaos Space Marines fell before their well disciplined fire as shot after shot struck their ranks. Channeled into well prepared fire traps the Chaos Marines were easily repelled, but far greater and more potent foes followed upon their heels.

ATTACK FROM THE DEPTHS

From the sewers and service ducts poured an army of those who had sold their souls to the Dark Gods. Clad in rags and armed with no more than iron bars and lengths of chain they threw themselves upon the defenders. Driven by their insane devotion to Chaos they cared little if they lived or died, and thousands were cut down by the devastating weapons of the Iron Guard. Nonetheless, this attack from an unexpected source left the defenders unprepared for the next assault.

The forces of Chaos moved upon the Iron Guard with purpose. Daemons and Chaos Marines advanced as one. Bloodthirsters of Khorne roared a great challenge to chill mortal blood. Keepers of Secrets stalked the battlefield, slaying those that dared to look upon them with a withering glare. Whirling Horrors skipped and chattered in an eerie blur of incandescent power. It was a terrifying sight, yet the Iron Guard held firm before the onslaught though many paid the ultimate price for their devotion.

Street by street, building by building, the Iron Guard fell back into the heart of the city. Their lines drew tighter but refused to break, as attack after attack was repulsed. When losses grew too heavy to endure, or as positions were outflanked and became untenable, the Iron Guard withdrew to

another line, always preserving what they could of their men and weapons. It was a battle fought with all the tactical brilliance and discipline the best Imperial troops could hope for. Yet it was a battle the Mordians could not win. Eventually they would have nowhere left to retreat to.

THE BATTLE FOR THE PALACE

At last the Iron Guard took position around the Tetrarchal palace itself, the last strongpoint on the whole world. Behind hastily constructed defences the infantry waited for the inevitable attack. From the towers and ceremonial balconies the barrels of lascannons and other heavy weapons glinted in the fight of the burning sky.

Suddenly the horde of Chaos was upon them, screaming and bellowing in its might. Greater Daemons of Nurgle strode clumsily amongst their minions, rising above them four or five times the height of a man, giants and lords of their foul kind. The bloated daemons shuffled forward, putrid innards spilling over the ground, nauseous gasses bubbling from rents and tears in their leathery flesh. Beside them were the Chaos Space Marines of that pestilential god, their armour green and rancid with decay, their rank bodies stiff with disease. Before them came a black cloud of flies which buzzed about the Iron Guard, crawling into their eyes and ears, and filling their mouths with black hairy bodies.

The Iron Guard's lasguns spat a volley of death into the screaming horde. Again the lasguns cracked with a single voice, as the captains ordered shot after shot into the vile mass. From the Tetrarchal palace came the chatter of autocannons, the angry scream of boltguns and the piercing shriek of lascannons. With mechanical precision the weapon crews loaded and fired, loaded and fired, never stopping for one moment or breaking their routine. Daemon gore ran like a foul river in the once white square, but as one beast fell another twice as hideous marched over its body towards the Iron Guard's position.

The captains ordered their men back to the palace steps and formed a firing line. Their discipline intact, the Iron Guard prepared for a single volley before the forces of Chaos fell upon them. Their final moment had come, though there were few left now to witness their inevitable defeat.

THE TIDE IS TURNED

Little could the defenders of Mordian know of the power or purposes of Chaos. How could they imagine, as the hordes of Chaos advanced upon them, that the Chaos gods' hold upon Mordian was but a tenuous one. The spell that had brought them to mortal space and imbued the flesh of their servants with physical energy was almost spent. The fires that burned in the sky were growing dim and the bellows of daemons echoed shallowly in the air.

As the Iron Guard watched, their enemies dissolved before their eyes. The sky darkened to its customary blackness. In the dark the guiding lights of Imperial spacecraft glittered amongst the stars. The Iron Guard had won not just a battle, but the most precious thing of all - time. From beyond the orbit of Mordian Imperial psykers had wrought a counter spell to break the hold of Chaos. Whilst the Iron Guard fought upon the planet, a separate battle of wills had raged between mortals and gods. Only the Iron Guard's heroic resistance had given the psykers enough time to work their mystical abilities before Chaos won the planet for all time.

+++Necromundan 8th 'Spiders'+++

There are many ancient Imperial Guard regiments with long and glorious histories. One of the most famous is the "Spiders," as the Necromundan 8th is commonly called. This regiment is recruited from the barbaric hive world of Necromunda and its warriors come exclusively from the Spider Clan of the Palatine Hive complex.

The Spiders are raised as warriors in the lower hab layers of the hive. Here amongst the ruins of past millenia they defend a territory where decaying water pipes, power lines and partially collapsed ventilation shafts are the currency of power. Their lives are savage and violent, and their very survival depends upon their skill at arms and determination in close combat.

The Spiders are paid and armed by the Imperial Commander of Necromunda to keep down other rebellious clans, and so, on paper at least, form part of the planet's own army. This arrangement

suits the Spiders admirably and, so long as they stay in the lower parts of the hive, it suits the Imperial Commander too!

Necromunda supplies many regiments for the Imperial Guard, of which the Spiders are one of the best. At the Battle of Deucalion it was the spectacular heroism of the Spiders that enabled the Imperial Guard to hold onto its landing fields long enough to evacuate the planet. Only the Spiders and Warmaster Solon's own troops remained to hold off the overwhelming enemy forces as regiment after regiment filed into the troop transports. When the last transports landed a massive enemy barrage fell amongst the ships, destroying half of them.

Immediately and without waiting for orders the Spiders' commander Raevan Mortz advanced towards the foe. The Warmaster Solon and his troops had no choice but to take to the remaining ships, and although they waited until the last minute before taking off none of the Spiders left Deucalion that day.

+++ATTILA+++

The world of Attila is a bit smaller than Earth with a single continent which covers almost half its surface. The center of this massive continent is prone to such extremes of temperature that it remains uninhabited, a baking desert in the summer which becomes a sub-zero sea of sand and snow over winter. Between the death lands of the continental center and the coasts is a belt of rich steppes thousands of miles deep punctuated with mountain chains, mighty inland lakes, and vast rivers. Only towards the coastal edges does the grassland give way to verdant forests, encircling the entire continent with a thin arboreal band.

Humans settled on Attila many thousands of years ago and must have adopted the nomadic life almost immediately. The original landing site of Khanasan has grown into the only city on the whole planet. The bustling metropolis is a gathering place for the tribes of Attila and the center of its government. The bulk of the population are nomads who subsist from their herds of ovigors, gigantic shaggy and savage animals native to the world of Attila. Their rich flesh and dark blood form the basic subsistence diet of the tribes. When the summer comes, the Attilans drive their herds towards the heart of the continent, following the spring thaw and new grown pasture. In winter, they retreat towards the outer grasslands abutting the coasts, and here their animals find enough grazing to keep them alive until the year's turn.

The Imperium recruits some of the most ferocious mounted warriors from this barbaric world. Attilan regiments of Imperial Guard Rough Riders have fought all over the galaxy in many different theatres of war. On worlds thousands of light years from Attila the image of the scarred tribesman resplendent in his crude furs and bedecked with beads and rings is as familiar as it is frightening. The Attilans' warrior prowess is founded upon a tradition of fighting amongst themselves, for the tribes of Attila respect only power and a king must be prepared to demonstrate his might to doubting rivals. When a lord of the Attilans defeats an enemy he cuts off the beaten man's head and his artificers turn the skull into a drinking cup as a permanent symbol of his victory. A tribal chieftain may have many such skulls, bound with ornately carved gold or inlaid with silver, embellished with rubies and sapphires of immense worth. The King of Khanasan and Lord of Attila is the most mighty of all, acknowledged as the King of a Thousand Skulls!

It is said that Attilans are born in the saddle, and they are amongst the greatest horsemen in the galaxy. The horses they prefer are thick-set beasts, ill-tempered and likely to bite or kick anyone unwise enough to give them the chance to do so. The riders depend upon their horses a great deal, and value them more highly than gold. In adversity a warrior will draw off some of the animal's blood and drink it to sustain himself. In this way Attilans can live without food or water for many days, enabling them to operate deep behind enemy lines without supplies.

Characteristic features of an Attilan warrior are the scars that he bears upon his cheeks, long knife cuts of white tissue which stand out against his weather beaten skin. These marks are cut into his cheeks as a young man, and ashes from the camp fire are rubbed into the wounds so that they leave deep and prominent scars.

Attilans wear their hair in long braids. They do not wash themselves or clean their clothes, believing that to do so would affront the spirits of water with which they superstitiously people their land. This tradition has proven hard to break, despite considerable effort on the part of the Adeptus Ministorum preachers in the barely tolerated mission in Khanasan. Indeed, it is sometimes said that the stench of an Attilan is as powerful a weapon as his hunting lance!

>>The Inquisition

+++The Inquisition+++

The Imperium is so vast and the task of directing the fate of humanity such an important one, that running the day-to-day business of empire is as beneath the Emperor as is the fate of a single planet or a mere handful of billions of people. For this reason the will of the Emperor is executed via two colossal organisations - the Adeptus Terra (also known as the priesthood) and the Inquisition. Inquisitors are special agents of the Imperium; free-roaming trouble-shooters bound by no laws or authority. Every Inquisitor is empowered to investigate any possible or potential threat to the future of humanity, whether that threat comes in the form of political aggression, administrative inefficiency or genetic deviation. There are no bounds to the Inquisitor's field of operation: alien plots, mutation, corruption, crime and incompetence all come under his jurisdiction. Inquisitors usually operate alone, but where necessary they will requisition, hire or purchase men and materials to help with their duty. Many Inquisitors maintain a small personal staff to aid them in their work. They may also request the cooperation of the Adeptus Terra in matters where their special forces are required. The most common threat posed to humanity, and therefore the most common problem faced by the Inquisitor, is that of psykers. The Inquisitor must be on his guard not only for individual psykers (who are mostly harmless) but for organisations, secret cults and other, so-called revolutionary groups working to protect and hide emergent psykers. Although such groups might start with good intentions, they always fall under the sway of psychically attuned aliens - creatures that wish only to destroy or enslave mankind. Another great threat to humanity which the Inquisition labours to expose is that of mutation - the constant pollution of the human gene-pool. Although most mutations are harmless, if the race is to develop into the new, psychically aware creature envisioned by the Emperor, other sinister and potentially dangerous mutations must be destroyed. Mutations which affect psykers can produce creatures almost as great a threat as some of the psychically attuned aliens.

His work through the galaxy has earned the Inquisitor the name of witch-hunter, torturer and worse. Where necessary he is both of these, and things more terrible, for any means justifies an end so vital and so endangered.

Profile. Inquisitors often come from the ranks of the priesthood. They have human profiles, but only an extraordinary human could take on the responsibilities of the Inquisitor.

Inquisitors are often drawn from the ranks of psychic members of the priesthood - so any Inquisitor has a 50% chance of having psychic powers. Psychic Inquisitors are also individuals who have been judged by the Adeptus Astraphica as mentally strong enough not to require ritual soul-bonding with the Emperor (see the Adeptus Astra Telepathica for a full description of this process).

Organisation. Every Inquisitor is a free agent, operating independently of other Inquisitors or central authority. They would, however, regard it as a matter of honour to respond to fellow Inquisitors in trouble or requiring assistance. Similarly, the first loyalty of every Inquisitor is to the Emperor, and an imperial command would be obeyed whatever the circumstances. Of all the Inquisition agents only one, the Master of the Inquisition, may be said to rank above the others. He works directly with the Emperor on Earth, and has direct access to the Emperor himself. His task is to report on the

Inquisition's mission to the Emperor, and to communicate the Emperor's commands to scattered agents throughout the Imperium.

Equipment. There is no item of equipment which is unavailable to the Inquisition. Their very duty places them in constant contact with exotic, often alien, technology. Equipment carried by each agent is a matter of individual choice, and might be varied depending on circumstances. Most Inquisitors wear powered armour, often discreetly hidden under a tabard and worn without a helmet. An armour energy-field of some kind would feature on the equipment list of almost all agents. Weapons carried at all times would include at least one pistol (usually a bolter) and a sword (often a chain sword or power sword). Older, richer or luckier agents might even boast Jokaero digital weapons, even as many as ten, although 1-4 would be more usual.

A typical Inquisitor is represented here by the renowned Obiwan Sherlock Clousseau - a tireless exposé of psychic misdeeds and genetic deviance. He wears a suit of skin tight powered armour under a long, enveloping cloak. Like most Inquisitors, he distains the open wearing of a helmet in favour of civilian head-wear (Inquisitors tend to be eccentric in their dress as well as their life-styles). Under his cloak are hidden various energy-field devices - conversion field, stasis field and refractor field (only one can be used at once of course). His favoured weapon is the bolt pistol, although he also carries a power sword and three Jokaero digital weapons; hand flamer, laspistol and needle pistol. He has several grenades secreted about his person, including two each of blind, choke, haywire and knock-out, and one each of crack, plasma, stumm, tanglefoot and vortex. He also has a communicator, bio-scanner, energy-scanner, nose filters, photochromatic eye drops, an immune injector, infra-vision contacts, chemicals for the Jokaero needler, a porta-rack, a rad-counter, a stimulant chemical, a syn-skin applicator and sufficient chemical for three uses, three suspensors and a can of web solvent. As can be seen, Obiwan Sherlock Clousseau is equipped for just about anything - but then he has to be - he's an Inquisitor.

Uniforms. Inquisitors do not wear uniforms, instead they wear civilian dress - itself variable throughout the Imperium. They do wear a badge of office as a sign of authority, but as often as not they will be working under cover and would not display it.

+++Inquisitors and the+++ +++Ordo Malleus+++

Inquisitors are free-roaming special agents of the Imperium and are bound by no laws or Authority. Every Inquisitor is empowered to investigate any possible or potential threat to the future of humanity; whether that threat comes in the form of political aggression, administrative inefficiency or genetic deviation. There are no bounds to the Inquisitor's field of operation: alien plots, mutation, corruption, crime and incompetence all fall within his jurisdiction. Inquisitors usually operate alone, independent of one another. They may also request aid from the Administratum of Terra, and this request is rarely not answered. The most prominent threat to humanity is, of course, psykers. They are ruthless in their apprehension and execution of suspected psykers. The Inquisitor's work has earned him the title of Witch-Hunter and Torturer. When necessary, he is both of these and things more terrible, for any means justifies an end so vital as the protection of humanity.

The Ordo Malleus is also a part of the Inquisition, although, secret. Not even other Inquisitors know much about them... save they keep watch over the other Inquisitors. The origins of the Ordo are very ancient, and predate the Emperors being placed in the Golden Throne. Even though the Ordo watches the purity of the Inquisition Ordinary, it is also charged with safe-guarding humanity against the creeping forces of Chaos (something an ordinary Inquisitor knows nothing about). Unlike the Inquisition Ordinary, the Ordo has a rigid hierarchy. It is controlled by a council of 169 Masters, each of whom has a right to personal audience with the Emperor. Their authority extends to even the Master of the Inquisition, and more than one has been tried and executed by the Ordo Malleus. Below the Masters are the Proctors and the Proctors Minor, each of whom controls a Chamber of the Ordo. There are two Chambers the Chambers Practical (those Ordo who operate in the field)

and the Chambers Historical & Theoretical (those Ordo who are too old for field work and simply do research).

The Ordo acts under the Emperor's warrant, and has a completely free hand. He can demand anything he wants to carry out his duty. An Imperial servant (from the Adeptus Astartes to Chuckus the store clerk) must simply obey, no questions asked (Assassins are exempt from this, however). 75% of all Ordo Chambers are psychic. The military arm of the Ordo is the 666th chapter of the Adeptus Astartes, the Grey Knights. However, both Space Marines and Imperial Guard are often conscripted by the Ordo for troops. It is worth noting that such conscripted troops suffer a terrible fate... not only are they destined to face the mind-warping atrocities of Chaos, but after the battle, they are all killed by the Ordo Chamber and/or Grey Knights. They are, of course, given posthumous honours for their having to die while serving the Emperor and saving Humanity. The Space Marines are too valuable to simply kill, though. So, each Space Marine who is conscripted to assist an Ordo is Mind-Scrubbed. He will not remember anything about either the Ordo Chamber, the Grey Knights, being conscripted and what was battled with. Indeed, those memories are destroyed.

+++Grey Knights+++

The Grey Knights are unique among the Legiones Astartes as the only chapter to have full knowledge of the dark secrets of Chaos – they alone know of the existence of Daemons and their appearance in the real world, and they alone are equipped to battle and defeat mankind's most terrible enemy." While the Grey Knights are technically Adeptus Astartes, they do not involve themselves with the ordinary activities of Space Marines. They are instead, a part of the Inquisition. And act as the military arm of the Ordo Malleus, with their main base being located on Saturn's moon Titan. The Grey Knights are unique in that they have no antecedents. The Chapter's Gene-seed was designed from an unknown source by the Adeptus Mechanicus. The high ratio of psykers in the chapter points to a source outside of the normal processes of existing Space Marine Chapters. There are conflicting reports of when this chapter was founded. I believe that the account of their being the first chapter created after the Heresy, to be the most likely. However it is also rumored that they were created upon the direct orders of the Emperor during the Great Crusade. The marines are subjected to training far more difficult than that of normal Chapters. "To date these extraordinary measures have been effective: in 10,000 years of combat against the forces of darkness not one Grey Knight has failed in battle or betrayed the Emperor in word or deed.

The Grey Knights' color scheme for Powered Armor is a grey similar to that of the Space Sharks. However, their more well known units, Terminators, wear metallic armor. The most common colors are gold, brass, and steel. Each Grey Knight Terminator goes into battle carrying his personally hand crafted copy of the 'Liber Daemonicus', the Chapter's sacred book of battle rituals. It can often be seen displayed in its ornately decorated ceramite case, hanging from a chain or fastened to his breast-plate.

"Nemesis Force weapons are the standard class of armament used by Grey Knight Terminators. The Nemesis is a double-handed weapon and comes in several forms, often as a halberd or a two-handed sword.

Whatever their shape, all Nemesis weapons have the same basic design and function: the blade is a powerful force weapon housing a psi-matrix attuned to the unique psychic field of its owner; and the haft or handle contains a modified storm bolter which can be used in both ranged combat and close assault."

The Grey Knights' secret fortress-monastery is located on Saturn's largest moon, Titan. The fortress is also the home to a unique library of knowledge known to a select few as the 'Librarium Daemonica'. It contains information about the Warp and the forces of Chaos, "tens of thousands of tomes of arcane lore and diabolism," accumulated over the millennia by the Ordo Malleus.

Most of the Chapter is scattered throughout the Imperium, usually organised into small units that have trained and fought together for their entire lives. When reports of possible Demonic incursion are received, they are able to respond immediately and investigate. It is not unusual for Grey Knights to be out in the farthest reaches of the Imperium for several decades at a time. When they die, a Grey knights only request is to have their remains returned to Titan. Where they can rest at last from their constant vigilance in the hallowed crypts far beneath the monastery amongst some of the Imperium's greatest and most unsung heroes.

+++The Ordo Malleus+++

The Ordo malleus is an inner college within the Imperium, it's activities and existence shrouded in secrecy. The Inquisition goes to great lengths to hide the existence of Chaos and it's warped servants from the bulk of Humanity. The Emperor and his advisors fear that such knowledge would have a terrible attraction for Humanity, and Chaos would be hastened. The Ordo, when it is mentioned at all, is always referred to as a watchdog on the Inquisition itself. It's purpose, as the Imperium's elite (and only) DaemonHunters, is altogether more serious and sinister.

The origins of the Ordo Malleus are very ancient, and predate the Emperor's confinement in his throne-machine. The Ordo was originally established to police the thoughts and deeds of the Inquisition itself, but is now also charged with seeking out and destroying all manifestations of Chaos within the Imperium. It's chief targets are the raiders of the Traitor Legions, and covens of Chaos worshippers who infect the Imperium, and the Sensei, who are regarded as a great threat to the good order of the Empire.

Unlike the rest of the Inquisition, the Ordo has a rigid and formalized hierarchy. It is controlled by a council of 169 Masters, who have the right to direct audience with the Emperor. Their authority extends even to the Master of the Inquisition who has, on more than one occasion, been tried and executed by the Masters of the Ordo.

Below the Masters are the Proctors and Proctors Minor, each of whom controls a Chamber of the Ordo. The Chambers, named for their founding Proctor, are the basic unit of the Ordo. The rank and file of these are the Inquisitors Ordinary. Within a parallel organization of 'Chambers Theoretical and Historical' are the Inquisitors Historical. These are the older members of the Ordo who can no longer carry out active duties for reasons of ill- health or infirmity. They are assigned to research and collation projects in the vast Administratum Libraries. The number of Inquisitors Ordinary and Historical in a Chamber varies from only a few score for the Chambers Theoretical and Historical (which are engaged in research and disreputation) to hundreds for some of the chambers Practical (the sector establishments of the Ordo in the field).

The Ordo acts directly under the Emperor's Warrant, and has a completely free hand. An Ordo Inquisitor Ordinary can demand anything in carrying out his duty. No explanation needs to be offered; the Imperial servant faced with an Ordo Inquisitor must simply obey. The commonest demand by Inquisitors Ordinary is for troops to support their action. Such forces never survive under an Inquisitor Ordinary's command, but posthumous honors are heaped upon units attached to the Ordo.

The Ordo Malleus Inquisitor

The Inquisitors of the Ordo Malleus are drawn from the ranks of the Inquisition, but are trained and conditioned to a far higher standard.

The Ordo prides itself on the psychic abilities of it's members. More than 75% of Ordo Inquisitors have psychic abilities, having been deemed strong enough to undergo the soul bonding ritual with the Emperor.

Members of the Ordo favor a simple and sinister uniform. They wear black, loose-fitting habits over their armor with large hoods that hide their faces in shadow. Graphic electoos (a form of tattoo) are a traditional, though unofficial, addition to the uniform of the Ordo. Because graphic electoos appear to move beneath the owner's skin, their appearance can be quite disturbing. Again by tradition, Ordo Inquisitors have one graphic electoo for each coven member they have discovered and cleansed,

and it is not uncommon for successful Inquisitors to be covered from head to foot in elaborate designs. The designs for Ordo electos have fixed for generations, and the motifs chosen are always variations on Daemons and scenes of the daemonic, the Ordo's enemies. This makes an Ordo member's electos particularly horrifying.

The badge of the Ordo, the Imperial eagle clutching a rod and an axe, is usually worn on the shoulder or the right breast. Proctors and Masters are always psykers, and carry a force weapon indicating their authority.

The Grey Knights

The Ordo has a complete Chapter of the Legiones Astartes attached to it on a permanent basis. The Grey Knights were a single Chapter created during an unregistered Founding shortly after the (official) Third Founding. Although technically Marines of the Adeptus Astartes, the Grey Knights are, to all intents and purposes, part of the Inquisition. They are listed as a Third Founding unit, and by the Emperor's instruction, were designated Chapter number 666. However, they have never been attached to any Marine force, and by tradition their Chapter Master has always been an Inquisitor of the Ordo rather than a Space Marine. In effect the Grey Knights are a 'Chamber Militant' of the Ordo Malleus, and occasionally refer to themselves as such.

The Grey Knights are fully as effective as any other Marine Chapter. They are specially screened to exclude all but the strongest and most resilient psykers, a measure designed to prevent any Daemonic contamination. As a result, few of the Grey Knights have any psychic power whatsoever. Their training and surgery rituals are, if anything, more demanding than those of 'ordinary' Marine units.

Recruits are conditioned to ignore pain and fear, and undergo neurosurgery to isolate and bypass their fear centers. They are exposed to wild psykers, mutants and deviants of every kind. They are trained to destroy them without conscious thought. This training produces a rigidly disciplined and controlled mind to which the presence of Daemons is less of a shock than for normal beings. Their lives are ones of self-denial and spartan purity, filled with rituals to strengthen the mind and the heart against the horrors they must face. The Grey Knights are also imbued with a zeal and purpose to dwarf that of any other Marine Chapter. Often entire companies are granted an audience with the Emperor, a privilege normally reserved for the Adeptus Custodes. To date these extraordinary measures have been effective: in over 10,000 years of combat against the forces of darkness, not one Grey Knight has faltered in battle or betrayed the Emperor in word or deed. Added to this spirit is the finest equipment in the Imperium. The Grey Knights are given only the best Marine equipment, with battle-proven and improved designs being given to them before any other Marine unit.

The Grey Knights are based in a secret fortress-monastery on Titan, the largest of Saturn's moons. Here the young aspirants are sent to undergo hundreds of trials of both body and spirit. Finally the handful of survivors (for none who fail survive) are implanted with the Chapter's gene-seed and begin their real training. Their bodies are hardened to withstand pain and fear and their minds are disciplined to withstand against the foul machinations of Chaos.

The fortress-monastery also contains a unique repository of knowledge about the warp and Chaos which has been painstakingly pieced together by the Ordo Malleus down the millennia in the Librarium Daemonica. This gloomy and forbidding place contains tens of thousands of tomes of arcane lore and diabolism, cracked with age and heavy with the psychic evil they have brought upon the universe. Every Grey Knight Psychic Terminator carries the Chapter's sacred tome of battle rituals, the Liber Daemonicus, in a special ceramite case upon their armor. This holy book contains the essential tenets of warp lore rendered from the dusty shelves of the Librarius Daemonica and is one of the Grey Knight's greatest weapons.

The majority of the Chapter's strength is scattered across the Imperium in fast ships guided by the finest Navigators of the Navis Nobilite. These forces are typically organized in small teams that have trained and fought together for their entire lives. Thus they stand ready to respond instantly to the first reports of daemonic incursions anywhere in the Imperium. Grey Knights may be stationed in the farthest reaches of the galaxy for decades at a time. All Grey Knights hope to be returned to their adopted homeworld of Titan when they die. There they can rest at last from their constant

vigilance in the hallowed crypts far beneath the monastery amongst some of the Imperium's greatest and most unsung heroes.

Only the Grey Knights survive in the service of the Ordo. All other troops die when given over to them. The reason for non-survival is simple: any troops that an Inquisitor Ordinary has commanded have been exposed to Daemons. They are therefore privy to one of the most closely-guarded Imperial secrets; that Daemons exist and Chaos is a terrible threat. Those that survive a battle or campaign are executed, with full honors, shortly afterward. They are expendable, and entire Imperial regiments and corps have been dispatched by the Ordo Malleus.

The most notable occasion was at the end of the Nexxas Excuplation (M40.561). An incursion by the Traitor Legionnaires of the Emperor's Children was opposed by a complete Imperial Army corps. Once the invasion had been beaten back the corps was destroyed by orbital bombardment from an Ordo warship. The Imperial records were altered to show that a renegade force of Eldar was responsible for the destruction of the unit.

The only general exception to this policy of secrecy-by-extermination are Adeptus Astartes units. Execution of a Marine is seen as wasteful. Marine units are mind-scrubbed rather than killed: their memories destroyed rather than their bodies. Mindscrubbing removes any and all memories of the Ordo's true purpose, but requires its victims to be completely retrained. Mind-scrubbed Marines cannot even feed themselves, let alone fight for the Imperium.

Of the Adeptus Astartes only the Grey Knights are allowed to retain their memories. The centuries have proved that the Grey Knights can keep the secret of the Ordo's hidden war against Chaos as well as any Inquisitor

+++Quotes from the Inquisitors+++

Some may question your right to destroy ten billion people. Those who understand realise that you have no right to let them live!

- *Officio Exterminatum In Exterminatus Extremis*

Of creations most foul I beheld the Lord of All and knew that I was dead.

- *Inquisitor Brand Last Words*

Aye Captain - Faith is the strongest weapon in your armoury now.

- *Inquisitor Lord Kryptman At the Battle of Ymnar*

Strike fast and suddenly. Attack without warning. Secure victory before the foe is aware of his danger. Remember always, a war is easily won if your enemy does not know he is fighting.

- *Inquisitor Lord Kryptman From the Macharian Heresy*

Against the Great Enemy the Eldar have no hope of victory. They hang on to existence, yet their grip upon the universe is slipping, their hold becomes more precarious with every passing year.

- *Inquisitor Czevak Discussing with Lord Kryptman*

You are not free whose liberty is won by the rigour of other, more righteous souls. You are merely protected. Your freedom is parasitic, you suck the honourable man dry and offer nothing in return. You who have enjoyed freedom, who have done nothing to earn it, your time has come. This time you will stand alone and fight for yourselves. Now you will pay for your freedom in the currency of honest toil and human blood.

- *Inquisitor Czevak Address to the Council of Ryanti*

Though I have seen within the Black Library and spoken to its most terrible guardian, I can never reveal what happened there; not to any man nor even the Emperor himself for I am so forsworn to powers beyond your knowledge. I can only say that a time of inconveivable horror is about to begin. A time when mankind will all the might of the Imperium cannot endure when the strength of the Eldar fails. Even now, our doom stalks us across the stars.

- *Inquisitor Czevak At the Conclave of Har*

There is a terrible darkness decending upon the galaxy, and we shall not see it ended in our lifetimes.

- *Inquisitor Czevak At the Conclave of Har*

They have only one purpose and there is nothing they will not do to accomplish this, no matter how vile or loathsome it might be. These abominations mean to destroy everything proud and noble, everything we hold dear and have fought so long to achieve.

- *Inquisitor Agmar On Tyranids*

The more I learn about these aliens, the more I come to understand what drives them, the more I hate them. I hate them for what they are and for what they may one day become. I hate them not because they hate us but because they are incapable of good, honest, human hatred.

- *Inquisitor Agmar On Tyranids*

Heresy is like a tree, its roots lie in the darkness whilst its leaves wave in the sun and to those who suspect nought it has an attractive and pleasing appearance. Truly, you can prune away its branches, or even cut the tree to the ground, but it will grow up again ever the stronger and ever more comely. Yet all awhile the root grows thick and black, gnawing at the bitter soil, drawing its nourishment from the darkness, and growing even greater and more deeply entrenched.

- *Inquisitor Lord Galan Noirgrim Master of the Ordo Malleus*

Now the past must unveil one of its darkest secrets, the story of the Plague of Unbelief and its most heinous vector Bucharis the Apostate Cardinal of Gathalamor. Never has the Imperium endured such as crisis of faith, not since the dark days of the Horus Heresy itself.

- *Inquisitor Lord Galan Noirgrim Master of the Ordo Malleus*

+++Discussion between+++ +++Captain Stern+++ +++and Lord Inquisitor Kryptman+++

Space Marine Captain Stein looked out upon the desolation. For three days the Imperial Guard's heaviest weaponry had pounded the forest of Ymnar. Where trees had once grown in unbroken ranks now there was thick red mud and wood pulp. Scorched craters pock-marked the landscape and massive rocks lay where exploding shells had tossed them. The ground still smoked, and Captain Stein guessed that it would be hot to the touch. He was grateful to be insulated from the heat and stench by his burdensome Terminator armour.

"Is it done?" he asked, almost to himself, "Is it really over?"

"Over!" exclaimed the other man, "Captain, it has not yet begun."

Inquisitor Lord Kryptman pointed to the south. His gnarled hand clicked and buzzed as prosthetic tissues and osteo-steel stretched and spun. Captain Stein caught a flash of brilliant scarlet upon the brass finger ring that adorned the bio-constructed hand. The Inquisitorial Seal.

"I see them Inquisitor," said the Space Marine Captain. His vision, though many times keener than that of an ordinary man, strained to reveal tiny movements in the distance. Gradually, as if responding to a common signal, the tortured soil moved, pushed up from some as yet unseen force.

"It won't be long now Captain," Kryptman warned, "I know these enemy. You can't kill them with guns and swords. Send the Confessors and the Chaplains to their station, and let every warrior prepare for the greatest battle of his life."

"Daemons...", exclaimed Stein, "may the Emperor protect us!"

Inquisitor Lord Kryptman nodded. "Aye Captain - faith is the strongest weapon in your armoury now."

+++Inquisitor Kryptman+++

"You know what you must do, Borshak?" Inquisitor Kryptman asked sternly.

The psyker nodded shakily. "I must read this alien artifact and tell you what I find."

Kryptman nodded. He mistrusted Borshak - like all empaths, the psyker was highly strung but there was more to it than that. There was a weakness about the skinny youth that made Kryptman suspect that Borshak might be receptive to malign influence. He resolved to watch him closely. They made their way down the cold corridor of the Talasa Prime base. The two black-robed security novices saluted Kryptman at the door. He answered their salute by punching his fist against his chest.

"Password?" asked one of the novices. Ordinarily Kryptman would have been unfazed by the need to give the code words. Even here in one of the most heavily-guarded citadels of the Inquisition he could understand the need for vigilance. However, he was nervous about the alien artifact and the circumstances it had been discovered in..

Coupled with the reports of sector wide unrest, it had set his nerves on edge. He wondered if the appearance of this strange creature was the harbinger of some new threat to the security of the Imperium.

"Opus Dei," he said testily. The cold-eyed novice stepped aside. Kryptman raised his ring and pointed at the door seal. "No barrier stands in the way of the truly faithful," he said. The red jewel set on his ring pulsed. The runes on the door flared to life and the door dissolved. Kryptman gestured for Borshak to proceed then followed him into the secured area. He knew they were safe in isolation. The secret of the dissolving door was one of the Inquisition's most carefully-guarded secrets and he was one of the few men privy to it.

The artifact sat on a plinth in the centre of the room, the eerie blue aura of the stasis field glowing about it. They moved across to the dais and looked down upon it. "It looks alive," muttered Borshak. He clawed at his shaven head with one dirty nail-bitten hand. "I don't like it."

"It doesn't matter whether you like it," said Kryptman.

He understood Borshak's unease. The fleshy, pulpy appearance of the thing set his stomach turning. During his own novitiate he had studied torture techniques. The appearance of the thing reminded far too much of an arm from which the flesh had been flayed to reveal muscle. "Just read it."

"You say that this was taken from the wreckage of the freighter Hammer of Foes?" Borshak asked.

"Yes, it was stored in stasis."

This was more like it. The psyker had begun to collect information in order to facilitate his reading.

"And that there was no crewmen on board."

"No living crewmen. Many of the escape pods were fired. They have yet to be found. About three of the crew have still to be accounted for. We found the bodies of the others. They had been killed with something that appeared to be organic material. Eaten right through as if by a combination of acid and giant worms. The ship had been decompressed. We found the body of its Astropath floating near the stasis chamber. He had died of oxygen starvation. The artifact was in the chamber."

Borshak took a deep breath. His lined face looked even more worried and careworn than usual. He peeled off his gloves resignedly. "I'm ready," he said.

Kryptman intoned the litany. The stasis field de-activated. For a long tense moment they waited. At first nothing seemed to happen and they relaxed slightly. Kryptman checked the readings on the brass-rimmed screen of the wall monitor. The techpriests had been correct, no biological contamination. So far, so good.

He became aware that Borshak was looking at him. He nodded. The psyker proceeded; a grimace of distaste passed over his face as he touched the mucus-coated thing.

He pulled his hand back. A thin film of slime glistening on his skin. "Urgh," he said.

"Get on with it."

With a slight shudder he grasped the thing once more. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, settling down into the trance state needed for psychic receptivity. A faint nimbus of light played around the eye symbol tattooed on his forehead. When he spoke his voice seemed deeper and more confident.

"It is alive," he said calmly.

"Sentient?" asked Kryptman.

"B-barely. I'm receiving conflicting impressions of the thing. I've just barely made contact. I-it's so - alien. It's like trying to read the mind of a s-spider."

"Try for a deeper reading." Borshak nodded.

His breathing slowed. If Kryptman had not known better he would have said Borshak was asleep. He noticed a small tic had appeared far back in the psyker's jaw.

"I-it's alive and part of it h-hates. I-it's so fierce. N-no. One of them is so fierce. It lives to bite and claw and spit, it chews up the other part, the little part and makes it into sh-shrapnel. Th-there's three of them. One bites, one guides and o-one - and one dies."

"One dies?"

"Y-yes, one lives to die. I-it's odd. The small one is many. It lives to die. It is chewed up and turned into projectiles and it i-infects the target."

"Speak sense, man."

Borshak had started to sweat. The strain of contact with the alien thing was starting to tell. "I-it's a weapon a-and i-it's alive. The bullets are alive. The firing mechanism is a-alive and the gun's alive. It's a kind of symbiotic organism I-like the martian tree-crab. I-it's alive and we - it hates you - us." Kryptman's mind reeled. A living weapon? A living rifle? He tried to think of how such a creature might evolve? It was madness - weapons were designed not born. "Try psychometry - find out what happened on the Hammer."

"We are picked up by the sensitive one, the one who speaks at distance. He senses our hate and he responds. At first he is curious then he grows to know and love us. He is united with us. He senses our bloodlove and we hunt - we hunt the meat-things, the enemies of our makers. He knows our need to plant our seed within them. He knows we hunger to spurt forth the little hungry ones who eat the meat. He carries us and we seek our prey through the red dark of the long-long corridors."

Kryptman noticed how agitated Borshak had become. The gun had started to throb in his hand. The fleshy muscular sacs pulsing like the valves of a great exposed heart. He senses that something was wrong.

"Put the thing down, man. It's doing something to your mind."

"We h-hunted the meat-things, to lay the young-eggs within their flesh. Again and again we send them forth, pleasure bursting through us mixed with the pain as we send the little eaters out their way. Fire them out to bore through the meat."

Borshak swivelled the huge gun to bear on him. Kryptman threw himself to one side. The thing in Borshak's hands spasmed. There was a terrible tearing grinding sound..

Kryptman remembered that Borshak had said about the grubs being chewed up and spat out. There was a sound like a man vomiting. A burst of mucus sprayed out. Something hard cracked on the wall behind him. A stink, as of excrement mixed with bile, filled the air.

"Yes-yes, we hunt the meat-things - but they flee into the great dark and they trap the ship - soon it is hard to breathe but the meat-thing, our carrier, our partner, places us in stasis so we might live. Now we have new partner. Groupmind complete."

Kryptman rolled behind the dais, drawing his pistol. The grinding sound continued. A burst of shrapnel tore into the dais. Steam rose from the stone where the acidic mucus eroded rock.

Kryptman leapt up and blasted. The bolt flew straight and true in Borshak's chest. His rib cage exploded. What was revealed within reminded Kryptman oddly of the weaponf alling from the psyker's dead hands. He fought to control the urge to pump bolter-shells into it.

It lay there dormant. Borshak's mouth continued to open like a fish's would when out of water. The Inquisitor understood now what had happened on the Hammer. The ship's astropath had melded with the weapon and hunted the unarmed crew. They had fled in the escape pods, after decompressing the ship. Rather than let the weapon die, the astropath had put it in stasis and suffocated himself. That question answered, Kryptman could hand the artifact over to the techpriests for dissection.

There were still other questions that needed answers though: who had made the gun, there had it come from, were there any more?

Kryptman had a premonition that he and the whole Imperium would soon need to know the answers. Inquisitor Kryptman would find those answers, he had to.

* * *

Inquisitor Kryptman pushed back the huge pile of papers, removed his reading glasses and rubbed his eyes wearily. He had been working all night trying to make sense of the mass of reports coming in from all over the sector.

As usual, the room was chilly. His young aide Carel had lit a small fire, but it wasn't vigorous enough to warm the high-ceilinged office. He got up from his straight-backed chair, stretched his long sinewy limbs, and walked over to the window. It was a cold winter afternoon and would be dark in a couple of hours.

Kendrick's World was an unwelcoming place, its people backward and intensely superstitious. The Imperial presence here was only a gesture; this world had nothing much to offer. Except solitude perhaps, since it was located on the fringe of one of the spiral arms of the human galaxy. Kryptman had travelled here to continue the Inquisition's investigations into the phenomenally high level of unrest in the sector. The reasons were far from clear, and now a missing Marine chapter had to be added to the ever-growing list of planetary revolts and Genestealer infestation. Still, at least the austere regime of the Imperial stronghold, a converted monastery, was to be welcomed. He had imposed a rigorous new timetable on the staff and discipline had been greatly improved as a result. Since the discovery of the strange organic weapon and Borshak's unpleasant death, he had been uneasy. Kryptman was not psychic himself, but he trusted his intuition. He couldn't help feeling that all these events were somehow related but so far the connection had eluded him, and Borshak's dying face continued to haunt his dreams.

He looked through the narrow window and saw a shower of meteors arcing through the pale sky, dark trails of smoke spiralling behind them. They had been falling for a week now and the locals had been getting very excited - spouting all sorts of stupid nonsense about the end of the world. Four hundred year's instruction in the Imperial Cult had obviously been a complete waste of time. With a snort of disgust, Kryptman turned his attention back to the tottering stack of reports.

* * *

Ten miles down the valley, a lone meteor shrieked through the cold evening air. Its impact with the hillside created a small crater and its heat charred a black ring in the surrounding heather. A nauseating smell like carbonised meat rose from the meteorite, which was roughly ovoid in shape, and about two feet high. Curiously, its ridged and warty form was more like some bloated, alien organ than a lump of sterile rock. After a few minutes, the meteorite toppled over on its side. A large native game bird approached and peered at it with one greedy eye. The cancerous looking thing shook again, faint sounds emanating from within. The bird stalked closer, until it was right beside the meteorite, which still trembled spasmodically.

The bird raised its beak and plunged it straight down into the meteorite, splitting it open like an overripe fruit. A spray of yellow sputum burst out and a formless creature catapulted onto the bird, engulfing it in a glistening organic mass. It was all over very quickly. The creature wrapped itself tightly round its prey, compressing it, absorbing it. No feather or claw was wasted. As it contracted round the bird, a trickle of blood and bodily fluids dribbled out, turning the charred ground into a disgusting bloody-black mud.

Slow changes rolled over the creature's body as it developed a more consistent appearance: an embryonic spine and rib cage erupted from amid obscenely pulsating organs, its pallid skin darkened and sprouted stubby feathers. With prolonged sucking noises a thick neck and head worked their way out from the top of the creature, while strong clawed legs sprouted from underneath. A stubby tail elongated from its spine and two beady eyes popped into existence. For an hour or so it lay on the ground, twitching its new limbs, recovering from the ordeal of its metamorphosis. Finally it lurched unsteadily to its feet and shook its body like a wet dog might do - shaking off a little hail of ash, bone fragments and bloody saliva. The creature now resembled a hideous mismatch of embryo bird and insect. Raising its powerful head, it sniffed the air, then loped off over the heather and rocks into the twilight gloom.

Cold, this place is cold. Cold and hard. Clear air, carries scent well. Little life all around, animals, birds. Stupid, slow, good for eating. Hungry, need more food, need more bulk. We must hunt. Many large life upwind. Find the place-of-stone. Find and kill the prey.

* * *

Kryptman did not look up at the knock on his door.

"Come in!" he shouted, irritated.

Carel, his young aide, came into the office, carrying a pile of papers in his thin arms. He shut the door quietly and advanced in silence to Kryptman's desk, too much in awe to speak. Kryptman scratched his signature on the bottom of the form and replaced the pen in the gargoyle-shaped inkwell.

"Well, what is it?" he asked, looking up.

"The latest batch of reports from the outlying posts. The communications problems is getting worse; we've lost contact with four more outposts. The engineers we sent out haven't been heard from since they left."

Kryptman didn't like this at all. News from the outposts was invariably tedious and inconsequential. He wouldn't miss it. What did increasingly worry him was why there was no communication. The comm-lines on this world were so simple that they almost never malfunctioned.

An oppressive sense of foreboding weighed down on the Inquisitor. Everything was falling to pieces around him - equipment malfunctioning, locals becoming hysterical, communication through the warp being obstructed. Most worrying of all, the Lamenters Marine chapter was missing, and couldn't be contacted. The Imperial stronghold was becoming increasingly cut off - from the rest of the planet, and now from the Imperium as well.

Kryptman didn't believe in coincidences.

But it was times like these that tested the mettle of loyal servants of the Imperium. He straightened his black damascene jacket, adjusting the formal collar so that it lay more comfortably about his neck.

"Put the reports down here."

He indicated a free space on his cluttered desk. Carel looked more worried than usual. The boy was a born worrier, but had a good, tidy mind for one so young. Given time, the Inquisitor knew he could mould this young man into a loyal and dependable Imperial servant. Feeling a little guilty for his earlier abruptness, he asked

"What's the matter, Carel. Is something troubling you?"

"I know you told me not to mention local gossip, sir, but it's the meteor storms, and all the other odd things which have been going on."

"Things. Be more specific, Carel. Inexactitude is a sign of confused thinking."

"I can't sir, it's only rumours. A number of locals horribly murdered, that lambs over Rakkish way that bit a boy's head off, a monster dog had been terrorising hill farmers on the Westside Moor...."

"Enough! It's just the odd incident which has been blown out of proportion by the farmers. You shouldn't take it so seriously, Carel. Meteors are simple astronomical phenomena, they don't signify the end of the world. In future, please try to raise yourself above the level of your superstitious ancestors. I suggest you learn the first seventy verses of the Canticles of Catechism to clear your head. I'm far more concerned about what's happening to the Lamenters and what's causing this communication breakdown. Have Astropath Faren reports to me immediately. Hurry now!"

Carel gave a half bow, then scuttled off, the studded wooden door banging heavily behind him.

Alone, Kryptman's feeling of foreboding returned. He'd told Carel that all these stories of mutilated corpses and rampaging monsters were sheer superstitious hysteria, but who was he trying to convince, Carel or himself? The locals, though superstitious, were remarkably pragmatic and unimaginative. These strange happenings must have some basis in fact, though he couldn't begin to imagine what.

Everything was so vague. Were the meteors carrying some sort of virus that infected animals and turned them mad? Should he, ought he, overlook the possibility of some sort of Chaos activity in the region? There was only a tiny incidence of emergent psykers on Kendrick's World, so it seemed unlikely they would have attracted any attention from the warp. And the sparse population and relative unimportance of the world suggested it would be of little interest to Chaos cultists.

The light flickered, and dimmed. The shadows of the winter evening drew close around the Inquisitor. He wearily opened the next report and tried to concentrate.

* * *

The creature galloped tirelessly up the valley, racing over the scree, bounding over rocks and streams. It broke its course once to devour a large grazing rodent, and by the time it had finished absorbing its bulk and reforming its body, the sun was setting. Its body was now larger, thicker, less suited for speed, more suited for attack. The creature's neck was losing definition, causing its head to recede into its shoulder; its maw deepened and widened, drool running off ranks of long sharp incisors. It now somewhat resembled a crudely-flayed wolf.

The old monastery squatted at the head of the valley, limned in blood by the setting sun. It was a huge, sprawling edifice, built centuries ago by a dour people with more interest in solidity than aesthetics, and more zeal for truth than comfort - men much like Inquisitor Kryptman in fact. Built into and onto a massive granite crag, it almost seemed a natural extension of the rock itself. When the Imperium rediscovered Kendrick's World, it was decided to use the empty building as their primary communication and administrative stronghold.

The creature crouched behind a rock, spying out the place. Its eyes had widened to cope with the fading light, and organ buds waved from its forehead, reading the scents on the air currents. With a soft ripping noise, long hooked claws shot from its paws. Its tails shortened and thickened and sprouted a cruel stinger. As the sun finally sunk behind the monastery, the creature leapt onto the rocks, propelled upwards on its powerful hind legs.

Hunger, hunger! Small large life above. I go up! We recognise this place-of-stone. Our prey is here. Remember his scent!

* * *

Far above a young guard patrolled the parapets of the monastery, rubbing his hands together to warm them. His lasgun weighed heavily across his shoulder and he shifted it into a more comfortable position. From his vantage point, he could see down the barren valley to the ranks of mountain beyond, a dreamscape of misty greys and browns in the fading light.

The glow-globes sputtered into life, their feeble light making the place surreally two-dimensional. Defaced statues of forgotten native gods crowded the walls, their shapes worn by weather and time. The young guard paced restlessly up and down his stretch of battlements. He been on patrol for three hours and the cold winter night had set in. Hearing the wind moan and wail, he shivered and pulled his cloak more tightly around him, feeling hemmed in by stone and shadows.

He did not hear the approach of Death.

As he turned away, something catapulted over the parapet and smashed into the back of his neck, knocking him to the floor. Its warm body enveloped his head. The musky stench was disgusting. He dropped his lasgun and flung his arms up to his head trying to tear the creature away. Savage claws raked at his throat, ripping open his windpipe.

He tried to scream but all his horror and pain just came as a racking gurgle. His questing hands pulled at the thing, futilely trying to pull it off, but it was slippery with a corrosive fluid. Razor-sharp teeth flayed the skin from his fingers. The pain was terrible, building up inside him with no release. Fire seared through the back of his neck as claws cut deep through the top of his spine, cracking his vertebrae apart. Sensation flared and dimmed. The last thing he felt was something punching through his eye sockets.

* * *

Food, warm food. Eat and absorb. Grow larger, grow larger. Teeth to tear, claws to rend. Our enemy is here. We hate him, we will find him and destroy him. Enter the place-of-stone. Seek out our enemy, hunt him and destroy him..

The creature reared up its body and stretched open its jaws, revealing row upon row of dripping needle-sharp teeth. Swishing its tail from side to side, it went down the steps into the monastery. All that remained of the guard was a messy pile of torn and bloody clothing, a slimy smear on the stone, and a lone disconsolate eyeball.

* * *

The door to Kryptman's office swung open admitting a worried Carel.

"Where's Astropath Faren?" demanded Kryptman. "Didn't you give him my message?"

"Yes, sir. Astropath Faren said to give you his apologies but he couldn't leave the Astral Chamber, they were too busy. He's sent you a coded message scroll and the latest batch of off-planet reports. Astropath Merrill had a fit, sir. He was foaming at the mouth..."

"Yes, Carel, that'll be enough. Stay here while I look through the reports."

Carel obediently stood to attention by the door, while Kryptman scanned the coded scroll from Faren. Kryptman knew that the Astropath would have come if he could.

There must be a major crisis to prevent him.

He picked up the scroll and pressed his long index fingers to the runes on either end. The cylinder hummed softly and split open, disgorging a thin sheet of vellum.

Kryptman peered at the Astropath's spidery writing, difficult to read in the dim light.

The message read:

"Kryptman, too busy too see you. Worsening problems with astro-telepathic communication. Everything is fragmentary, distorted. It's worse trying to send. There's a great impenetrable presence, a psychic void. Not a warp storm, something else. Something utterly alien, like nothing we've ever experienced before. A solid darkness, a shadow in the warp. And it's growing. We recoil before it, we cannot fight it. We dwindle before its might. Astropath Merrill has foreseen a time of darkness. Come to the Astral Chamber as soon as you can."

Kryptman put down the vellum with a shaking hand. As he released it, the paper disincorporated itself in a puff of acrid smoke. Why did he have this sense that events were speeding up beyond his capacity to understand them? And what did he mean, the Shadow in the Warp? Why did Astropaths always have to use such flowery language, why couldn't they just tell you the plain facts?

Kryptman picked up the other comm print outs and scanned them as fast as he could. Loss of contact with Darson VI following increased reports of Stealer activity in the sector. Not the slightest trace of the Lamenters. It was as if they had been wiped out, which was, of course, so unlikely as to be considered impossible - under normal circumstances. What force could possibly cause an entire chapter of Marines to disappear? A cold fear was growing in the pit of his stomach.

He was just starting to read an incomplete account of a devastated research station on a planet in the next system, when a dishevelled guard burst in.

"Inquisitor Kryptman, Haral's been killed!" he cried, white-faced with shock. "There's nothing left but -" Clutching his mouth, and making swallowing noises, he blundered back into the passage.

"Carel, go with him. Find out what's going on, and get back to me as soon as you can."

Carel left the door open, and Kryptman heard alarms go off, their wailing muffled by the labyrinthine corridors and the thick stone walls. He opened a drawer and took out his bolt pistol. It was a beautiful weapon, thousands of years old, passed on from Inquisitor to Inquisitor. Its familiar heavy weight in his hand, the fine carvings on its barrel, reassured him, gave him strength. After checking the purity seal was intact, he broke open a case of bolter shells and loaded fifteen of the brass shells into the gun. The shells were heavy and cold, stamped with the mark of the weapon factories of Mars. He placed the gun on the table, ready.

* * *

The creature padded awkwardly down the gloomy corridors of the old monastery, vent-like nostrils flaring, reading the scents carried on the air currents. It was the height of a tall man, but with a much thicker body, its centre of gravity lower than a human's. Its two upper arms were short and coarse, glistening with raw tendons and skinless muscle. Neck and shoulders had virtually fused together, and its face - mostly composed of its ferocious gaping maw - seemed to be sinking down to its torso. A rudimentary limb stood out from the top of its head, from which extended a crude three-fingered clawed hand. Its back legs too had shortened and broadened, and a secondary tail reached forward from between them, tipped with a hard, horny substance. The protuberant backbone also ended in a muscular tail, which curled upwards and backwards. Corrosive venom dripped from its tip, leaving tiny pockmarks in the flagged stone floor. Flexible chitinous plates ran down its back, and when it moved, pulsing, phosphorescent organs showed through. It exuded a disgusting slime continuously, occasionally shaking off the excess and leaving a rank and slippery trail in its wake.

Man body good food, easy to absorb. I am strong, I shall destroy. The prey is close, I have tracked him down. I am the living weapon. We remember this place of cold stone darkness. We remember Kryptman. We come. We are retribution.

* * *

Kryptman returned to the reports. There were numerous accounts of extra-normal occurrences, disturbingly similar to those on Kendrick's World. Contact with the Scythes of the Emperor erratic but possible - just. Some mention of unidentified alien craft spotted by a Space Wolves patrol on the edge of the spiral arm, but then communications lost (always this problem with communications). Three more merchant space ships were missing, not in the warp, but normal space. New outbreaks reported of Stealer cult activity.

All these things could be taken as isolated incidents, but he was convinced there must be a connection. Why couldn't he see it, understand the pattern? Everything whirled round in his head: Genestealers, the Lamenters, meteors, monsters, mutilated bodies, the Shadow in the Warp. His head ached trying to contain all of it.

Carel returned to the office, out of breath.

"The monastery's not under attack?" asked Kryptman.

"No sir, but whatever killed Haral is now in the building. There was a slimy trail of footprints leading down the tower steps. All the guards are looking for it, but it could be anywhere."

He made an encompassing gesture of helplessness. Kryptman understood the problem. The monastery was so huge and rambling that they were still discovering new areas in it. Assuming the invader didn't lose itself and starve to death, it could hide out indefinitely.

Carel dropped three heavy iron bars across the door to secure it. Drawing his laspistol from its concealed holster under his robes, he took up guard by the door, weapon in hand.

Kryptman hoped the guards could deal with the invader quickly. He should be supervising the hunt himself, but he had to go talk to Astropath Faren first.

With a sudden wrenching impact, the door splintered open, throwing splinters of wood and steel across the room. The creature leapt in, and gathered itself to attack. Kryptman was stunned by the creature's dramatic entrance and horrific appearance - he stood motionless for a couple of fatal seconds. Looking into its glittering black eyes he saw himself, his scarred face broken into a myriad of tiny images. He knew this creature wanted him, wanted to kill him. And the creature knew it had found its prey.

He grabbed wildly for his bolter, and knocked it off the desk onto the floor. Seeing its opportunity, the creature started towards him, propelling itself forwards with an odd bounding, striding motion.

Carel leapt between the monster and Kryptman, firing his laspistol at point blank range. It turned on him with incredible speed for its ungainly shape, claspng his head, crushing his skull. Gobbets of brain and bone fragments fountained across the room. Continuing the tremendous force into the ceiling, breaking his bones with a sickening crunch. Instinctively, he kicked over his chair, flung himself to the ground, and rolled under the desk as the creature landed on top of it with a crunch. He fired blindly up through the wood, and rolled out the other side. He came out of his roll in a fluid motion, simultaneously firing another shell at the creature, which had jumped down to the other side of the desk. This attack had some effect, ripping away part of its spine to expose the muscles and spraying the far wall with red mucus. Enraged, the creature opened its mouth and screamed a horrid, gurgling cry, then lifted the edge of the desk and sent it crashing towards the Inquisitor. Kryptman couldn't move out of the way fast enough, he was knocked over, one of his legs caught under the heavy desk. He fired wildly as he fell, but his shot missed, and exploded through the window, spraying shards of glass everywhere. Before he could pull his leg free, the creature had jumped on him, scrabbling and clawing at his body, trying to pinion his arms.

Mighty Emperor, give me strength, prayed Kryptman, struggling to escape the steely grip of the claws. As the creature's grip on him tightened, it stabbed at him with its forward-thrusting tail, trying to spike open his chest. Kryptman realised that the creature was slowly,, inexorably drawing him closer to it, towards its gaping maw. The foetid rank odour it exhaled made him gag. As the creature forced him up to its mouth, Kryptman, with a superhuman effort, managed to free his right arm and fire his boltgun straight into the creature's mouth. The shell shot down the creature's throat and exploded inside its body.

The creature was torn apart from the inside: chunks of flesh and bone rained over the room.

Kryptman was flung violently back against a wall; he felt his ribs go in a lance of pain.

The whole attack had taken but a few seconds. Kryptman fumbled through the wreckage looking for stim-pills and painkillers. His foot slipped on some bloody bit of the alien carcass and he fell into the chair, gasping with pain.

What was this creature? Why had it been sent to kill him, and who had sent it? He had no doubts that the creature had been instructed to do this. Unlike a mindless monster, it had attacked with ruthless efficiency, refusing to be distracted, as though guided by some cold and calculating alien intelligence.

The mixture of stimulants and painkillers was making him feel heady. A terrible understanding assailed his consciousness. This creature is the link, he realised. Somehow this creature connects all these events, all the weird happenings. He could almost see the pattern. The Imperium must be warned! Claspng his tattered black jacket about him, Kryptman staggered painfully out of his office, heading towards the Astral Chamber.

* * *

Astropath Merrill was lying in a cot outside the Astral Chamber, the white of his eyes rolled up, mumbling endlessly about the Shadow in the Warp. Kryptman tried unsuccessfully to soothe him, then gave up. Merrill was beyond any help he could give.

The Astral Chamber was a great spherical vault, its high ceiling lost in shadow. Ornate marble couches, evenly spaced against the outer wall, pointed into the centre of the room, where the podium of the Chief Astropath was positioned. On every couch but one lay an Astropath. The ends of couches were inset into the wall, so the psykers' heads were hidden. The chamber was lit with dim red light, and when Kryptman entered he had the impression that the grey-clad bodies of the Astropaths were floating in a great circle around him.

Faren, looking harassed, strode down from the podium to greet him. He looked very old and tired, his fine grey hair all dishevelled.

Kryptman quickly explained the situation, outlined his theory, stressed the gravity of the threat. To his surprise, the astropath took him perfectly seriously, saying nothing, just nodding his head thoughtfully. As they discussed how best to communicate the situation to the Imperium, they were interrupted by the Astropath who had finally managed to contact the Scythes of the Emperor.

"The Scythes of the Emperor are under heavy attack, they don't know how much longer they can hold out. Their situation is critical. They must have support. Wait - they're sending us a warning...."

The Astropath's breathing was fast and laboured. Sweat dripped from his forehead, as he struggled to maintain contact with the beleaguered Marine chapter. Faren reached out a hand to support him.

"Warn them, warn them, the Tyranids are coming! THE TYRANIDS ARE COMING!"

With a hoarse scream, the Astropath fell to the floor, clutching his head. Simultaneously, the bodies of the other Astropaths jolted on their couches as they too broke psychic contact, the strain too great for them to bear any longer. One of them plunged over to Faren and Kryptman.

"The shadow! The Shadow in the Warp! It's too strong, we can't break through. It's inhuman!." He broke down and slumped to the floor, sobbing.

The lights in the Astral Chamber flickered and went out. Faren and Kryptman stood in the middle of the room, the shadowy forms of the Astropaths lurching and moaning around them like lost souls.

They looked at each other, their grim faces illuminated by the runes of the machinery.

"Tyranids?" breathed Kryptman in horror. "Another hive fleet?"

For the first time in his life, the Inquisitor was truly afraid.

+++The Star Child+++

As the spirit of the Emperor drifted through the warp it gradually dissolved into the flow of energy, returning to the cosmic of the nature of the warp in its uncorrupted form. Only a tiny core of the Emperor's humanity remained whole, like a small child bobbing upon the tide of a colossal storm in a tiny reed boat.

Thus the soul of the Emperor was cast adrift into the warp. While the Emperor's soul survived there was still hope for mankind. For just as the New Man had been born from the collective souls of the

shamans of old, so the Emperor's soul might be reborn one day. But the day would lie far in the future, when the cries for a new saviour would strengthen the core of the Emperor's soul and rekindle it into new life.

Meanwhile the soul of the Emperor was merely a potential, a child awaiting birth, the Star Child. The humans that were left in charge of the Imperium had no real understanding of what had happened to the Emperor. The concept that he could be born again never occurred to them. To the rulers of the Imperium, the Emperor continues to live, though his body was broken, by means of his indisputable powers.

Only a few select individuals learned the secret over the following millennia, and they became the highly secret brotherhood known as the Illuminati. The Illuminati await the birth of the Star Child and the second coming of the New Man. They know that their knowledge makes them dangerous heretics in the eyes of the Imperium, and consequently maintain a strict secrecy over their activities.

Meanwhile the Illuminati remains a secret force in human space, working away behind the machinery of government, preparing the way for the rebirth of the New Man.

The Sensei

When a Champion of Khorne, Nurgle or any other Chaos Power pledges himself to the service of his Patron Power, his very soul becomes part of the Power's energies. The Star Child also has his Champions, known as the Sensei. Although they do not necessarily know their true identity, these people are actually descended from the Emperor's own descendants, and their genetic structure is similar to his. Not all the Emperor's descendants are Sensei, and almost none of them realise that they carry genes from the Emperor or that it is this which gives them their powers.

The fortuitous combination of genes the Sensei have inherited from the Emperor makes them very special. Their most important trait is their immortality. Although they can be killed they do not age, and possess amazing powers of recovery. They are also protected from the Chaos Powers, and the untainted flow of the warp can move through them unimpeded. A Sensei cannot experience hate, bitterness, or irrational anger, because these things are part of the disharmony of the Chaos Powers. They radiate natural confidence and harmony, and can even draw upon the energies of the warp to use their psychic powers. Sensei do not risk attracting daemons or other malicious psychic forces by using their powers. Being untainted by Chaos Powers they are utterly invulnerable to the predations of the Chaos Powers. In fact because they harbour no trace trace of the emotions and concepts embodied by the Chaos powers they are largely invisible to them.

Sensei are heroes who wander throughout the galaxy, sometimes in the company of a select band of other powerful heroes. The psychic powers of a Sensei make him dangerous heretic in the eyes of the Imperium, so that he and his followers risk capture and death at the hands of the Inquisition or other Imperial forces. They are not so much the enemies of the Imperium as of Repression and injustice in all their guises. Repression exists throughout the Imperium, much of which is justified, but not all by any means. Wherever a Sensei appears he can be sure of huge popular support, while the forces of oppressive government recognise him as an implacable foe.

The Sensei Adventurer Bands

The Imperium regards the Sensei and their followers as dangerous bandits, nihilists and psyker who, if not actually in league with Chaos, are weakening the bulwark which the Imperium has set against its threat.

All over the Imperium, forces are deployed to chase groups of Sensei, and in their turn the Sensei are forced to operate as outlaws. However the conflict does not weaken the resolve of either side. The Imperium is strengthened by the resolve of the Imperial forces, while the Sensei are spurred by their battle against cruelty and oppression.

Sensei outlaw bands are known as Adventurer Bands. They occur all over the Imperium as the champions of underdogs and scourge of authority. They hide in underground caverns, or deep inside cities, or lead freedom fighters from the forest and mountains. Some sail the seas as pirates and operate from secret islands and coves. Others sail space itself as pirates of a different kind, boarding and robbing Imperial cargo vessels as they move ponderously between planets.

Everywhere they champion the poor against the rich, the oppressed against the oppressors. They

are brave, they are popular, and they see themselves as the enemies of both Chaos and oppression.

>>Chaos

+++The Traitor Legions+++

In the time of the Horus Heresy, nearly half of the Space Marine Legions deserted the Emperor to follow Warmaster Horus. Nine of the twenty Legions that were in existence at that time rebelled and became the Traitor Legions. Each of the Traitor Legions has its own unique character and fighting style, but they are all united in their hatred of the Imperium and their thirst for revenge for the defeat they suffered ten millennia ago.

The Death Guard

During the Horus Heresy, the Death Guard joined Warmaster Horus in many battles and raids on the Imperium. When Horus led his forces against Earth and the Emperor, the Death Guard became lost in the Warp. While they were trapped in the Warp, a strange and deadly infection started to spread amongst the Legion, spreading from ship to ship. The stinking pestilence flooded the gut and disintegrated the flesh and rotted its victims from the inside out. Even the Legion's Primarch, Mortarion, became infected, and in his delirium he called upon the powers of Chaos to aid the Space Marines. His fevered ravings were answered by Nurgle, and he became Nurgle's champion. After Horus's defeat, Mortarion led his Death Guard in a campaign of destruction over a score of planets, until finally retreating into the Eye of Terror. Here he received Nurgle's ultimate reward, and became a full-fledged Daemon Prince, ruling over one of Nurgle's greatest Plague Worlds in the Eye of Terror. Mortarion sends out fleets of Plague Ships into the Warp to carry their contagions throughout the galaxy.

The Word Bearers

Even before Horus had been corrupted, Lorgar, Primarch of the Word Bearers, began to worship the gods of Chaos. He revelled in the different aspects of each of the dark powers, dedicating himself to Chaos in its purest form, as Chaos Undivided, and he quickly led the Word Bearers along the same path. The fanatical zeal the Word Bearers had shown in their worship of the Emperor was quickly diverted into equally fanatical devotion toward Chaos.

The Word Bearers are the only Chaos Space Marine Legion of the original nine to still have Chaplains, who enforce a strict regime of religious observance upon their Brothers. Word Bearers are zealous in the extreme, marching forward under huge banners dedicated to Chaos in its myriad forms.

The Night Lords

Their Primarch, Konrad Curze, called the Night Hunter, knew only one way, that was the use of vicious force. His methods were simple, vicious and direct, if you broke the law you died, there was no appeal, Night Hunter was judge, jury, and executioner upon the world Nostrama, where he had set himself up as a vigilante against the crime lords of the planet. When the Great Crusade finally reached this dark world, and the Emperor was reunited with this dark-visaged young Primarch, Night Hunter was placed in command of the Night Lords. The Night Lords quickly gained a reputation for ruthless efficiency, and a cynical disregard for human life. As long as they achieved their objectives, the means didn't matter to them. When the Emperor recalled Night Hunter to answer the charges of cruelty and destruction against him and his men, Night Hunter quickly defected to the side of Warmaster Horus. Night Hunter, operating from a planet deep in the wilderness area of space known as the Eastern Fringe, led the Night Lords on a campaign of terror and genocide that has rarely, if ever, been equalled. Even after Horus had been defeated, the Night Lords continued their attacks until finally the Imperial Assassin M'Shen was able to infiltrate Night

Haunter's base and slay the Primarch, with this act the Night Lords quickly stopped being an organised threat to the Imperium.

The New Lords now strike from the Eye of Terror, where they have retreated to, and they fight for the pure pleasure of it, and for the material rewards it can bring, and not because they worship some deity. They look down upon the more dedicated Chaos Marines, and Loyal Marines, considering them fools.

The Alpha Legion

The Alpha Legion was the last Legion created during the First Founding, it being the 20th Legion. When Horus made his pact with Chaos, the marshall pride of the Alpha Legion was their downfall. The Warmaster was a mighty warrior himself, he commanded armies and fleets, and commanded at the forefront of the Emperor's wars. By comparison, he made the distant Emperor on Terra seem weak and cowardly. The Alpha Legion continues to fight a covert war against the Imperium to this day. They are connected with Chaos Cultists of many of the settled worlds of the Imperium. The Alpha Legion directs the activities of Cultists across entire sectors and they instigate massive insurrections against Imperial rule.

The Emperor's Children

The Emperor's Children were among the units assigned to crush Horus and his rebel Legions on Istbaan V. During a party, the Legion's Primarch, Fulgrim, and his highest ranking officers were corrupted by the decadent pastimes Horus and his Chaos worshippers offered. The Imperial Cult was quickly supplanted by the gratifying worship of Slaanesh.

While corrupt beyond human comprehension, the Emperor's Children are a savage fighting force. Like many of Slaanesh's followers, they have become known as Noise Marines. Each suit of armour, every bolter or chainsword is worked into fantastic patterns and coloured in praise of Slaanesh.

The Iron Warriors

The Iron Warriors once formed the Emperor's most able body of siege troops. The Iron Warriors' Primarch, Perturabo, excelled in siege and warfare above all else. Wherever the Iron Warriors fight they throw up great evil citadels in their wake, and hold them against all comers. Fields of trenches and forests of razorwire surround the strongholds of the Iron Warriors. Even after Horus's defeat, the Iron Warriors were only driven out of the Imperium worlds at a terrible price.

The Thousand Sons

Their Primarch is Magnus the Red, called the Red Cyclops or Cyclopean Magnus, due to his one large eye and his flaming-red hair. Magnus had already been touched by Chaos long before the Horus Heresy, from his long study of the Arcane arts. Even though the Thousand Sons tried to use their occult powers to warn the Emperor of Horus's heresy, the Emperor, mistrustful of anything tinged by Chaos, declared the Thousand Sons heretics and sent Leman Russ and the Space Wolves to devastate the Thousand Sons' homeworld of Prospero. The Thousand Sons were driven to war against their Emperor, and had to fight alongside the Traitor Legions for their survival. The Thousand Sons turned to Tzeentch and asked for his patronage, as she is the greatest wielder of Magic among the Chaos gods.

Magnus the Red was elevated to the rank of Daemon Prince of Tzeentch and given a Daemon World to rule over. He rules from his great volcanic fortress called The Tower of The Cyclops. The topmost level of the fortress has a single living eye, which watches over the landscape and the minions of its Lord, The Eternal Watchdog of The Sorcerer King. Over time, the Thousand Sons started to degenerate and become mutated. The Sorcerers of the Thousand Sons joined together in a cabal led by Ahriman. Even though they risked the wrath of their Daemon Primarch, they cast the spell The Rubric of Ahriman, purging the Thousand Sons of mutation for all of eternity. This caused the great schism within the Legion, and caused the cabal to be banished by the enraged Primarch and scattered to fight in different Traitor Legions across The Eye of Terror.

The Black Legion

The Black Legion began life as The Luna Wolves, created during The First Founding. The Emperor later changed its name to The Sons of Horus, in honour of its Primarch, in recognition of his and its many accomplishments in The Ullanor Crusade.

It was as The Sons of Horus that the Legion fought in the Horus Heresy, serving as Horus's Praetorians throughout his campaign. They were the first to remove the Imperial Eagle from their armour and Banners, and replaced it with The Eye of Horus.

Factions of the other Traitor Legions later blamed The Sons of Horus for causing the rout from Earth by retreating into WarpSpace with the body of their beloved Warmaster.

The Sons of Horus at first worshipped one Chaos power after another, more and more of their number becoming possessed by Daemons. Over the centuries, they were also thinned out by their constant wars with the other Traitor Legions and Chaos forces. When Abaddon came to power in the Legion as their new Warmaster, his first edicts rejected the name of Horus and their ancient Legion title. He ordered the remaining members of the Legion to repaint their armour black in eternal memory of their shame at allowing the body of the Warmaster to be taken. He then led them in a lightning raid which destroyed the Warmaster's body and all of his clones. The Legion's remaining battle barge acts as a secret base for Abaddon and his Black Legion from which they make raids into the Imperium *and* The Eye of Terror.

The Worldeaters

The Worldeaters were easily converted to following the Chaos god Khorne due to their marshall pride and their belief that The Emperor and The Imperium had become soft and decadent. They have totally devoted themselves to fighting as close combat troops, feeding upon the berserk rage of Khorne and distaining ranged weapons as the weapons of weaklings. They arm themselves entirely with pistols and close combat weapons, huge chainaxes and chainswords becoming their favoured tools of bloodshed.

The Worldeaters have split into separate squads, each following its own Champion of Khorne. They have become so engrossed in their fighting rage that any chance for them to operate as a cohesive Legion is long past.

+++The Emperor's Children+++

Chapter History:

All the first founding Chapters were created to take part in Imperial Crusades. It was, however, nearly sixty years before the Emperor's Children saw action. An accident during gene-seeding almost destroyed the Chapter as it was born. Once the Chapter had been re-established with rescued gene-seed it proved to be a loyal and efficient unit, distinguishing itself in several campaigns.

The Emperor's Children were one of the units assigned to pacify Horus and his rebel Chapters, and were the first unit to defect to the Warmaster. During a parley, the Chapter Master and his highest officers were corrupted by the decadent pastimes that Horus and his chaos-worshippers offered. Drugged, pleased beyond endurance, and finally broken, they agreed to keep the Chapter neutral.

Neutrality was all that Horus needed. The rot quickly spread to the whole Chapter, and the Emperor's Children willingly embraced Chaos in all its indolent depravity. The Imperial Cult of the Chapter was quickly supplanted by the more gratifying worship of Slaanesh.

As one of the Traitor Legions, the emperor's Children invaded Earth, but took little part in the fighting around the Imperial Palace. Simple pleasures had given way to complex debaucheries. While their allies fought and died the Emperor's Children slaughtered more than a million people and rendered them down to create endless varieties of drugs and stimulants. Countless thousands more died to give the Legionnaires more direct, if cruder, enjoyment.

When the assault failed the Emperor's Children fled into the eye of Terror with the rest of the Traitor Legions. They were the first to begin raiding Imperial worlds for captives and plunder. Their excesses soon knew no bounds and simple raiding could not supply enough raw Human material for their orgies of worship. At this point, the Emperor's Children turned on the slaves and servants of other Traitor Legions, an action which began a series of wars within the Eye of Terror.

The struggles of the Emperor's Children continued until the destruction of the cloned Horus by the Black Legion. At that point all the Traitor Legions resumed raids on the Imperium. The Emperor's Children have again proven spectacularly successful at this pursuit, and the worship of Slaanesh within the Eye of Terror has never been pursued with such fervor.

Chapter Organization:

The Emperor's Children have retained some of their former organization as Marines, but have altered it to suit their new loyalties. While corrupt beyond Human comprehension, the Legionnaires of the Emperor's Children are a savage fighting force. Like many of Slaanesh's followers, they seek and find a perverse enjoyment in battle. The danger of combat is a rediscovered thrill and aphrodisiac, allowing them to reach new extremities of debauchery.

Psykers are particularly highly regarded by the Emperor's Children, both as enemies and within their own ranks. The broadcast terror of an enemy psyker can be enjoyed in its own right as a new sensation, while a Legionnaire-psyker can kill his enemies with pleasure or pure sensation- the greatest act of worship for a servant of Slaanesh. Close combat, where the enemy can be touched and directly destroyed, is also much favored by the Emperor's Children. Few of them enter battle without some form of close combat weapon. Many Legionnaires aspire to die of pleasure while hosting a Daemon, and as a result the Legion has many Possesseees and Summoned Daemons within its ranks and as allies. The Emperor's Children take a delight in the changes that Chaos and the daemonic has wrought in them, seeing these mutations as means to new pleasures or marks of Slaanesh's approval.

Only in one matter has Marine tradition been completely maintained. The Chapter name has been retained unchanged throughout the Legion's exile. Successive Legion Commanders have taken pleasure (unsurprisingly) in reaffirming the Legion's title. It has become a direct and grievous insult to the grandeur of the "false" Emperor and his staid Imperium.

Chapter Colors:

The Legion's original Chapter colors of gold and purple were abandoned long ago, as was the Imperial double-headed eagle which was, at one time, forbidden to all other Marine Chapters. With the Horus Heresy and the defection of the Chapter, the right to use the double-headed eagle motif was passed to other, loyal, Chapters of the Adeptus Astartes.

A few of the original Traitor Marines have retained their original Chapter colours, although the Imperial badge has been replaced by Slaanesh's male-female rune. For the most part, the Emperor's Children use Slaanesh's pastel shades on their armor, reserving particular colors for different companies within the Legion. Officers and sergeants are, however, still marked out by gold or silver helmets and rank badges. The original Marine armor designs have long since been corrupted in the Emperor's Children. Over the years the mutations wrought by Chaos have been echoed in the shapes of the Legionnaire's arms and armor. A sensuous delight has been taken in making each Legionnaire's appearance grotesque and different from his comrades. Each suit of armor, every bolter, or chainsword, is worked into fantastic patterns and colored in praise of Slaanesh. Each Legionnaire alters and changes his armor slightly, adding to its quality and "beautifying" it. For the most favored, the weapon smiths of the Legion sometimes carve scenes of debauchery into shoulder and breast plates.

+++CHAOS CULTISTS+++

Chaos Cultists are often hidden within what appears to be loyal communities of Imperial citizens. They come from all classes and occupations, and can appear on any of the millions of planets with the Imperium. These cultists are as great a threat to the Imperium as the many raids by renegade Chaos Marines, as they strike at the Imperium from within, spreading terror and destruction. They corrupt the citizens and defenders of the Imperium and infect the Imperium with the taint of Chaos. These followers of the Chaos Gods organize themselves into covens structured as religions, and they subvert and recruit new members with promises of divine notice and rewards, with promises of

power and gifts granted by the Gods of Chaos. These Cults are especially attractive to ambitious individuals and those who are bored with living within the restraints of life within the Imperium. Those who seek thrills and adventure are easily swayed by the leaders of these cults and brought to the worship of Chaos. Some are seeking the power to warp reality through Sorcery and psychic abilities. Some are seeking wealth, while others seek power over their fellow man. The majority, though, are just misled ordinary people who are condemned by their misguided beliefs. Many followers of Chaos comes from those of very low intelligence, and those of unstable mentality. Murderers and those who have committed other despicable crimes seek sanctuary within the Chaos Cults in an attempt to escape justice.

Some Cults worship Chaos Undivided, while others worship an individual Chaos God. Either way, they strive to further the cause of Chaos in its struggle to cominate the galaxy and destroy the Imperium.

The Cults that cause the most damage are those that worship one individual Chaos God and have gained the power to summon daemons from the Warp to aid them. The Inquisition is ever searching out these Cults, striving to rid the Imperium of the infection of Chaos.

+++Generating Daemon Names+++

This is provided as a tool for adding some character to your Chaos armies. There are no new game rules here, just pure old-style GW flavor. SM/TL players might want to use the following information to come up with names for their favorite Greater Daemons. Epic 40k players can do the same, and hopefully might find some inspiration for naming daemon and daemon engine detachments. Use what you like and forget about the rest. And above all, enjoy!

Every daemon has a true name that they never willingly reveal to anyone or anything, as knowing a daemon's true name gives one power over that daemon (extremely strong daemons sometimes boldly proclaim their true names, a sure sign that the creature is too powerful for the knowledge to be of any help). As a result, daemons often adopt use-names to identify themselves. Use-names have no real power, and a daemon may adopt new ones from time to time depending on its moods. Generally speaking, the longer the name, the more powerful the daemon.

Chaos champions can be gifted with True Names as they progress upon the path of chaos, but chances are the champion will continue to use his/her real name and not reveal the daemon name. Besides, "Rhug'guarihlulan's Berzerkers" just doesn't have a nice ring to it...

Daemon True Names

The True Name table appears below; it is used to generate "elements" (similar to syllables) of a daemon's True Name. Greater Daemons have a true name composed of (1d6 x the number of their Chaos god) elements. Roll that many times on the table and string the results together into a single word. Particularly powerful GDs will use 2d6 instead of 1d6 in the above formula. The number of elements in the true name of the god's other servants is equal to the Chaos god's number only. So for instance, a Lord of Change would have a True Name composed of 1d6 x 9 or 2d6 x 9 elements, and a Flamer of Tzeentch would only have 9 elements in it's True Name.

Slaanesh's number is 6. Nurgle's number is 7. Khorne's number is 8, and Tzeentch's is 9.

Second Die Roll (d10)	1	2	3	4	5	6
First Die Roll (d6)						
-----	-	-	-	-	-	-
1	A	COG	FL	LL	SS	CC
2	ER	KW	PP	Z	AA	DA
3	FOL	MM	SH	ABL	DE	G ' G
4	N ' N	TH	AE	DH	GZ	O
5	THL	AK	DH	HH	OA	TL

6	AN	DU	HL	OE	U	AO
7	E	I	OO	UL	AR	EE
8	II	OW	UU	BH	EO	IL
9	RH	Y	IO	EU	IR	PH
10	YY	CH	FF	KS	Q'	ZH

The book encourages you to re-arrange whatever is rolled to produce something more pronounceable (good luck) or more appealing. The example they give is "G'garulhliulrhan", which they re-arrange to "Rhug'guari'ihlulan".

Daemon Use-Names

The table below is for generating elements of Daemon use-names. Roll four times on the table for Greater Daemons, and string the results together into two names of two elements each (onetwo three four). Use-names for lesser Daemons are one word composed of two elements.

Second Die Roll (d20)		First Die Roll (d10)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
-----	9	10						
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	-	--						
1	blue quiver	dangle slash	dreg	fondle	grind	grunt	mad	pox
2	suck vex	thigh bubo	bane	carnal	fiddle	hot	mucus	sate
3	chew spasm	dog spittle	gibber	gnaw	grope	maul	offal	pus
4	sword bile	wrack blister	cackle	fang	hammer	mildew	rot	toad
5	canker mire	eat rend	fester	flux	glut	hate	ichor	leper
6	rut glop	skull gut	spike	tremble	vomit	wind	brute	dung
7	mark face	red fist	spider	thrash	bag	blade	cold	death
8	grab spume	gristle sweat	helm	loon	pest	puke	rip	sharp
9	vile sore	whip taint	blunt	drink	gall	gross	maggot	rabid
10	worm grim	belch liver	bog	buttock	crush	fire	froth	gobble
11	maim wobble	moulder blood	pinch	scratch	slobber	spew	stare	wart
12	doom axe	foul black	grin	loose	putrid	slob	sting	wither
13	break mange	dread quake	eye	thrust	fury	grue	heart	loath
14	rheum foam	scum green	smut	tear	twist	water	blast	cut
15	lewd crab	plague drool	slake	squeeze	whine	ash	beast	chaos
16	fiend scab	gnash spite	grasp	hack	lick	nibble	pierce	reap
17	spurt pile	throb sin	war	beetle	craze	flesh	gore	lip
18	spot fume	warp gob	bend	blight	bowel	clap	fat	flush

19	howl	lust	man	ooze	rotten	sinew	slug	spoor
	venom	wight						
20	bite	claw	filth	glutton	kill	pain	scrape	spine
	wail	burble						

The tables are really just a guideline; ROC encourages you to fool around with whatever you roll up (or to just choose what you want off of the tables and not roll at all) in order to get something that you like and that suits the daemon. For instance, if you roll up "Suckthigh" for a Bloodletter, you might want to re-roll or just pick something suitably Khorne-ish like "Doomspike" (although the first name would be good for a Daemonette of Slaanesh).

The book also encourages adding titles and whatnot to the name to make it sound more impressive, such as "Doomspike the Render of Limbs". So I've also included the alternate daemon titles for each daemon type found in the ROC books to provide some inspiration.

When it comes to naming actual units in 40k or FB armies, the book encourages you to create a name for any greater daemons and assign a title to units of lesser daemons, possibly working in the name of one of the lessers. So for instance you might name your Keeper of Secrets "Fluxcarnal Fleshpiercer" and your unit of Daemonettes "The Bringers of Joyous Degradation" or perhaps "Suckthigh's Bringers..."

Daemon Titles

Here are the alternate daemon titles, which should, at the very least, give Epic 40k chaos players some inspriation for detachment names.

Khorne titles:

Bloodthirsters: Fists of Khorne, Deathbringers of Khorne, Drinkers of Blood, Blooded Ones, Lords of Skulls, Guardians of the Throne, Eaters of Gore and Flesh, High-handed Slayers; Bloodletters: Khorne's Chosen, Takers of Skulls, Teeth of Death, Horned Ones, Naked Slayers; Fleshhounds: Beasts of Khorne, Hunters of Blood, Flesh-Renders, Inevitable Ones; Juggernauts: Blood Crushers, Soul Crushers, Juggers, Feet of Khorne, Blights of Khorne.

Slaanesh titles:

Keepers of Secrets: Slayers of Slaanesh, Despoilers of the Flesh, Feasters of Pain, Great Horned Ones, Base Ones; Daemonettes: Children of Slaanesh, Debauched Ones, Bringers of Joyous Degradation, Seekers of Decadence, Givers of Indescribable Delight; Fiends of Slaanesh: Beasts of Slaanesh, Rams of Slaanesh, Beastials, Unholy Ones; Steeds of Slaanesh: Flesh Lickers, Degraded Ones, Tongue Lashers of Slaanesh, Whips of Slaanesh.

Nurgle titles:

Great Unclean Ones: Fly Masters, Plague Lords, Stench Lords, Father Nurgles; Plaguebearers: Tainted Ones, Maggotkin, Rotbearers, Nurgle's Tallymen; Nurglings: Pus Spores, Mites of Nurgle; Beasts of Nurgle: Beasts, Slime Hounds, Nurgle's Lapdogs.

Tzeentch titles:

Lords of Change: Watching Lords, Eyes of Tzeentch, Feathered Lords; Horrors: Whirling Destroyers, Grumblers, Screamers, Spinning Sourguts, Squealers, Whiners; Flamers: Burning Horrors, Fire Daemons of Tzeentch; Discs of Tzeentch: Sky-Sharks of Tzeentch.

+++Khorne, The Blood God+++

"Khorne is the god of anger and destruction, the warrior god of Chaos whose bellows of rage echo throughout time and space. He sits upon a great throne of brass atop a mountainous pile of bleached skulls. Whenever a Champion of Khorne is slain in battle his skull is added to the pile, which slowly grows higher and higher. Khorne is a fighting god and his daemons and mortal Champions are amongst the most potent warriors of all. Khorne is a noble warrior who respects strength and bravery, who takes no joy in destroying the weakm and considers the helpless unworthy of his wrath. It is said that fate will spare any brave warrior who calls upon Khorne's name and pledges his soul to the blood god. It is also said that Khorne's daemons will hunt down and

destroy any warrior who betrays his honour by killing a helpless innocent or murdering in cold blood. Khorne's great delight is battle and the spilling of blood."

- Renegades

"Khorne is the Blood God, the angry and murderous god of Chaos, one of the great four Powers. His great brass throne sits upon a mountainous pile of bones - the remains of his followers who have died in battle, and of the many they have killed in his name. The growing bone pile reflects the success of his worshippers, feeding his glory but never quenching his thirst for blood and death. Khorne is the Power of Chaos in its aspect of mindless and absolute violence, destroying everything and everyone within its reach, slaying both friend and foe alike. He is the Huntsman of Souls who drives the great armies of Chaos before him. His horn sounds in the depths of the Eye of Terror, urging his followers ever onwards in search of fresh prey. Khorne watches the wild destruction wrought in his name, and his bellows of rage and delight can be heard echoing across the Warp. Khorne is commonly depicted as a muscular humanoid figure hundreds of feet tall, sitting on a vast and weirdly-carved throne of brass, which in turn rests on a mountain of blood-stained bones. He is dressed in plate armour of a strange and alien design, elaborately carved and worked with a repeating skull motif. His head is covered by his huge winged helmet, with only a portion of his bestial, snarling face showing beneath it.

The symbol of Khorne is a skull, the symbol of death. This is often rendered as an X-shaped rune with a bar across the bottom. His followers favour red, black and brass in their dress and armour, the hues of blood, death and Khorne's own armour respectively. The number eight is also associated with Khorne and this is reflected in the organization of his daemoniac armies and followers.

Khorne is worshipped by both Chaos Marines and foul Beastmen alike. He has no temples as such, but is worshipped upon the battlefield. Furthermore, his followers believe that they would displease him by wasting valuable time building temples and worshipping in them when they could be slaying in Khorne's name. Every life taken by a follower of Khorne increases the Blood God's power. He looks with particular favour upon those who take the lives of their friends and allies, and the more death and destruction a creature has caused, the more welcome it is as a sacrifice to Khorne.

Followers of Khorne have no friends and few long-term acquaintances - all are soon-to-be sacrifices to Khorne. Even another follower of Khorne may try at any time to offer their lives to the Blood God! Followers of Khorne may have allies for a short time, but they are always aware that all other intelligent beings fear and hate them, and will seek to destroy them at any opportunity."

+++Tzeentch, Changer of the Ways+++

"Tzeentch is the god of fortune and chance and the cosmic architect of fate and destiny. His body is covered with faces which constantly shift and change, reflecting the mood of Tzeentch as his all-seeing mind probes the endless strands of fate which hold the universe together. Tzeentch schemes and plots to further his own unimaginable purposes, sometimes supporting a mortal cause, at other times hindering it, but constantly manipulating the vastly complex strands of fate which hold the secrets of life and death. Because Tzeentch's plots are so convoluted it is impossible to divine what his true purposes or intentions are. His machinations invariably turn out to be more subtle and complex than they first appear, and even his most loyal followers are likely to discover only too late that they are just pawns in a cosmic game of the gods. Tzeentch is also the god of mental energy and magic - the raw forces of change themselves."

- Renegades

"Tzeentch is known by many titles including the Changer of the Ways, the Master of Fortune, the Great Conspirator, and the Architect of Fate. These titles reflect his masterly comprehension of destiny, history, intrigue and plot. In his mind he listens to the plans and hopes of every man and every nation. With his all-seeing eye he watches these plans unfold into history. Tzeentch is not

content to merely observe the fulfilment and disappointment brought by the passage of time. He has his own plans: schemes which are so complex and closely woven that they touch the lives of every living thing, whether they know it or not.

Tzeentch feeds upon the need and desire for change that is an essential part of human nature. It is also a part of dwarven and elven natures, but not to the same extent as mankind is a far more volatile and ambitious species. All men dream of wealth, freedom and a better tomorrow. Nor are these dreams the preserve of the impoverished or powerless as even rich men dream of further riches, or of an end to their responsibilities. All these dreams create a powerful impetus for change, and the ambitions of nations create a force which can change history. Tzeentch is the embodiment of that force.

Tzeentch is the greatest magician of the Chaos Powers. Magic is one of the most potent of all agents of change, and those who use it are amongst the most ambitious and the hungry for power. Many Champions of Tzeentch are also Wizards, while others are likely to be given magical powers or artifacts by their Patron.

Some Daemons of Tzeentch are creatures made from magical energy, and they often appear to be transparent or glowing with an inner light. The Lesser Daemons, or Horrors, cast spells around them as they move, while the Flamers of Tzeentch project multicoloured flames of raw magic. The Greater Daemons, the Lords of Change, are more substantial, and their very thoughts appear as magical multicoloured mist which swirls about their heads. All this magic gives the followers and Daemons of Tzeentch a very distinctive and colourful character.

Tzeentch is also the Great Conspirator, the master of plot and intrigue. Because he is aware of the dreams and plans of all mortals, he is able to predict the likely course, or courses, which the future might take. Tzeentch perceives every event and every intention, and from this information his mighty mind can work out how each will influence the future.

Tzeentch is not content to merely watch the drama of history as it unfolds. He has purposes of his own, although what they are is impossible to say for sure. His intentions are complicated, his schemes highly sophisticated and incredibly long-term. Perhaps he has plans to overthrow the other Powers, or to extend his dominion over mortal realms. Whatever his ultimate purpose, he seeks to achieve it by manipulating the individual lives of men, thereby altering the course of history. By offering power and magic he can recruit influential people to his cause, and affect the lives of many more at a single stroke. However, few of Tzeentch's plots are simple, and many may appear at first contradictory to others, or against Tzeentch's own interests. Only Tzeentch can see the threads of potential futures weaving forward in time like tangled balls of multicoloured wool.

The skin of Tzeentch crawls with constantly changing faces, leering and mocking the onlooker. As he speaks, these faces sometimes repeat what he says with subtle but important differences, or provide a commentary which throws doubt upon his words. This makes it very hard to interpret what exactly Tzeentch is saying. These lesser faces appear and disappear quite quickly, but the actual head of Tzeentch does not change. His puckered face sits low down and has no neck, so that it is hard to distinguish his head from his chest. His curving horns appear to spring from his shoulders rather than from his head. The firmament surrounding Tzeentch is heavy with brooding magic. It weaves like liquid smoke about his head, forming subtle and interwoven patterns. Forms of places and people appear in the smoke as Tzeentch's mind contemplates their fate.

Every Power of Chaos has his opposite number, another Power whose nature is the antithesis of his own. Tzeentch is the eternal adversary of Nurgle. His energy comes from the excitement and will to change, to forge one's destiny, change fortune, and gain power. This is quite the opposite of Nurgle, whose power comes from defiance and hopelessness."

+++Nurgle, Lord of Decay+++

"Nurgle is the god of plague, pestilence, decay and physical corruption. His body is huge and bloated, his rotting flesh swollen with decay and pock-marked with sores and lesions. Tiny daemons called Nurglings crawl all over his putrid carcass plucking at torn flesh and sucking at the

leprous sores and putrid boils. Nurgle is full of morbid energy and enthusiasm, and his daemons travel through time and space spreading plagues and corruption as they perform their Dance of Death round cities and towns they wish to infect. Mortals who die from Nurgle's plague are never free of their agonies, as their souls are claimed by the plague god and they become new daemon servants in turn. A mortal so much as touched by a daemon of Nurgle will catch some foul disease, and is doomed from that moment on to die. It is held that a mortal who is dying of sickness can forstall his death by calling upon Nurgle and pledging his soul to the Lord of Decay."

- *Renegades*

"Nurgle is the Great Lord of Decay and the Master of Plague and Pestilence, his carcase is riddled with disease and infestation. Nurgle is also the Lord of All because all things, no matter how solid and permanent they seem, are liable to physical corruption. Indeed, the very process of construction and creation foreshadow destruction and decay. The palace of today is tomorrow's ruin, the maiden of the morning is the crone of the night, and the hope of a moment is but the foundation stone of everlasting regret.

What is the response of living men to the undeniable and inevitable futility of life? Is it to lie down and accept death and the coming to naught of their every endeavour? No it is not! Faced with the inevitability of death what answer can there be but to run through life at a great and unstoppable pace, cramming each day with hope, laughter, noise and bustle. Thus, happiness and human endeavour are sired by a coming to terms with decay and futility. This realisation is the key to understanding the Great Lord of Decay and his worshippers.

Once we comprehend what it is that the Chaos Power Nurgle embodies, it becomes easier to understand what might otherwise seem a contradictory or even perverse nature. On the one hand he is the Lord of Decay, whose body is wracked with disease; on the other hand he is full of unexpected energy and a desire to organize and enlighten.

The living know that they will die, and many know that they will live with disease or other torment, yet they drive this knowledge into a corner of their minds and keep it pinioned there with all manner of dreams and activity. Nurgle is the embodiment of that knowledge and of the unconscious response to it, of the hidden fear of disease and decay, and of the power of life which that fear generates.

Nurgle is the eternal enemy of the Chaos power Tzeentch, the Lord of Change. Nurgle and Tzeentch draw their energy from opposing beliefs. While the energy of Tzeentch comes from hope and changing fortune, that of Nurgle comes from defiance born of despair and hopelessness. The two Great Powers never lose an opportunity to pit their forces against each other, from mighty battles on the Chaos Wastes, to complex political intrigues among mortal men."

- *Realms of Chaos: The Lost and the Damned*

'...Thus happiness and human endeavor are sired by a coming to terms with decay and futility. This realisation is the key to understanding the Great Lord of Decay and his worshippers.

Once we comprehend what it is that the Chaos Power Nurgle embodies, it becomes easier to understand what might otherwise seem a contradictory or even perverse nature. On the one hand he is the Lord of Decay, his body wracked with disease; on the other, he is full of unexpected energy and a desire to organize and enlighten.

The living know they will die, and many know that they will live with disease or other torment, yet they drive this knowledge into a corner of their minds and keep it pinioned there with all manner of dreams and activity. Nurgle is the embodiment of that knowledge and of the unconscious response to it, of the hidden fear of disease and decay, and of the power of life which that fear generates.

Nurgle is the eternal enemy of the Chaos Power Tzeentch. Nurgle and Tzeentch draw their energy from opposing beliefs. Whereas the energy of Tzeentch comes from hope and changing fortune, that of Nurgle comes from defiance of born of despair and hopelessness. The two Great Powers never lose an opportunity to pit their forces against each other.

+++Slaanesh, Lord of Pleasure+++

"Slaanesh is the Lord of Pleasure whose followers abandon all self-restraint and inhibition to embrace the countless possibilities of mind and flesh. Slaanesh is neither male nor female, but a disturbingly beautiful amalgam of the two. It is said that any mortal who gazes upon the image of Slaanesh will become enslaved by the god's beauty and willingly obey the Lord of Pleasure's slightest whim. The very touch of the god's breath overwhelms mortal senses with the scent of delight, melting the resolve of the toughest warrior and submerging his mind in waves of pure pleasure. The slightest purr of the god's voice is enough to stimulate the senses into eternal and blissful oblivion. To the followers of Slaanesh the mortal world is grey and insipid compared to the sensual paradise of their master's affection."

- Renegades

"Slaanesh is the Lord of Pleasure, the Power of Chaos dedicated to the pursuit of hedonistic pleasures and the overthrow of all codes of decent behaviour. He reigns in a vast and luxurious palace in the void, where favoured followers litter the floors, indulging themselves in all forms of perverse pleasures of the flesh.

Slaanesh takes the form of a bisexual humanoid, male on the left side and female on the right, with an unearthly, unnatural and almost disturbing beauty. Two pairs of horns rise from his flowing golden hair, and he dresses in a mail shirt fringed with velvet. His right hand holds the magical jade sceptre which is his greatest treasure.

The symbol of Slaanesh combines the conventional symbols for male and female, although it is seldom worn openly by his followers. In its place they often wear items of jewelry bearing erotic motifs. Followers dress in robes which are often opened to leave the right side of the chest uncovered, a requirement of many of the rituals involved in his worship. Pastel and electric shades are the chief colours, although white is often used as well. These colours are also sometimes carried over into everyday wear, although they may be modified to fit in with current fashions. Regardless of any considerations, all Slaanesh followers wear garb of sensuously high quality. Six is regarded as the number of Slaanesh, and this is reflected in many small and large things by his followers.

Slaanesh has a neutral attitude to many of the gods of Chaos, and is generally too caught up in his own pleasures to be interested in alliances and co-operation. Particular enemies are the followers of Khorne, whose belief in pain and death is completely opposed to Slaanesh's principle of a life of unrestricted pleasure. Followers of Nurgle and Tzeentch are subject to Slaanesh's usual neutral attitude."

- Realms of Chaos: Slaves to Darkness

+++The Eye of Terror+++

The region of space known as the Eye of Terror lies on the edge of the galaxy to the north and west of Earth. It can be plainly seen as a swirl of stars in the form of a vast and unblinking eye spanning over ten thousand light years of space. The Eye of Terror is the largest known zone of warp/reality space overlap. There are many other such Zones scattered throughout the galaxy, but they are much smaller and much less significant. At the centre of the Eye of Terror is a hole in the fabric of space like a puncture in the skin of a balloon. The raw energy of Chaos pours through this hole and mixes with the material universe. As a result of this intermixture, the Eye of Terror is not wholly subject to the laws of time or space. Its boundaries effectively mark an end to normal and habitable space.

There are stars and worlds within the Eye of Terror, but they are unlike the familiar stars, solar systems, and planets that populate the rest of the galaxy. Each world is a self-contained manifestation of a unique nightmarish sub-reality, a vision of hell formed without regard for the logic of either astrophysics or nature. The energy of the warp saturates these places and sustains a cosmology based on the inhuman perceptions of the powers of Chaos. Thus there are worlds which are flat like dinner plates, worlds surrounded by circling fireballs which provide light and warmth, and tiered worlds like gigantic wedding cakes rising step-by-step on supporting pillars. No-one can say

exactly how many of these realities exist inside of the Eye of Terror. There must be many thousands if not tens of thousands. Indeed, their number and even their very form are probably inconstant and unpredictable.

Because the Eye of Terror is so steeped in chaotic energy it is not as inhospitable to daemons of chaos as normal space. This is not to say that daemons can live or move completely freely within the Eye of Terror, but their conjuration is vastly easier and their power is correspondingly greater than it would be elsewhere in the galaxy. The centre of the Eye of Terror is more hospitable to daemons than the fringes as it is more highly saturated with chaos energy. The worlds which lie closest to the centre of the Eye are called the Daemon Worlds.

Daemon Worlds

On the Daemon Worlds, Chaos reigns triumphant! A daemon can move unhindered from the warp to one of the Daemon Worlds. The Chaos Powers regard these worlds as provinces of Chaos in the galaxy of matter – material colonies of their immaterial empires. The four Great Powers continuously compete to possess the Daemon Worlds. Armies of daemons and their living allies fight huge bloody battles to determine which of the Chaos Powers will possess them. These battles often last for hundreds of years, so that the entire world becomes little more than a gigantic arena where the opposing forces are pitched against each other. The Chaos Powers do not, of course, appear in person to lead their armies – they are spectators to events and not participants. Their generals are Greater Daemons and favoured Daemon Princes who, because they were once alive, understand the nature of both the material universe and the immaterial Realm of Chaos. Once a Daemon Prince has conquered a world, his grateful Patron gives it to him as a gift to rule over as he wishes!

When a Daemon Prince takes control of his hard-won world he uses his mighty powers to reshape it to a form which pleases him. Because of this, every world is different and all are equally spectacular in their own way. The most powerful psykers in the Imperium have reported dreams or visions in which worlds of The Eye of Terror have been revealed to them. On one world a black sun stands in a white sky and smoky threads pour from it onto a tangled black city – this is said to be the homeworld of the Daemon Prince Perturabo, formerly the Space Marine Primarch of the Iron Warriors. Another world has boiling lakes of blood from which spheres of fire float into the sky and spread their light across the firmament – the ruler of this world is the Daemon Prince Bubonicus, formerly a mortal Champion of Nurgle on one of the myriad lost worlds in the galaxy. Visions of such places disturb the psychically sensitive throughout the entire galaxy.

To the living inhabitants of the rest of the galaxy, the prospect of entering the Eye of Terror is terrifying. Navigators will shun space for thousands of light years around it rather than risk a minor deviation in course which might take them into its boundaries. Most Navigators have personal experience of close encounters with Chaos near the Eye of Terror. Many can recall other Navigators who traveled too close to the Eye in a foolish attempt to cut days from their journey time only to vanish forever. On the Eldar Craftworlds there are sealed doorways which were once warp gates leading to living worlds, since swallowed up by the eye of Terror. Now those entrances are sealed with bonds of Wraithbone a thousand times stronger than steel, and cursed with runes so potent that just to look upon them would drive a mortal creature insane.

Within the Eye of Terror the Chaos Powers exert such an influence that normal mortal life can be snuffed out at a whim. Even psykers, whose psychic energy is greater than that of ordinary men, cannot resist the will of Chaos for long. Eventually, all mortal creatures who remain inside the Eye of Terror become either the slaves of Chaos or its Champions.

The Eye of Terror is home to countless millions of living creatures. Many of these are human, or were once human before Chaos perverted them into forms no longer recognisable as such. Every world in the Eye of Terror has its mortal population whose Champions and warbands form the mortal armies of Chaos in the galaxy. Even Daemon Worlds have mortals who live there and worship their chaos masters as gods.

The Eye of Terror offers a place of sanctuary to human worshippers of Chaos forced to flee from the Imperium. The Inquisition never rests in its bid to oust Chaos Cultists from Imperial worlds, and whole planets have been destroyed in order to eradicate thriving cults. However, despite the vigilance of the Inquisition, many worlds harbour secret Chaos Cultists. Even Imperial officials are

sometimes drawn into these cults and led to betray their race and the Emperor. Cultists who have the means and courage to flee the Inquisition often make for the Eye of Terror and the welcoming arms of their chaos masters. These traitors are useful servants because they know a great deal about the Imperium and its defences.

Mortals who take refuge in the Eye of Terror can become very powerful Champions of Chaos – many will have dedicated themselves to Chaos and might already be well on the way to daemonhood. Many mortals took refuge in this way following Horus's defeat by the Emperor. Those Traitor Marines who survived the defeat were led in to the Eye of Terror by their Primarchs. They were joined by rebels from the Imperial Guards, the Fleet, and other former followers of Horus, including many Beastmen. Such is the nature of the Eye of Terror that some of the very individuals who fled there in those far off days are still alive ten thousand years later, granted vastly extended mortal lives by their Chaos Patrons. Whether this reflects a reward for their loyalty or a punishment for their failure it is impossible to say.

Daemon Battles

The mortal population of a world in the Eye of Terror serves Chaos in two equally important ways. Mortals provide the manpower for the armies of Chaos, especially for armies which roam beyond the Eye of Terror in the material universe. Mortals also worship the Chaos Powers and thereby add their own psychic energies to the total energy available to their master.

On the Daemon Worlds life is war; war is the name of Chaos, war fought to amuse or serve the Chaos Powers. Mortal Champions, warbands, mortal and daemonic armies, all battle together in an endless celebration of strife. The Chaos Powers revel in the adoration of their favourite warriors, and savour the blood that is shed willingly in their honour. Should the pace of conflict slacken, a Chaos Power will invite a rival Power to send an invading army to one of his worlds so that they can enjoy the sport of battle. The limits and terms of the tournament are determined beforehand: the number of troops, daemons, and Champions to be committed for example. The wager is likely to be possession of the planet itself! The Chaos Powers love such contests and will often gamble whole worlds on the outcome of a single combat between two mortal Champions.

Although the Eye of Terror seethes with almost perpetual warfare, not every mortal creature is necessarily harnessed to battle. Chaos wants the best warriors after all! Only those who are brave enough to fight their way to freedom from the slave pits, prayer-gangs and black factories are good enough to fight for Chaos. The remainder serve through work and worship. Slaves are rewarded in the bitter way of Chaos; they learn to love the lash and become frenzied with pleasure as they approach extremes of self-sacrifice, trying to outdo their neighbours in their efforts to please their masters.

Just as the inustrial slaves labour to produce the weapons and armour for battle, so vast prayer gangs are put to work worshipping their masters. On the Daemon World of Bubonicus, for example, the equator is surrounded by a dancing human chain which sings and dances the praise of Nurgle as it circles the world. The dancer develop Nurgle's Rot and gradually mutate into Plaguebearers. The Plaguebearers join their master and new mortals take their place so that the circle is never broken. This theatrical conceit pleases Nurgle tremendously, so that Bubonicus has commanded that it should never cease.

This is a typical example of the vast scale of worship which the Chaos Powers enjoy. Other examples include planets where millions of people chant the same mantra in a cry of perpetual worship so that the whole world vibrates to their voices. The entire energies of another are spent building and tolling bells as big as cities whose thunderous peals rebound around the globe while thousands of slaves labour to swing them. There is said to be a world belonging to Nurgle where the entire population is enslaved to keeping the accounts of disease and pestilence, recording every incidence of sickness in the entire galaxy.

The Forces of Chaos

The Eye of Terror is the focal point of Chaos in the galaxy. Its countless worlds provide the bases from which armies and raiders attack the rest of the galaxy. The Imperium lives in fear that the forces of Chaos will unite into a huge army of conquest and pour into human space, destroying and taking over human planets. This has never happened because the various Chaos worlds don't form a united empire but comprise countless independent realms ruled by rival Chaos Powers and Daemon

Princes. The different Daemon Princes and other daemoniac rulers regard their neighbours as rivals, even though they all share a common master.

When the rival forces of Chaos do decide to act in concert they pose a potentially dangerous threat to the Imperium, the Squat Homeworld, Orks, Eldar and all other intelligent lifeforms in the galaxy. Fortunately, alliances between different daemon rulers tend to be fragile arrangements which often fall apart even before their target is reached. Once they have captured the odd planet their natural tendencies to squabble over the spoils almost invariably dissipates their forces and brings their reign of terror to a close. This disunity is particularly noticeable where the forces of several powers are involved in a common enterprise.

Only when Chaos raiders are led by a single extremely powerful leader are they really dangerous. Fortunately for the Imperium, it is rare that a leader of sufficient calibre emerges. Almost invariably the impetus of each fresh attack is quickly spent, so that human forces can take advantage of their enemy's disunity to make good their initial losses.

Chaos Renegades

The most common threat to the Imperium comes from relatively small groups of raiders, invaders and space pirates referred to as Chaos Renegades.

A typical force of Chaos Renegades is based around a core of one or more Champions of Chaos plus their attendant warbands. In most cases all the Chaos Renegades in a force come from a single world, and their troops comprise not only mortal Champions and their followers, but also a number of other followers of their Chaos Patron. Chaos Renegades are accustomed to war and death on their homeworld and regard the galaxy as little more than a giant battlefield. The logical extension of their existence is to find new battles to fight, fresh worlds to conquer, and new peoples to enslave on behalf of their chaotic master.

The Chaos Renegades are often aided by other forces of Chaos. Among these are the Chapters of Traitor Space Marines which turned to Chaos during the Horus Heresy, and which still exist in the Eye of Terror. These Traitor Marines roam the various worlds over which their Patron Powers have dominion, joining warbands, sometimes becoming Champions and even progressing to become Daemon princes. One of the most active Chapters of Traitor Marines is the Iron Warriors Chapter. This Chapter is dedicated to Chaos in its undivided Majesty and is based on the world of the Daemon Prince Perturabo. As they owe allegiance to no Chaos Power in particular, they will often join with Chaos Renegades regardless of the Chaos Power they follow.

When the Chaos Renegades land on their target worlds they may be joined by allies from among the world's own population, or by other marauding forces such as Orks or pirates. These allies are all too willing to join with Chaos Renegades and fight with them in return for a share in the spoils of war.

As the Chaos Renegades move out of the Eye of Terror and towards their targets they are joined by other Chaos sympathisers and all manner of freebooters. Renegade leaders use the contacts with the Chaos Cultists and treacherous humans to direct their attacks as effectively as possible – appearing from nowhere to attack a vulnerable space convoy or a defenseless planet. Renegades also lend their weight to the Chaos Cultist risings on human worlds, with the ultimate aim of overthrowing Imperial government and installing the cultists in power. Cultists who join up with Chaos Renegades are sometimes taken back to the Eye of Terror where they enter the service of their master.

Orks and human pirates, freebooters, and other nihilistic groups also join Renegades for a share of the loot – they don't really care which side they support and are quite happy to fight for Chaos against human or other forces. In this way many of the lawless and discontent elements of the galaxy are drawn to the service of Chaos – some make the mistake of returning to the Eye of Terror where they are caught in the endless cycle of battle and damnation.

Warp Travel

Because the Eye of Terror exists both in real space and the warp it can be reached by spacecraft travelling in either the material universe or the immaterial warp. By moving into the Eye of Terror a spacecraft can move between the two alternative universes. Renegades have access to many kinds of spacecraft, including captured vessels as well as the remnants of the fleets assembled by Horus to attack Earth during the Heresy.

Because of the complex, non-linear progress of time within the warp, craft which are thousands of years old are still in service, many as gleaming and potent as the day on which they were launched. Other craft are built on worlds within the Eye of Terror, raised by the servants of Chaos as sacrifices to their daemonic masters. The outward appearance of such ships varies a great deal, but on all it is one of corruption and madness.

The flow of the warp can carry a spacecraft through time as well as space, so that what seems like a few days' travel may take a craft through thousands of years of time. Imperial ships are built to minimise these effects, and their crews are careful to navigate round the worse eddies and whirlpools of the warp. Chaos spacecraft are inconsiderate of such matters and they are content to drift through time and space until the winds of chance bring them upon a suitable target.

Ships sometimes get caught up in the warp and subjected to the disturbing effects of time distortion. Even some of Horus's original forces suddenly reappear after ten thousand years of travel, unaware that their cause is lost and determined to continue their attack upon the forces of the Imperium.

One of the most weird and extreme results of spacecraft being caught by temporal whirlpools in the warp is the creation of Champions fated to foresee their own *Heroic Death*. The lives and deaths of all living things have an existence in the warp. Caught up in such a cyclone of time a man might witness his own death, or that of another, the more heroic and spectacular his doom, the more likely it is to be revealed. Once a Champion's glorious fate has been seen, and it becomes known that he will achieve a Heroic Death, his fame spreads throughout the galaxy. The manner of his doom will be explained by countless followers of Chaos, and the brave deeds which he is yet to perform earn him a formidable reputation. Because his doom is certain, the Champion need have no worries about being slain at any other time, and can therefore disregard such petty fears for his own safety as might otherwise concern him, and spend his remaining life living up to the glorious image of his own death.

+++The Carnival of Death+++

The space inside the wagon was cavernous out of all proportion to its tiny exterior size. The cacophonies that filled it were indescribable; the squealing, screaming, chattering and bickering of the Nurglings was beyond mere human imagining. A million unruly school children left to their own devices could not begin to rival the anarchy or intensity of that daemonic din. The grating drones of the Plaguebearers all counting at once produced a sound so bass and penetrating that it made the vital organs of every daemon vibrate and quiver in time with its beat.

Then there were the indescribable noises, the creaks and groans, the little pops of bursting pustules, the slopping slick noises of the frantically affectionate Beasts, and other sounds which were impossible to ascribe to any one source in particular. Amidst it all, waving his arms, the Great Unclean One was trying to make himself heard.

"Ahh... Gentlecreatures, children, pretties... lend your ears to your loving Father, cease thy aimless chatter, banish thy banal burlings..."

It was quite useless, the noise continued apace, the squeals and laughter reaching a new crescendo. The Great Unclean One appeared for a moment to be hurt by his fellow daemon's rudeness.

"SHUT UP," he bellowed.

The noise stopped instantly, not even the beat of little daemonic hearts or drip of tiny daemonic noses could be heard. The brow of every Plaguebearer furrowed in concentration as each tried desperately to remember the last number he thought of. The Great Unclean One quickly regained his composure, for he was used to such things.

"Gentlecreatures our pretties... now is the time to sing the songs of fate, for the moment has come for the Dance of Death!"

+++Father Nurgle+++

Father Nurgle settled his great mass down among the supporting heap of his smallest minions. Those lucky enough to escape being crushed by their master's bulk squealed delightedly as they snuggled into the damp warmth of his flesh. Nurgle reclined comfortably and his corpulent face assumed an air of triumphant expectancy.

Nurgle gave a dignified nod to one of the Plaguebearers. Excitedly, the daemon began to beat its drum, slowly and rhythmically at first, and gradually faster and faster as it became carried away by the sense of occasion. All of his servants applauded, and Nurgle acknowledged them with a smile and regal wave of his festering paw.

It was the prelude to battle that excited the daemons, drawing squeals of anticipation from the tumbling little Nurglings. This time the cavalcade was to be joined by others: Champions of Nurgle and their mortal warbands, who were also going to take part in the great war. the Beasts bounded and fussed in their eagerness to welcome the mortals, causing considerable disarray and the odd casualty amongst the serried ranks of warriors.

The warbands flocked to the sound of the drum. They came in carts and wagons like those of Nurgle's own cavalcade, marched into camp, or simply distilled from the surrounding woods like shadows at sunset. Some of the most severely mutated of them wore bright carnival masks and voluminous robes, completely failing to hide their unique disfigurements if that was in fact their purpose. The Plaguebearers carefully recorded the name of each Champion as he arrived, announcing his titles as loudly as they were able among the rising laughter and squeaking chatter. The show pleased Father Nurgle immensely: the busy carts with their tinkling bells, the gaily-coloured masks and carefully decorated palanquins bearing various daemons or Champions. He sighed with satisfaction and patted the little Nurgling that had crawled into the crook of his arm and puddled there.

>>Alien Races

+++THE ELDAR+++

Although humanoid in appearance, the Eldar are actually quite unlike humans. An Eldar stands a little taller than a man, with long graceful limbs and elegant elongated features. Their metabolism is faster than that of humans, so they are swift footed, quick thinking, and in many respects superior to mankind. However, they are on the whole a little more fragile and perhaps not quite as strong physically, although as in all species these qualities vary enormously from individual to individual, and some Eldar are very strong indeed. They are very long lived as a species, some surviving for a thousand years, but they are not prolific.

EARLY HISTORY

The Eldar are an ancient race; their spacefaring history predating humanity's by many thousands of years. In the distant past, the Eldar encountered the Old Slann, the greatest of all spacefaring peoples, and learned many arcane secrets about the universe from them. After the passing of the Old Slann, which itself happened thousands of years before man's first stumbling attempts at spaceflight, the Eldar continued to flourish and their civilization expanded throughout the galaxy. Eldar space travel, like that of the Old Slann, is based around the principle of warp-tunnel engineering. Tunnels were constructed from star to star, passing through the warp and allowing spacecraft a means of moving rapidly throughout the galaxy. Warp drives, as used by human

spacecraft, were not used by the early Eldar and this kind of travel within the warp rather than through tunnels was regarded by the Eldar as dangerous and impractical.

RACIAL DISASTER

The Eldar civilization collapsed at its very height. Today, its remnants reflect, but cannot hope to equal, the achievements of that long past era. The Old Slann are said to have forewarned the Eldar about the dangers that they would face. They taught how every living thought and feeling creates an echo in the warp, and how like characteristics re-echo together, creating a unified circulating wave of energy. Such waves form vortices of pure energy manifesting a collective consciousness and will. The Slann called these conscious warp creatures the Powers of Chaos.

The Eldar fell victim to the monster created by their own racial inclinations: a Power of Chaos raised by their common ambitions and motives. As the Power grew stronger, its echoes began to permeate the minds of the Eldar themselves, reinforcing the qualities upon which it fed and furthering its own growth. The natural ambitions and ideals of the Eldar, healthy enough in moderation, were soon reinforced to a point of obsession and insanity. Within a few generations the extremes of behavior overthrew all other considerations and the whole civilization fell into madness and decay.

Only a few Eldar rebelled against the life of sybaritic ease now almost universal amongst their kind. These were the few that had heeded the warnings of the long vanished Old Slann, turning their minds away from their natural inclinations and towards the aversion of racial disaster. In order to escape the decaying civilization around them, they constructed many vast spacecraft, self-contained worlds where they could live wholly untainted by the mass of their race. These craft worlds were the only portion of Eldar society to survive the fall of the Eldar race. All the living Eldar are the descendants of these brave and hardy people.

The fall of the Eldar is said to have happened in a single orgy of destruction. When the Power of Chaos finally achieved sufficient energy, it began to draw all Eldar consciousness to itself, literally draining the minds of the Eldar. Every Eldar world was emptied of life, and almost the entire race perished. The energies of the Eldar passed into the warp, and became the creature known as Slaanesh, the Power of Chaos given form by the dreams of the Eldar. This relationship is important to those Eldar who survived, because in Slaanesh they perceive the worst side of their race, the side of their character which caused their downfall and to which even the survivors are inclined.

THE CRAFT WORLDS

Today the entire Eldar civilization is located on board the giant craft worlds that float throughout the galaxy. The size of these worlds varies tremendously, some are almost the size of a small planet whilst others are little more than a city floating in space.

The craft worlds still preserve the warp tunnel technology of the Eldar, and every craft world has many entrances to warp tunnels inside it. Some warp tunnels are large enough only to admit a single Eldar, others are large enough to drive a substantial vehicle through. The largest of all are located outside the craft worlds, either contained within or suspended in space nearby. They are virtually invisible of course, little more than a patch of darkness, but they allow whole spacefleets to move between the different craft worlds, and from craft worlds to solar systems throughout the galaxy. In this way the Eldar can move easily and quickly through the galaxy.

THE INFINITY CIRCUIT

While the Old Slann taught the Eldar about the dangers of the warp, they also taught them about its many positive aspects. They taught how the mind of a living creature passes upon death into the warp, where it may, if the individual mind has achieved power, remain whole and immortal as a spirit in the warp. The Old Slann believed that the object of life was to perfect the mind, and thereby achieve conscious immortality as a spirit in the warp. Once created an immortal spirit could reincarnate as a living creature, and would always return to the warp as a whole spirit upon death. However, the Old Slann also warned that such an existence was impossible if an individual's own thoughts were too close to those of a Power of Chaos, for when that happened a deceased consciousness would be devoured by the greater Power, losing its identity and melting into it. Today the Eldar know that upon death their consciousness will not survive, but will be devoured by Slaanesh and further invigorate that which is the eternal shame of their race. They can have no

immortal life as a spirit, and in death can only hope to serve the creature they regard as their most potent enemy. It was as a response to this fate that the Eldar developed the Infinity Circuit. The Infinity Circuit is a repository of Eldar minds, a collection of objects called Spirit Stones. The consciousness or spirit of one or more Eldar is preserved in each Spirit Stone. Of course, a consciousness is not quite like a living mind, so many Eldar minds can occupy a single Spirit Stone manifesting a collective consciousness, or pool of knowledge. Although Stones are individual repositories, all share the energy of the entire Infinity Circuit, and are linked by that energy flowing between them. When an Eldar dies his spirit passes into a small temporary spiritual repository called a Way Stone. The Way Stone can only hold the spirit for a limited time, during which the Eldar's spirit must be transferred to a Spirit Stone for it to survive. All Eldar wear a Way Stone, a small stud or decorated emblem which will hold their spirit if they die, usually on their breast. Each craft world has its own Infinity Circuit, spread over many Spirit Stones where the consciousness of its past citizens resides. The craft world's Infinity Circuit represents a vast repository of wisdom and experience, and it is treated with ultimate respect by the Eldar who live upon that craft world. Every Eldar knows that his fate is to join his forefathers in the Infinity Circuit when he dies. If an Eldar dies before his spirit can be gathered, this is regarded as a great loss and a terrible fate. The Infinity Circuit of the craft world is regarded in many respects like a living creature, which in some ways it is, contributing its own undying wisdom to the government of the living.

There are many small Spirit Stones containing one or only a few collective minds. These smaller Spirit Stones sometimes lie at the heart of machines, spacecraft, or other mechanical devices in such a way that the consciousness they contain can join and harmonize with the minds of living Eldar. The relationship is a useful one to the surviving Eldar, and one that has grown to be entirely natural for them.

The ultimate examples of Eldar meshing with Spirit Stones is that of the creatures called Avatars. Every craft world has a number of Avatars, battle-suits built around a Spirit Stone housing the idealized spirit of an Eldar principle. Such stones contain only the parts of consciousness that most embody an aspect of the Eldar character. An Eldar who becomes an Avatar melds his own personality with the idealized spirit of a racial principle, becoming a living manifestation of that attitude of the Eldar character. Once an Eldar has donned the suit of an Avatar, he and the Spirit Stone are united until he dies, the Eldar simply forgets he has his own personality and becomes enmeshed within the single-minded thoughts of the Avatar. Upon death, the Eldar's own spirit passes into the stone and awaits a new Avatar. The Avatars are important to the Eldar, they are living virtues, the embodiment of what they see as worthy about their race. The Avatars are the most important occupants of a craft world.

A further example of this melding of Eldar and Spirit Stone is the Phantom Titan, where the minds of its living crew meld into the Spirit Stone of the Titan itself, and are governed by its vast fighting experience. Unlike the Avatar the melding is only temporary, but it still enables the crew to fight with all the battle-wisdom and ferocity embodied by the spirit in the stone.

THE LAST HOPE

Although very long lived, Eldar are not a prolific race. This may be one side effect of their spiritual fall. As a result most Eldar populations are in a state of slow decline, and many craft worlds are all but deserted. The Eldar nurture one last hope. They believe that when the Infinity Circuits hold all the spirits of their race, all of the craft worlds will unite into one Infinity Circuit, and the collective spirits of the Eldar will join to form a new Power of Chaos that will battle and subdue Slaanesh, so that Eldar spirits may once more be able to merge with it and form a single, balanced entity. By doing so, if such a thing is possible, they hope that this will allow the Eldar race to be recreated in a better form. Meanwhile the Avatars of the craftworlds must guard the Spirit Stones from harm and continue to survive, so that all Eldar can see and form in their own minds a concept of the Eldar virtues that will enter along with their spirits into the Infinity Circuits.

+++Eldar Background Information+++

+++Datafile 1+++

FIR LIRITHION (HEARTS ARMoured FOR BATTLE)

The Fir Lirithion of the Iyanden Craft World have a most unusual attitude towards combat. This Eldar clan are slow to ire and they never go willingly to war; yet they are, once on the field, among the most fearsome of all opponents. To the Fir Lirithion, war is a cancer to be eradicated. They strive to cut out the disease but leave the body unharmed; to this end they will go to inordinate lengths to purge their enemies of belligerent leaders while leaving the unwilling masses unharmed.

This tactic of course, relies on the idea that the masses will be routed upon the death of their leaders. As a consequence, the first time the Fir Lirithion found themselves fighting Orks, they suffered the biggest defeat of their long and glorious history. They struck at the Ork command post with a lightning strike, killing all of the tribe's leaders in one fell swoop. Expecting the Orks to fall apart without leadership, they did not expect the retaliation they received, and were taken by surprise. Their losses were heavy that day.

Fir Lirithion are regarded as the surgeons of the battlefield by most observers. They have fought many highly effective campaigns, such as the route of a company of Emperors Children on the moon of Balthon; a strike force of Phantoms went deep into the Valley of Envy and destroyed the traitors' command center. The leaderless and battered Marimes were forced to withdraw to a savage feral world in the outer system, where they were killed by a virulent plague that caused their Larraman's Organ to emit cells uncontrollably, terminally thickening their blood.

FIR DINILLAINN (PROTECTORS OF THE FALLEN)

Since Imperial records began the Eldar Phantoms of the Saim Hann Craft world have been known as the Fir Dinillainn - the Protectors of the Fallen. Yet on their own time scale, this name is but a recent acquisition earned by an act of outstanding courage and selfless service to another clan many thousands of years ago. Lord Amthillon, leader at the time, sacrificed a third of his force to protect the dying warriors of the Fir Lirithion Clan - his companions in the field - so that their spiritstones could be retrieved. By that single act of self sacrifice the Fir Lirillyon - the Knights of Purpose were renamed. the Fir Dinillain. Since that day the Phantoms of the Saim-Hann Craft World have astonished even Imperial forces with their selfless heroism.

FIR FARILLECASSION (WATCHERS OVER ANCIENT WRONGS)

It is widely-rumoured among the few Eldar unaware of the truth that the true location of the Black Library - said to hold the Eldar codices that concern themselves with the worship of Chaos and tell of the Eldar's downfall - must be the Biel-Tann Craft World. Although this is certainly untrue, the Phantoms of Biel-Tann do display an unparalleled hatred of Chaos. The driving force behind this hatred is a fervent wish that no other race should suffer the terrible downfall that befell the Eldar. Inquisitor Trant tells of his journey to Truan IX to destroy a Khornate coven. However, Trant arrived too late - upon reaching the surface he found that virtually the entire population had been wiped out. In the rubble of the western continent's capital city he found a half-burnt banner bearing the symbols of the Fir Farillecassion - the Phantoms of Biel-Tann. They had arrived before him.

FIR IOLARION (EAGLES BORN OF FIRE)

The Fir Iolarion - Eagles Born of Fire - were almost completely destroyed four centuries ago when they lost control of the warp gates onboard their Craft world, Lugannath, allowing the Daemons of the warp to enter and attack them. For many years the clan drifted helplessly in space while they laboured to make the necessary repairs; stranded, and with their numbers severely depleted by the creatures in their midst, they were reduced to being one of the weakest Eldar clans.

Over time however, thanks only to their own unrelenting and steadfast efforts, they have not only regained the power they once had, but have exceeded it tenfold. Their almost total obliteration is now regarded by their leaders as a baptism of fire.

In the months after their warp gate accident, the Iyanden Craft World sent Eldar troops to nearby systems to gather materials for repairs. On the Ork world of Gagnar they found a lake of liquid copper vital to the restabilisation of their warp gates. Although their operations to drain the lake were constantly hampered by attacks from Ork Gargants, the presence of the Fir Iolarion Phantoms meant that they were able to get the metal they required without sustaining heavy losses.

Most Eldar craft-worlds have their own Titan forces whose crews work together with an Infinity Circuit.

The Infinity Circuit is used in many forms by the Eldar, where other races would use computers and similar devices. Each Infinity Circuit is imprinted with the character and memories of a living Eldar through the process of 'soul-grafting' (*Faileanam*). The Eldar's body is left as a mindless husk, but his thoughts live on in the Infinity Circuit. Soul-grafting is seen as the ultimate sacrifice that an Eldar can make for his people, and the ancestors and relatives who live on within Infinity Circuits are treated with great respect. They are revered and marked by the title of *Tuisich-Novasmair*, which Imperial sources normally translate as Lord-Phoenix.

The Infinity Circuit of an Eldar titan is normally mounted in the centre of the crew compartment, and takes the form of a large and intricately faceted piece of *carrecenad*, the 'soul-stone' which forms the basis of Infinity Circuit technology. Unlike their Human counterparts, the crew of an Eldar Titan is not physically connected to the machine; smaller chips of stone set in headbands allow the crew to meld psychically with the Infinity Circuit and the highly-sophisticated Mind Impulse Units it controls.

An Eldar Phantom crewman is immediately recognisable by the Spirit Stone he wears upon his forehead. Upon becoming a Titan crewman, a ceremonial band is wrapped around the Eldar's head; almost immediately, the band bonds to his skull and sends tendrils into his brain. The headband bears a small chunk of Spirit Stone taken from the Titan that the Eldar is to serve. Upon taking his place in the cockpit, each crewman psychically links with the Titan using the fragment of the stone. In effect, the Titan and crew become a single entity. The band may only be removed upon the Eldar's death.

Like all Eldar, a Titan crewman bears a Spirit Stone on his chest that, upon his death, will preserve his spirit for a short time. The shape of this stone often reflects the symbol of the Eldar's clan: the Fir Lirithion, for instance, have heart-shaped stones.

Because of the close links that are required between the Titan's crewmembers and the Titan itself, it is usual for each crew to consist of Eldar from one family. This affords them a great deal of respect within the craft world's hierarchy, as a family must be truly worthy to serve in a Titan clan.

When in battle, each crewman wears a close-fitting boiler suit that contains the life-support systems he needs. His boots are made of a slightly adhesive substance that is ideal for moving around the organic tubes and passageways that criss-cross the Titan. When outside the Titan, each Eldar wears either a jacket or a coat for warmth. Like the boiler suit itself, these topcoats bear the Titan's rune and victory symbols on the left shoulder, and the Eldar's clan symbol on the back.

The Phantom has a crew of four - three living Eldar and one Infinity Circuit. The Infinity Circuit is normally mounted in the centre of the crew compartment in the Titan's head, and the living crew - frequently blood-relatives of the Infinity Circuit - occupy couches around it. Unlike their Human counterparts, they do not have specific functions. Each crew member is equipped with a headband in which is set a fragment of the *carrecenad* stone; by means of this they merge their minds with the Infinity Circuit, forming a composite mind capable of handling multiple thoughts and actions. This mind is linked to the Phantom's mechanical systems by Mind Impulse Units which are far in advance of those used by the Imperium. The relationship between a Phantom's living crew and its Infinity Circuit is intimate and all-sharing; they know each other totally, and are marked by their ability to finish each other's sentences and thoughts out loud. In any other Eldar, this would be unthinkable presumption, but Titan crews are known for the closeness they develop and the eccentricities that arise from it. To Eldar outside the Titan Clans, they are almost a race apart.

ELDAR STORIES

Iyanden was going to war. Grav-tanks Sped forward, leading the way for the Titans. Four Phantoms wore the green and gold of Lirithion, with the heart and thorns on their banners. Behind the Titans came an army of Walkers, and above them hovered a swarm of Jet bikes, buzzing like angry hornets. Gracefully, the Titans picked their way through the Infantry that Milled around their feet. The leading Titan bore the sigil of Lord-Phoenix Fiallathandirel, Wall against Evil. In its head, a domed mass of Carrecenad soul-stone held the essence of the Eldar who had borne that name. The living crew - blood-relatives of the Lord-Phoenix - reclined on couches around the stone. Each wore a headband of polished metal, set with a smaller brother of the stone on the floor. Their eyes were empty; their minds were one with their Ancestor. They had become -Fiallathandirel. The crew's eyes saw nothing: it was the mind of the Titan that beheld the Orks through the sensors that were his eyes and ears. There were many foes: hideous Gargants towered above Buggies and Battlewagons. Here and there among the mass of troops could be seen the squat, brutal Dreadnoughts. Orks covered the ground like a poisonous green mould.

Iolavai Firnamaidd! The battle-cry came from all places and from nowhere it flew from the throats of the living, and echoed round the silent stones. Time for the killing.

Grav-tanks leapt forward, spitting bright laser-fire. Artillery added many voices to the song of war. Dreadnoughts and Walkers loped forward and behind them, with shorter strides, ran the battle-suited Avenging Warnors.

The Phantoms leapt ahead, swift movement and bright laser-bolts weaving a tapestry of death. Fiallathandirel led, dancing in a storm of refracted colour as defensive screens broke up his image. Missiles flashed from the Phantom's wing, and his pulse laser traced a line of fire across a Gargant's shields. Swift Badbaltrilas raced forward. Lady Double-Armed With Swords of Light. and a Gargant died. One of her pulse lasers destroyed its shields. and the other broke its oily heart in a gout of fire. Missiles and laser fire rained down on the Ork infantry. Spirit Warriors brought Wartraks and Buggies fiery doom. But the Orks were taking their own toll. From a score of positions. las-cannon picked off Dreadnoughts and Walkers.

Fiallathandirel saw Rash Lantillifieth. Bright Slayer of Darkness. rush forward through a storm of enemy Shells. Before he could fire. his pulse laser was destroyed and bright blue sparks showered from one wing. The crippled Phantom swerved violently and his power fist tore into the head of a Gargant.

Far off to the left. another Gargant died. Caught in a web of fire from the Walkers and artillery, it began to pour smoke and settled on its broad haunches. One of its turrets rattled briefly and Dreadnoughts fell like grass in the wind.

Away to the right a haze of colour solidified into brave Brylidassian, Opener of The Gates of Doom. The Phantom stood like a statue as a vortex of light swirled out from his D-cannon. The last Gargant toppled and crushed the troops beneath. Half its right side had simply vanished. The Phantom was lit up with fire - his pulse laser turned to slag. Before he could seek safety in movement he was destroyed. Fiallathandirel was saddened; another Spirit-Brother would dance no more.

The Orks were wavering; their charge had been brought to a standstill. Here and there pockets of infantry dug in, and hails of bolters fire greeted the advancing warriors. This was the Fate-time; the moment at which all would be lost or won.

Suddenly, the air was filled with the scream of flight packs. Like a storm of meteorites. the Fian Silspeiraigh plummeted into the heart of the Ork infantry positions.

Seeing the Caurifellianaidd was almost a shock after the stories. Liafil had heard - they looked very like himself. He tried not to stare at the shifting red-and-black of soul-stone in their head-bands. "It

is my thought," said one, "that the Orks..." "Agreed." The second interrupted. "But recall..." "Very different terrain." A third voice. "However..." "Luatheinn on the left flank can..." "If necessary. We shall know more from this briefing." Liafil was relieved to reach the briefing-chamber. The Caurifellianaidd's constant interruption of each other made him very uncomfortable.

In the head of the Phantom, three Eldar reclined on ornate couches, loose-limbed and empty-eyed, twitching occasionally against their straps as their minds moved the great war machine. Each wore a metal headband set with a luminous red stone, shot through with a shifting filigree of black. At the centre of the triangle formed by the three couches, a larger piece of the same stone was set into the cabin floor.

A slight smile appeared simultaneously on three vacant faces as the renegade Humans came into view. It was a huge force. Crowds of infantry scurried like insects by the feet of the lumbering, unlovely Human Titans. The Eye of Horus glared from a dozen banners, proclaiming their allegiance to Chaos.

The first Phantom was already dodging as a battery of weapons came to bear from the Traitors. A hail of plasma and laser fire cut through the whirling, multicoloured shards of disrupted light where the Phantom had been, just as its pulse laser spat a volley of multi-coloured laser bolts. The flare of void shields was followed by an explosion as a Traitor Titan lost a power first. A second volley of shots smashed into a building as the Phantom ducked behind it.

Another Traitor Titan met its doom as the searing volley of a pulse laser cut its legs from under it, but the second Phantom had stayed still a fraction too long. As its shape coalesced out of the whirling holo-field distortion, a macro-cannon spoke, and the pulse laser was snapped in two like a twig in a hurricane. The third Phantom was no more than a blur. Its Holo-field defences scattered its image over a wide area as it strode flat out, trying to outflank the Traitor force. A trail of fire followed its disrupted form, but the Traitors could not find their target.

The jet bikes screamed down on the Traitor infantry as the dreadnoughts and artillery opened fire on the foremost of the Traitor Titans. A pair of plasma cannon vanished in a boiling cloud of vapour, and its legs ground to a sparking, sputtering halt.

A cluster of blue icons appeared on the holo. Blue for unidentified. Brannon snapped the comm open.

"Praebete aures, Hornet Group, this is Leader. These could be our Traitors. Odd numbers will proceed left around the buildings. Even numbers will follow me to the crest of the hill. Await my order to fire. Acknowledge."

The white icons representing the rest of the Fire Wasps force flashed gold once, and the formation split with parade-ground precision.

Half of Hornet Group followed Brannon's Nemesis to the crest of the hill, spread out in arrowhead formation.

"Moderati will prepare their weapons."

"Macro-cannon ready."

"Plasma gun ready."

"Las-cannon ready."

"Chain fist ready."

"Lyanden is ready."

Brannon punched the comm button angrily.

"Who said. . . ?" At that moment, his Nemesis crested the hill. On the plain below, a force of Eldar was waiting. There were three slim, deadly-looking Eldar Titans; dreadnoughts, infinity-circuit robots and war walkers stood at their feet while a small group of jet bikes hovered by the shoulder of the lead Titan. To the rear, Brannon could just make out a detachment of mobile field artillery. Even as Brannon took in the size of the Eldar force, the strangely-accented voice sounded again.

"Lyanden is gladdened, friend Hornet." Something about the languid tone irritated Brannon, and he tried to keep his voice level as he replied.

"This is Hornet Leader. What is your purpose here, Lyanden?"

"Our purpose is not incompatible with your own, friend Hornet. We, too, seek those whom you call Traitors."

"This is Imperial business, Iyanden." Brannon replied through clenched teeth. "We have not been informed of any treaty of co-operation."

"There is none." Brannon was sure he heard a hint of supercilious mockery in the Eldar's tone. *"Our business is not with your Imperium, either as friends or as enemies. We seek those whom we seek for reasons of our own."*

"Iyanden." Brannon's tone was stiff with formality and irritation. "Be informed that this planet is within Imperial jurisdiction, and that your presence here constitutes a technical invasion. If necessary, we stand ready to..."

"To weaken both our forces Such a thing would gladden those you call Traitors, who, by the way, are approaching. You will pardon us for the present, although we shall be happy to continue this discussion in a short time."

The Eldar force had already begun to move off, and the lead Titan raised its power fist in a casual wave as it turned. Almost at the same time, a thick spread of red Traitor icons appeared at the edge of Brannon's holo-display.

"Hornet Group, this is Leader. Pugna incepta. All Titans will move to engage the Traitors. Treat the Eldar as non-hostile, but be on your guard. Those decadents are capable of anything."

As he led Hornet Group toward the Traitors he recited the Fire Wasps' Litany of Combat silently, summoning his faith in the Emperor to overcome his resentment of the Eldar's high-handed attitude and clear his mind for the coming battle.

The Fire Wasps arrived just in time to see a damaged Eldar Phantom charging a Traitor Nemesis. The severed stump of its pulse laser blocked a scything chain-fist as plasma vaporised one of its wings, then its power fist seized the Nemesis by the barrel of its las-cannon, the Phantom locked one leg behind the Nemesis' knee-joint, and the Traitor Titan toppled and fell.

On the Traitors' far flank, a pulse laser volley crashed into the blind side of another Titan, fracturing the reactor vessel at its heart. Plasma boiled skywards, and another Traitor Titan staggered crazily out of the explosion, struck a building and fell.

The Imperial Titans of Hornet Group fell on the Traitors' near flank like a thunderbolt, laying down a holocaust of plasma and laser fire as they advanced.

With the Traitors already weakened by the Eldar, the battle was brief

Fiallir led his Wind Riders high over the battle. In the distance four of the ugly, brutish Ork Gargants lumbered forward, contrasting grotesquely with the Phantoms of Fir Lirithion they faced. Grav-Tanks sped forward weaving as they headed for the chosen artillery positions.

The Wind Riders left the Titans behind. Fiallir wondered briefly what it must be like to have a machine respond as if it were your own body. Then he laughed out loud. He knew. His Cycle rolled and swerved, sharing his laughter.

Far below him the artillery was firing. Explosions appeared among the advancing horde of Orks. With the wild song of the Avenger keening through his veins, Fiallir led the Wind Riders to the attack.

"Iolavai Ceifulgathann!" Six voices echoed the warcry as the Wind Riders swooped. Shuriken tore through steel and leather, flesh and bone. Orks scattered: Bikes and Wartraks swerved madly to avoid the onslaught. A Wartrak gunner died trying to bring his las-cannon to bear. Another was faster - Fiallir threw his Cycle into a tight turn as a lasa-bolt grazed his front fairing. Behind him Rhiadlior fell in a storm of bolter shells - now they were five.

Hugging the ground the Jet Cycles screamed along the Ork lines. Grav-tanks hurried to reach the gap before it closed. Rubble flashed by, inches away - vital cover against the concentrated bolter fire of the Ork infantry. Five Orks died against the stump of a wall but Mathlahir fell with them.

Dodging and weaving the four Jet Cycles headed deeper into the Ork lines. Auto-cannon shells marched along a wall behind Fiallir's shoulder; he flung his Cycle sideways out of the line of fire and swung round the building.

The Gargant came as a complete surprise Fiallir swerved and climbed, almost rolling over in the effort to avoid the huge machine Liassalath reacted an instant too late. A dozen Orks died at their firing-posts as the three Jet Cycles flashed past. The Gargant was behind them before the answering bolter fire started.

The Wind Riders bore down on the front line to find it awash with Avenging Warriors. The whole of the Ork centre had dissolved into small hand-to-hand skirmishes, and stalking Dreadnoughts sowed destruction along the flanks. A wrecked Gargant lay on its side, a makeshift fortress where a small group of Orks made a determined stand.

They took the Orks by surprise. A huge Ork stood bellowing orders - Fiallirs shurikens cut him in two and the others fled. With Eldar infantry all around them and Jet Cycles attacking from behind, panic spread quickly. A few fired back, and Talission fell.

The two surviving Wind Riders made a low pass over the ruined Gargant. but there was no answering fire. Fiallir exchanged a wave with one of the Avenging Warriors, and headed back toward the Eldar lines.

Ralahir sat quietly in the hold of the Falcon, waiting for the Vengeance to begin. Around him sat nine others, all clad, like him in the mask of The Avenger. Ten Eldar, one face, One mind. The Avenger's Song beat soundlessly through his mind as he knew it beat through nine others - and across the battlefield, in thousands more. Two thousand minds, two thousand guns, one mind, one song, one spirit. So it was taught - that each was The Avenger and The Avenger was all.

An explosion jolted the Grav-Tank but it veered and regained its course Ralahir was thrown against the straps of his harness and for a moment his concentration strayed. Then his mind became one with the song again; his spirit rose and fell in tune with two thousand others.

Through their mental song with distant ears, he heard the dull crump of Ork weapons and the voices of lasers and shuriken cannon. They blended somehow, forming bass and descant to the song of war.

The Falcon stopped abruptly, as a dancer stops at the end of a high leap. Ralahir loosened his harness and stood up in a single motion, holding his shuriken catapult in readiness. Doors swung open, and the Avenging Warriors went to war.

The Phantoms were almost with them, blurs of colour behind and to the right. Jet Cycles screamed overhead as the Falcon sped away with the rest of its group, to harry the Orks left flank. In the distance Gargants lumbered forward like mobile buildings, towering above the crowd of infantry and the hordes of wheeled and tracked vehicles. The air was bright with laser fire and the ground shook to the tread of the huge machines.

The heavy weaponry was already within range; soon it would be time for shurikens. The Jet Cycles sowed explosions along the Ork front line; one fell, like a shooting star. Ork vehicles lurched forward from the flame and smoke spitting shells, plasma and laser fire. Dodging between ruins and rubble the Avenging Warriors ran forward to meet them.

A gang of Wartraks thundered down on their position. spewing, death as they bounced and jolted across the broken ground. Their lasers were answered with shurikens. The driver of the leading vehicle slumped across his handlebars; it swerved abruptly into one of its fellows. The surviving crews jumped clear of the wreck, drawing bolters. None lived long enough to fire.

The other Wartraks were past them now, heading deeper into the Eldar force to exchange fire with the Walkers.

Ralahir looked around; across the battlefield the wave of vehicles had cut through the Eldar infantry. A few headed straight for the Phantoms prompted by some suicidal bravery to attack the biggest target they could find. Meanwhile the Ork infantry was closing.

Shuriken and bolter fire lit up the air with a deadly-bright hail as both sides dug in. The broken ground was a deathtrap - whoever left cover first would die first.

Jet Cycles made a strafing pass over the Ork positions but their fire would never be enough to break the deadlock. Ralahir thumbed his communicator into life.

" *Iolavai Silspeiraigh!*" There is food for the Hawks here! Let us feast on the sorrows of our enemy!

The battlefield was silent. Corpses were strewn across the ground, their weapons as broken as their bodies. Vehicles lay smoking, overturned, their dead crews sprawled on and around them.

But among the death, there was movement. Grim graceful figures glided from ruin to ruin, from wreck to wreck. Slowly, silently, the Eldar took back their dead.

At the center of the field, where the fighting had been fiercest, six great pyres were lit. The Orks were ignored, their bodies left to feed the carrion-beasts which already scuffled and chattered among the rubble. Not for them the rites of *Tienespiorath*, no remembrance for the enemy.

Liathair turned his back on the pyres for the fourth time and went back toward the ruined building. A jet bike passed him, the normal scream of its engine lowered to a mournful hum as its rider brought back a fallen comrade. Further away, he could see a group of searchers carrying bodies into a Grav-Tank. To his left, a Banshee strode towards the pyres holding the body of an Avenging Warrior in its great hands like a broken doll.

It was late now, and the dead were truly lost; earlier a few had been saved into the spirit-stones of the Lords-Phoenix. Now, the slain were beyond saving, their spirits sucked into the void, into the great abomination which the Eldar must bear, of which only the Harlequins speak.

Inside the building, Liathair kicked an Orkish carcass aside and gently lifted the last of the Eldar bodies in his arms. For the fourth time he made the journey back to the place where a fresh pyre was being built. The mask of the Avenger snarled up at him from the helmet: my life was sold dearly.

He laid the corpse on top of the growing pyre. He did not look behind the mask, to see who it was; it was irrelevant. All the dead had died in the spirit of the Avenger, their other selves forgotten, No names, no faces - just snarling masks and blazing shuriken catapults.

Pain is ours, and sadness at your parting,

Never to taste of our victory's joy.

The fires are lit for you, those who live weep.

Not enough Orks exist to atone for your lives.

The dirge rose over the communications network, stately and measured. Though the lost had no names still they were lost. He had found the four dead from his coillineir and performed the marcarath which the living owed the fallen.

A great shadow fell over the unlit pyre; one of the Phantoms now towered above it. A huge pulse-laser reached down, with something like gentleness - a flash, a crack, and the pyre was lit. The Titan stood over the pyre as it burned, arms crossed and head bowed in mourning.

+++Eldar Background Information+++ +++Datafile 2+++

Overhead, a sun the colour of blood beat down turning the ash plain into a lake of crimson light. A good omen, Karhedron decided. They would sweep the foul influences of Chaos from this world. He surveyed the scene through the eyes of his Warlock mask, his long thick robes fluttering in the breeze. He scanned the horizon, hoping to catch sight of the enemy.

In his mind lethal energies pulsed and surged. He felt the urge to unleash them creep through him. He was a vessel for transcendent power. All he had to do was focus it through his channelling runes or his witch blade to bring death to his enemies.

His mind cast back to his time as an Aspect Warrior, an experience he had hoped never to have submit himself to again. Countless times had he stood waiting like this for battle to commence. As a Fire Dragon Karhedron had fought on fields of ice under turquoise skies, danced through whirling red dust on burning desert plains, crept through underground labyrinths of dank dark stone. The ancient weapon he bore remembered too. It had not always been his - he had retrieved it from beside the fallen body of the famous Warlock Tathaya, where she lay surrounded by dead Orks.

The song of wings filled the air as a group of Swooping Hawks soared ecstatically into the warm sky. They drifted lazily upward, catching thermals like giant birds of prey. Karhedron knew that their seeming indolence was illusory. The Keen-eyed Ones kept careful watch in case the enemy attempted a surprise attack.

He studied the squad of Aspect Warriors sitting on the nearby rocks, meditating on the inner nature of their weapons. The sun glinted off their blue armour, highlighting the Fire Shrine rune that marked them as belonging to their Craftworld. Their shuriken catapults lay dormant across their knees. Karhedron was not fooled by their apparent passiveness. He knew that the Dire Avengers could shift from quiet repose to instant action in the blink of an eye.

A high-pitched keening wail filled the air as the Howling Banshees performed the Dance of Skulls near their dropship. Karhedron watched as the women sparred in slow motion with invisible foes, each movement part of some greater intricate pattern, as if the whole unit were one organism sharing a single mind. Scarlet tresses swept through great arcs as the women swayed. Langourous kicks just seemed to miss each of the dancers. As the ritual continued the pace of the footstamping and handclapping speeded almost imperceptibly until the Banshees moved and tumbled almost too fast for the eye to follow.

A shimmering of air between the gateway tetrahedrons announced the arrival of a squad of chitinously armoured Striking Scorpions. They skittered across to the Parseer's position and bowed before Kelmon, the chosen Battleseer. Kelmon acknowledged their presence with an ornate salute. Mandiblasters clicked acknowledgement then they turned and moved to take up a perimeter position.

Nearby atop a great butte, Dark Reapers, arranged in three-man fireteams, stood immobile as statues. Their massive forms radiated menace yet their presence was strangely reassuring.

Karhedron knew no enemy could approach without being the target of their missile launchers. A line of Fire Dragons weaved across the plain as the Eldar army arrived through the gateways and assembled, squad by squad, on the plain. A thrill passed through Karhedron as he realised the extent of the force the Craftworld was fielding. Unit after unit of Guardians arrived and took their place in the formation. Mighty Spirit Warriors stalked among the ranks on long insect-like legs. As the last of the force assembled Karhedron speculated on the nature of the enemy they were to face. The corruption of chaos must be mighty indeed to justify the deployment of such a massive military strength, he thought.

As the formation was nearly complete a change of mood swept through the army. He felt tension galvanise the nearby Dire Avengers. The Banshees ceased their dance and stood poised like ballerinas, waiting. A hush of expectation settled over the assembled Eldar. The whole army held its breath.

Suddenly the smell of ozone filled the air. A crackling, hissing sound emerged from the gateway tetrahedrons. The runes along their sides blazed as if being overloaded with power. A bloody glow illuminated the area between the pyramids.

Space seemed to warp and then the Avatar was there, looming over his honour guard of Exarchs. Even the mighty masked warriors were dwarfed by his massive presence. The incarnation of Khaine stood half-again as tall as those who surrounded him. In his left fist he clutched a gigantic battle blade. Blood dripped from the fingers of his left hand. Crimson eyes glowed like red-hot rock within his helm. He swept a burning glance over his awe-stricken followers. Karhedron felt a cold wash of horror drench his soul as he beheld the god-like being, followed by an unholy thrill of anticipation. The Avatar's incandescent gaze seemed to bore into the very heart of the Eldar warriors, kindling the fire of battlelust there. All fear, all hesitation was burned away by unholy joy and murder lust. The killing power within them stirred in answer to the being's call. A cry of pure exultation was torn from Karhedron's throat. It mingled with the great roar of the entire army.

The warcry rumbled like thunder over the plain, a shout to inspire pure terror in any living thing that heard it. It continued to rise into crescendo after crescendo till the Avatar made a short chopping gesture for silence. Instantly all was quiet.

Then, following their Bloody-handed God, the Eldar marched to war. Flanked by his apprentices Kelmon prepared himself for the battle. His fingers toyed idly with the wraithbone tiles of the

battlerunes. The air carried the scent of ozone and blood. He gazed into the viewing tesseract and studied the disposition of the armies, fixing them in his mind.

The Light in Infinite Darkness forces stretched out across a long front. The Avatar and most of the Aspect Warriors held the centre in strength. Spirit Walkers guarded the right flank. The left flank was secured against the base of a huge butte. Dark Reapers commanded the heights. A strike force of Banshees waited in the gulleys ready to advance in cover along the dry stream bottom. The Guardian Squads reinforced the centre. Swooping Hawks cast long shadows on the ash plain. The Eldar force was a river of colour suddenly frozen.

The chaos cultists faced them along the top of the ridge, a huge ragged army of depraved humans clutching ill-assorted weapons. Once perhaps they had been part of the Planetary Defence Force before this world fell to the forces of depravity. Now they stood mouthing silent obscenities. A few hastily converted Rhinos lay hull down against the great ridge. The sign of Slaanesh was splashed in red paint along their side. The skeletal fingers of dead tree branches clutched at the sky. Beyond them Kelmon sensed rather than saw an obscenely powerful presence. A dozen rusty Dreadnoughts lumbered into position on the humans' left flank.

It was time. Kelmon breathed deeply and entered the trance. His fingers danced through the air scattering the red and blue runes representing the opposing forces. He emptied his mind and sifted through the possible futures, searching for a probability line that would give the Eldar victory. As always the future was turbulent, waves of possibility and psychic power and passion clouded the potential course of events. The power of the Avatar itself warped the timelines round it.

He felt a surge of exhilaration as the power flowed through him - nothing could compare with this feeling of power. All the game-playing and Event challenges among the Seers were only preparation for it and offered only pale hints of its satisfactions. He focussed all his attention on the runes, and under his scrutiny they moved delicately into conjunction with each other, establishing the weave of the pattern. The runes danced around him, shifting like a shoal of fish in ocean depths. Each represented a part of the assembled forces, and through them he could maintain a psychic link with the Eldar troops.

The blue stone representing the Spirit Walkers moved off cautiously, and on the battlefield the great war-machines strode forward. In his multi-compartmented mind a dozen potential futures blossomed. He saw the machines fall blasted by heavy weapons. He saw them stride among the dreadnoughts and engage in melee. He saw them stumble on the rough ground.

In the air the red runes rearranged themselves. In his mind's eye he saw the human heavy weapons belch. Flowers of flame bloomed at the feet of the Spirit Walkers. Kelmon reeled, feeling the pattern of the conflict emerging from the maelstrom of probability. Events were rapidly speeding up, and the dance of the runes reflected this. He struggled to keep track of the pattern as it became ever more complex and intertwined, twisting into impossibly convoluted designs symbol of the state of the bauble.

As one group of runes moved, another set responded in-turn. Images flickered through his mind. Swooping Hawks soared over the enemy front line dropping explosive grenades. A storm of laserbursts erupted round them. Several Hawks dropped like wounded birds into the ranks and were swiftly torn to pieces. Their rune flicked away from its endangered position and the airborne troops drifted into the sky out of laser range.

A wave of screaming humans raced forwards. They slid down the slope of the ridge, plumes of ash billowing round their feet, bolters blazing, looks of ecstatic bloodlust frozen on their faces. The Rhinos provided supporting fire. The red runes span round each other like a Catherine wheel and touched the blue rune of the Dark Reapers. A hail of missiles leapt from the mesa top and tore the cultists to shreds. Another of the blue runes moved into the pattern and the Banshees started sneaking forward up the culverts of the stream bottom.

Pain flared through him as the Avatar rune grew in size and luminescence, attracting more blue runes around it as the Bloody-Handed One led the Scorpions and the Dragons towards the survivors of the human charge. Kelmon threw his efforts into following the new probability line the Avatar had instigated. The Hawks flew down across the ridge to assault the snipers and the Rhinos. The attack wasn't elegant but it distracted the humans from the frontal assault as they concentrated on the fliers.

Human reinforcements raced down the ridge throwing themselves into the fray, seemingly unafraid of the Avatar. Once again Kelmon sensed the presence of some daemonic power. The rune of the Accursed One span into the middle of the pattern, and the sense of looming presence intensified. Men screamed as the Dragons' meltaguns charred their flesh. The Scorpions ripped through them, mandiblasters spitting death.

On the right, the Spirit Walkers had bogged down in an exchange of fire with the dreadnoughts. They seemed to be losing. The Spirit Walker rune flipped into a new position, placing itself in conjunction with the defence rune. The Walkers moved further to the right seeking cover.

The Dreadnoughts were on the move now, heading towards the swirling melee at the ridge bottom. In his mind's eye Kelmon saw the Avatar turn and shred a mighty machine as if it were made of paper. Blood and oil mixed as the man within was ripped in two.

Warlocks danced through the fray, blasting their foes with psychic bolts. Kelmon sensed the ebb and flow of their power within the runes. There was a brief flicker of unexpected contact where he looked through the eyes of the Warlock Karhedron. He felt the shock of contact as the Warlock rammed his witchblade into the stomach of a cultist then withdrew it almost before the blood spurted.

The Rhinos started to move rumbling forwards, bolters blazing. The hail of fire shredded through cultist and Eldar alike. It pattered off the Avatar's armour like gentle rain. When the armoured vehicles came into range the Dark Reapers moved into action. Orange contrails of rocket fire flickered hellishly, and explosions ripped the earth around the Rhinos. A direct hit reduced one vehicle to mangled wreckage.

The withering rain of missiles stopped the armoured advance. Kelmon let his attention slide elsewhere. The Screaming Banshees had reached the hillside and their rune twisted as they charged up the slope to clear the ridgetop. The outcome of this move was strangely obscured and when they were in position he found out why.

His heart skipped a beat as he felt empathically the terror of the warrior women. Row upon row of human warriors waited and when Kelmon recognised the being that led them he realised what had hid them from his vision. A Keeper of Secrets. A Greater Daemon in the service of Slaanesh towered over the assembled throng. Jewelled eyes glittered in its bull-like head. Its huge pincer arms caressed the head of a priestess almost lovingly. It beckoned with one of its other pair of human arms and a wave of cultists surged towards the Banshees.

The dancers held their ground, vaulting among the frenzied soldiers. Their masks screamed and Kelmon could hear the high pitched wailing in his head. Men fell clutching bleeding ears, faces liquefying under the impact of high intensity ultra-sound. Then the Daemon entered the fray and the Banshees died. The creature's fury was awesome to behold.

The Slayer of Slaanesh seemed almost to gloat as it thundered through the Eldar force, pincers ripping off heads. It lifted one frail body and tossed it aside casually, like a discarded toy. Laser bolts reflected from its glowing skin. It ignored the strike of the Banshee leader's power sword before playfully disembowelling her. The Banshees tried to retreat but they were cut off by the cultists surrounding them. Mad laughter frothed from the humans' foam-flecked lips as they killed the Aspect Warriors.

Now the Keeper of Secrets emerged onto the ridge top, holding the shattered body of a Banshee over its head. It stood there silhouetted against the sunlight and roared its contempt of the enemy below. It plucked the brightly-glowing waystone from the woman's armour and popped it in its mouth like a sweetmeat. A look of obscene pleasure passed across its face as it consumed the soul contained within.

The Eldar army froze. Moans of terror issued from a few lips. A lull settled over the battlefield and even the chatter of small arms fire seemed to recede.

The Avatar turned its burning gaze on the Daemon silently responding to its mocking challenge. The slow drip-drip-drip of blood from its left hand intensified. Its blade glowed brightly in its clenched right fist.

Kelmon sensed that they had reached the crisis point of the battle. Two mighty probability waves were about to dash, one bringing screaming terror and defeat to his people, the other bringing

joyous victory. The outcome was unclear. Forces beyond his ability to comprehend had been unleashed here.

The Daemon led its followers down the ridge. The Eldar charged to meet them. Great clouds of dust rose around the combatants. Now all subtlety was thrown aside in the primal fury of conflict. The fighting became close and deadly as the two forces mingled. The Avatar and the Keeper of Secrets ploughed towards each other, leaving red destruction in their wakes. Swooping Hawks entered the melee. The Daemon rent two Exarchs asunder before it confronted the Avatar.

The earth shook as the two mighty beings clashed. The Avatar and the Daemon wrestled, each seeking advantage. Auras of power flickered around their heads as they duelled with blades of psychic force. The Daemon's claws locked tight on the Eldar's armour, striving to crush the being within. The Bloody-Handed One's left hand closed on the Daemon's throat as it sought to strangle its foe.

Kelmon felt a surge of power as the Warlocks entered the fray. Their witch blades flashed, cutting into the daemon's hide, distracting it for a second as it lashed out with its fists, breaking bodies with each terrific blow.

For a long moment the conflict stood in the balance. The Avatar and the Daemon stood locked, straining to their uttermost, neither able to break the deadlock. Kelmon sensed the total nature of the combat. Here were two beings, driven by burning hatred, battling on every level, physical, mental, spiritual; reenacting an old cosmic battle. Around them the struggles of man and Eldar were dwarfed by the energies unleashed. It was like two giants fighting in an ant-heap.

Slowly, painfully, the Avatar forced the Daemon back. The Daemon held its ground, but was forced to sway, curving its back away from its foe. The Avatar seemed to grow as it exerted itself more fully. Suddenly, with a final desperate surge it lifted the Daemon and broke its back over one armoured knee. A terrible psychic scream rang out. The feedback through the runes almost caused Kelmon to faint.

The Avatar stood now in the centre of battle and raised its blade in triumph. The cultists moaned, having seen their god destroyed. The Avatar glared around. Its gaze fixed on one man who fell to his knees screaming. The Avatar reached out with its bloody hand. There was a great splintering and rending of bones as the man's heart burst out through his chest and floated into the Avatar's grasp. The cultists fell back demoralised.

The battle was over. The massacre began.

Karhedron walked across the plain of ash. All around Bonesingers in wraithbone armour loomed from the twilight, their ornate helmets and baroque armour turning them into menacing spectral figures. They stood over the bodies of the Eldar dead, singing the Requiem for Fallen Heroes.

A thousand points of light glittered in the shadows transforming the battlefield into a carpet strewn with tiny stars. Each small fire was a waystone, pulsing with the soul of a slain warrior, a refuge against the ultimate death. Slowly the lights winked out as the Bonesingers reverently collected them for merger with the Infinity Circuit.

Karhedron passed the burned out remains of a fallen Spirit Walker. The machine was shattered beyond repair, its external carapace pitted with blast craters, its great head fused to molten slag. It lay on its side like the skeleton of a fallen giant.

He remembered the Spirit Walker as it had marched to battle, striding like an elegant thoroughbred, spidersilk pennons aflutter. He mourned its passing. Another artefact of ancient times destroyed, another object of irreplaceable beauty removed from the universe by the forces of senseless destruction.

He stepped over a human corpse. The man looked small and pitiful now he was dead, hands outstretched, begging for mercy he never received. His eyes were open, looking up to the unforgiving sky with an expression of shock. The Warlock bent down and closed his eyes gently, thinking that no-one should gaze out into the darkness forever.

Shocking quiet had fallen over the field now that the battle was over. Karhedron found it hard to believe that only hours earlier he had been trapped in a roaring melee, partially deafened by the clamour of battle. Now his ears seemed to ring with the absence of sound.

Nearby a Dire Avenger sat cross-legged by the body of her fallen comrade. She had removed her mask and crystal bright tears ran down her face. He knew her name was Talessa. He placed his hands on his own mask and toyed with the idea of removing it. He did not. He knew that when he did so, the last remnants of his fighting persona would fall away and he would have to confront his own reaction to the battle. Then he too would weep. At the moment, armoured in the role of Warlock, he could ignore the worst of his sorrow. He stalked through the aftermath of carnage wondering if it was always like this, the grief and the hollowness of heart. He began to understand why some of the Eldar became trapped on the warrior path. Dealing with the sight of so much ruin could be too much to bear. We have won this battle, he thought, but we can never win the war. In the end this ceaseless conflict we destroy us. Every fight leaves us diminished a few more souls lost to the Warp forever. He thought of Shiera, the Banshee whose waystone the daemon had devoured. That bright joyous girl would dance no more at the Feast of Forgotten Sorrows. She was gone now and a small part of the Eldar race had departed with her. The universe is colder for her passing, he thought. All the bloodlust and the bright madness of battle had gone now. It was as if the Avatar had taken it with him when he vanished back to his nether- realm in the heart of the Craftworld. Contemplating the darkness of spirit that the Bloody-Handed One's presence had revealed to him, Karhedron almost hated the creature. Part of him had enjoyed the battle, had revelled in the taking of life and the terrible excitement the being had led them into. The Avatar is part of us, he thought. We cannot escape that fact or shift the blame to him. We created him and we summoned him. His destructive potential is part of every Eldar. The Avatar's presence was simply an excuse for unleashing our darker selves. He is only our reflection, an incarnate nightmare of violence and death made real by our desires. He reached the centre of the field where the remaining troops were gathered. Most of the Aspect Warriors had removed their masks, were becoming themselves again. Some sat quietly, some wept, some laughed. The faceless precision of the Aspect Squads was gone, replaced by the reactions of individual Eldar. A group of people had gathered around the Farseer. Among their ranks Karhedron could make out the face of his mentor, Lahessa. Kelmon emerged to be greeted by their quiet approbation. His face was flushed, triumphant. He was raised on high by two Guardians, who lifted his thin, wasted body easily, and was taken down towards the bulk of the army. Somewhere, someone struck up a tune on the splinterpipe. The wild melody drifted over the battlefield, moving slowly from a mood of melancholic sadness to exultant triumph. It was the music of survival, of people who had passed through the inferno of combat unscathed. It spoke of the strange joy of victory, of the simple gladness of being alive. It mourned the passing of the dead yet spoke to the beating hearts of the living. It said tomorrow we will grieve but tonight let us give thanks for our lives. All things pass, life goes on. Still armoured as a Warlock, Karhedron was unmoved by this. He was frozen in the role of the hero, the eternal warrior. He confronted the Seer Lahessa. She met his gaze steadily. 'It's over,' she said. 'The time for heroes is past.' For a long time he looked at her, wondering whether he could face being a simple mortal again, a dying thing in a dying world. The music and the message of her eyes reached out to him and Karhedron took off his mask, became truly himself again, and wept.

THE ELДАР MOONS

Although the whereabouts of the original Eldar homeworld is lost, it is known that the world had three moons: Lileath the Maiden Moon which was white, Kurnous the Hunter's Moon which was greenish and dim, and Eldanesh the Red moon. According to the legends embodied in Dance of Asuryan, when Khaine slew Eldanesh the dead Eldar Lord was turned into a moon and coloured blood red in memory of Khaine's bloody-handed deed. The moon is always said to be a symbol of bad fortune and even today the Eldar regard the symbol of the red moon as a Portent of disaster.

THE CRONE WORLDS

The old Eldar homeworlds still exist in the Eye of Terror although they have been transformed into hellish places where daemons rule over subjugated races of mortals. The Eldar call these the Crone Worlds - referring to Moraiheg the Crone goddess. The Crone Worlds remain the primary source of spirit stones. Acquiring new spirit stones is extremely hazardous because it necessitates an expedition to an area of warp-real space overlap such as the Eye of Terror. However, there is said to be untold Secrets buried on the Crone Worlds since the time of the Fall and this attracts thousands of Eldar in search of their legendary past. According to legend the spirit stones were made by Vaul from the Tears of Isha. This is interpreted as a metaphor for the crystalization of psychic energies caused by the interface between the warp and the material universe. This process is associated with the Fall, and especially with the final catastrophe which ended the Eldar civilisation.

THE MAIDEN WORLDS

Before the fall the Eldar seeded many dead worlds with life as part of a program of colonisation which would take many thousands of years to reach fruition. Many of these worlds did not become inhabitable until many years after the fall, and some were then settled by humans and Orks who were quite unaware that they were living on a planet originally intended as an Eldar colony. The Eldar refer to these worlds as the Maiden Worlds, or Lilaethan after Lilaeth the Maiden goddess of the Eldar. Since the Fall fresh colonies have been settled from the Craftworlds themselves, often on worlds seeded before the fall, but sometimes on newly seeded or newly discovered habitable planets. The Eldar refer to all such worlds as Maiden Worlds as opposed to the lost Crone Worlds of their ancient civilisation.

THE CRYSTAL SEERS

As Farseers grow older their close association with the life of their Craftworld begins to affect them - their psyches become inextricably linked to the Wraithbone core of the Craftworld and their physical bodies grow increasingly dormant. Eventually, a Farseer of great age will retreat to the Dome of Crystal Seers, a bio-dome many miles across where the Wraithbone core of the craft breaks through to the surface and forms a forest of Wraithbone trees. Once a Seer enters the Dome his body begins to crystallise and grow transparent, first affecting his lower body so that his upper torso still lives normally whilst his feet are rooted to the spot, then creeping upwards so that only his head is still flesh, finally turning him entirely to transparent crystal. Once this has happened the Farseer is part of the Craftworld his consciousness has flowed into the Wraithbone core where it will be preserved forever in the infinity Circuit. Other Eldar sometimes come to wander round the Dome of Crystal Seers to look upon the Seers of old whose forms are preserved forever amongst the changeless Wraithbone glades.

He found her in the arbor, gazing into the heart of a purple iris. She silently acknowledged his approach, continuing to study the delicate dark petals of the flower. Elshar expected no more greeting. Since he had become trapped in the Aspect of the Warrior his feelings for Irillith had lessened to such a point that he could now barely remember them. Their paths had forked apart, but he still felt respect for her. She was a fine warrior, an honour to her Aspect. All the Eldar sensed the growing tension which heralded the awakening of the Avatar and the summoning of the Aspect Warriors. A time of darkness and blood, a time when they had to trust their darker sides to preserve them from evil. He supposed she resented it, or was saddened by it while he, as an Exarch, welcomed the coming conflict. He found peace-time monotonous, only the thrill of battle made him feel truly alive. He was like a hunting hound being taken out to the chase.

'You've heard the news?' he asked her.

She shivered slightly at the rhetorical question, and turned to face him, her dark hair gliding over her shoulders.

'Yes, we go to fight again.. The wraithbone hums with the message of war. I feel....him. He is beginning to wake. Soon I shall be assuming my Aspect, and you... Do we need to say farewell Elshar, or will you even care to remember me?' Macthen drew back respectfully as Elshar strode past. The Exarch didn't appear to have noticed him. They used to be as close as brothers when they fought together as Aspect Warriors. While Macthen had travelled the Path of the Warrior and reemerged into the light, Elshar had become increasingly caught up in the Aspect until he entirely surrendered to it. And now the Time of War was upon them, and Elshar had been elected the Young King. Macthen didn't envy him his role.

He'd once officiated at the awakening of the Avatar, and the terrible experience still haunted his dreams. Now he followed a different path couldn't remember the details of the ceremony very clearly, but the image of the Avatar bursting through the doors of bronze would remain with him always.

Elshar was an Exarch of some standing now, his daring exploits celebrated in song and dance through many Craftworlds. Now all that separated him from his ultimate fate was the span of two days and a mortal body. It was a great honour to join the Avatar in immortality, but Macthen found the idea and the process involved quite horrifying.

Elshar fixed his gaze to the opposite wall and held himself rigidly still. The attendant Exarchs moved around him silently, and he felt, rather than saw, them start to paint the runes on his naked body. The blood dried instantly, burning Corrosively into his skin. He could feel the pattern creeping over his body, as if he were being covered with a net of fire.

A tiny part of him, which he thought long gone, whimpered softly in fear, and he suppressed it viciously. He had climbed to the peak of his terror and elation, and now all feelings were falling away. Emotionally and spiritually he was growing numb, bleakness filled his soul. His thoughts, the finish and beginning of his existence were polarised into a single point of time, bearing down upon him like a ball of fire.....

Irillith and Berel clasped each other closely, the last moment of human contact before they assumed their warrior aspects. Around them, the walls of the shrine were humming with tension, sparkles of psychic energy running along the wraithbone.

They pulled apart and took their positions with the others on the floor. The Exarch raised her arms and the ceremony began. As the Eldar intoned the ritual chants and performed the familiar gestures they felt their humanity sliding away as the dark side of their nature was slowly released. Irillith's natural gentleness, her fears, her pity for Elshar were washed away by the relentless tsunami of the Aspea of the Warrior. As the mental breakwaters seceded, the part of her that was Irillith was swept further and further back until it was exiled to a tiny refuge in the core of her being.

Fully suited now, but still holding their masks, the Banshee warriors received the final blessing. The Exarch passed among them, dipping her finger in blood and drawing the sacred rune of the aspect on their foreheads.

The psychic tension was now almost unbearable, and the mane of hair on the Banshees' helmets stood on end with static. As one, they closed their eyes and raised their masks to their faces. A psychic shockwave boomed through the Craftworld as, Simultaneously, the Avatar burst through the doors of bronze and the Aspect Warriors donned and fastened their masks.

Irillith snapped open her eyes, and a film of pure red washed down over them. Blood. she smelled blood. The call to battle raced through the veins of her body. She wanted to leap, to sing with the joy of death. Most of all she wanted to *kill*.

The moment must be very near now, thought Macthen, nearly upon us. Over his head, the Ozone sparkled and pulsated with power. He tried not to think consciously about his work, his Seer's mind empathically absorbing the psychic waves that danced through the core of the World. He felt the energy being channelled through his body, rippling down his arms, flowing through his wrists and hands to the sculpture. When the shockwave of the Avatar's awakening had passed, he looked down at his creation. From the crude iron ingot a leaping figure of an Avatar arced gracefully up. He was not surprised that the daemon mask of its armour echoed Elshar's face.

He found her in the arbor, gazing into the heart of a purple iris. She silently acknowledged his approach, continuing to study the delicate dark petals of the flower. He examined her face, looking for some improvement in her mood since their return.

Two months had passed since the massacre on Sarlinn's World. Outfaced, outnumbered and outmaneuvered, the Eldar forces had been forced to fight a bloody retreat back through the warp tunnel which linked them to the planet. Barely a tenth of the Eldar engaged in the campaign had returned, a bitter blow to Craftworld's already diminished population. Worse still, in the desperate struggle against the forces of chaos there had been few chances to gather the Waystones of the fallen.

Physically and spiritually the Craftworld had been dealt a mortal blow, a blow from which it was unlikely ever to recover. Their few colonies were already seriously depleted of personnel and resources, and they could expect little reprieve from that quarter.

The Eldar had clawed their way out of the pit of despair, but were never able to surmount the brim of their eternal tragedy. They were too few, the omnipresent darkness of Slaanesh was too powerful. The only respite was bought at such a terrible cost of lives and souls.

The Craftworld seemed ominously empty now. It had never been very populous, but the corridors and rooms had rung with laughter and music. Everything, every being, every Creation was so precious, and they were all aware of that fact. The Eldar had continuously celebrated the joy of their existence, had fought when they needed to, had passed through the darkness back to the light again.

Now, it seemed they had lost sight of the light. The Eldar who had returned brought no joy of victory with them, only the shadow of despair. So many had died on the stony fields of Sarlinn. Worse than dead, their souls had been lost forever to chaos. The awareness of this irreplaceable loss loomed over the remaining Eldar like a close dark cloud, oppressing their thoughts and their spirits. In their tunnel vision, all they could see was a slow, inevitable decline. No more laughter, no more life, no more hope.

Strange rumours were whispered in the empty corridors, that the rooms of the dead had sealed themselves off, that Wraithguard had been seen patrolling the outer limits, that the Avatar no longer sat on his throne of iron. A deadness permeated everything, colours had lost their brilliance, tunes fell flat and monotonous.

'Irillith?' he said gently, touching her on the shoulder. 'Come back with me, you look pale, you need to eat. you shouldn't spend so much time alone, it won't help anything.'

she threw off his hand and turned to face him, violet eyes glowing in her shadowed, gaunt face.

'Leave me alone Macthen. There's nothing more for me out there, for any of us. You've heard what the seers have seen, nothing... *Nothing!*'

'That's not true,' he replied, the lie coming awkwardly from his mouth. 'There is always a future. you mustn't give up hope. As long as we have hope, we have a future. I've brought you something - I think Elshar would have wanted it.'

She took the bundle from him and unwound the silk wrappings hesitantly. He saw her eyes glisten with emotion as she turned the statuette over and in her hands, feeling its grace and symmetry. Realising he could do nothing more to help Irillith, Macthen left. As he closed the door he thought he caught a glimpse of someone standing behind her, a stooped old woman, but he couldn't be sure. It might just have been a trick of the light.

+++The Black Library+++

Much of the Eldar's ancient knowledge and culture was lost during the flight from Chaos. The craft-worlds became the sole repository of Eldar wisdom, and this fragmented as the Eldar nations drifted apart. Craft-worlds were lost over the millenia, and knowledge vanished with them.

A single source of Eldar knowledge has remained untouched and inviolate since the Fall. Aboard a dark craft-world, far beyond the boundaries of the Imperium, is the Black Library of Chaos. Here are the collected tomes, books and codices describing the Eldar studies of the warp. The forbidden lore of the Black Library describes the blandishments, influences, forms, creatures, perils, promises and horrors of Chaos. Enclosed within a nearly impenetrable psychic barrier, the Black Library is watched and maintained by its Guardian-Scribes; they collate and transcribe the knowledge of the

Library, a task that they have carried out since the Fall of the Eldar. They also maintain a hawk-like watch over their charges, the books; dreadful repositries of secret powers and must be monitored at all times."

The existence of the Library is known to only a few, and entry is allowed to even fewer individuals. The library's 'mind' defends itself from the weak who would misuse its knowledge by refusing entry to all except those who have acknowledged and tempered the Chaos within themselves. The immature, who are still vulnerable to the promises and seductions of Chaos, find that they are unable to pass through its gateway. As a result few have seen within the Library or read any of its books. Only two groups come and go at will: The Human Illuminati and the Solitaires of the Eldar Harlequins. The Guardian-scribes rarely leave once they have entered.

+++The Harlequins+++

The Harlequins are followers of the strange Eldar god the Great Harlequin, also known as the Laughing God, one of only two Eldar gods to survive the Fall. The Harlequins live on no Craftworld but wander from world to world through the network of interspatial tunnels that binds the Craftworlds together. Only they know the whereabouts of the Black Library, for they are the keepers of its terrible secrets about the Fall and the true nature of Chaos.

The Harlequins are warrior troubadours whose carefully constructed masques and impressive displays of mime and acrobatics tell the many strange stories of Eldar mythology. They wear exotic multi-coloured costumes, brightly patterned to represent figures from the Eldar myth cycles. They never show their real faces but conceal them beneath a shifting costume mask which can assume any image at the will of the Harlequin. When the Harlequins fight in battle their masks are said to reflect the worst nightmares of all those who gaze upon them, causing their foes to quail with supernatural terror.

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+++THE ELDAR EXODITES+++

During the Fall the degeneration of the Eldar was not complete, for many Eldar resisted the temptations of Chaos. Some, the more far-sighted, began to openly criticize the decadence of their fellow citizens, and to warn against the insidiousness of Chaos cults. These people were mostly ignored or else treated as narrow-minded self-righteous fools and fanatics. Soon the general collapse of society convinced even the most resolute amongst them that there would be no end to the reign of death and depravity. Some decided to leave the Eldar worlds, and settle new planets free of the creeping corruption. They were the ones still untainted by the touch of Chaos, and by now they were few.

These Eldar are known as the Exodites. Of all the Eldar race they were uniquely far-sighted. Amongst a race naturally indulgent and hedonistic they were reviled as dour self-righteous fanatics obsessed with misery and self-denial. There were some whose dire premonitions were perhaps yet another form of insanity, simply one more conceit taken to inhuman extremes. Others were genuine survivalists who chose exile over degradation and destruction. In an assortment of spacecraft the Exodites abandoned their homes. Many died in open space. Some reached new worlds only to be slain by marauding Orks or natural predators. Many more survived. For the most part they headed eastwards as far away from the main concentration of Eldar worlds as they could reach.

Upon the fringes of the galaxy the Exodites made new homes. The worlds they settled were savage and life was often hard for a people unused to physical work and self-denial. When the final cataclysm erupted, most of the Exodite worlds were far from the psychic epicenter and survived. The resultant psychic implosion wiped out the rest of the Eldar race and left a gaping hole in the fabric of space, but out on the fringes of the galaxy the Exodites were safe. Many Craftworlds rode out the psychic shock wave and survived that way, but the Exodites had already reached places of safety - or else they perished with the rest of their race and have been forgotten.

Since they were first settled the Exodite worlds have not changed a great deal. The Eldar that live there have learned how to cultivate crops and harvest other natural resources. The psycho-plastics necessary for Eldar technology are rare and precious on these remote planets so the Exodites utilize other substances and rely upon simpler ways and physical labor. The Exodites have developed the craftsmen and artisans needed to work with natural materials to create the items that are needed in their daily lives. The Craftworld Eldar regard the Exodites as rustic and rather simple folk, vigorous and wild in a way that is quite unlike their own introverted societies. Craftworlders and Exodites travel within each other's realms, but their different mental outlook and way of life means that they have their own concerns.

The Eldar path determines the way of life for all Craftworlders but not for the Exodites. Because of this they seem wild and individualistic compared to other Eldar, more independently minded and adventurous by far than their cousins. They can survive in this fashion because they are distant from the Eye of Terror, the hole in the fabric of space which still acts as a psychic focus for the destructive influence of Slaanesh. This alone is not enough to protect them, but it is a significant factor. More importantly, the Exodite societies are more rigorous and physical than those of the Craftworlds. Where the Craftworlds cling to the past and preserve all they can of their fallen civilization, the Exodites have turned their backs upon ancient traditions in favor of a simpler and harder way of life. Their minds are tougher and more straightforward but not so subtle and ultimately less powerful than the Craftworld Eldar. However, they have survived, and of all the Eldar they seem most likely to continue to do so.

The Exodite worlds are untamed and often dangerous planets. Mighty rivers roar unchecked over their natural flood plains. Massive forests stretch over thousands of miles of virgin woodland. The few meager settlements co-exist with wild beasts of all kinds. The Exodites are too few to disturb the balance of nature. Their settlements are small and thinly scattered. Many are occupied only for a few months of the year, because on many worlds the Exodites are nomadic, moving with the seasons and the herds. They time their migrations so that they arrive at their camps in the late summer to collect crops planted in the spring, remaining until it is time to plant the following year's crop and move on.

The wild creatures that inhabit the Exodite worlds are many and varied. Most of the Exodite worlds are now home to large herds of megadons and other gigantic beasts which the Exodites know by the name of dragons. It is likely that these creatures are native to the region, but that the early

settlers spread them throughout all their worlds so that they are now common. The Exodites follow the dragon herds as they graze the endless grasslands of the great plains. By carefully managing the herds the Eldar live upon them, eating their flesh and even drinking their blood, and utilizing their skins to make clothing and leather. Even bones and horn have their uses, and these materials partly substitute for the psychoplastic substances used by the Craftworld Eldar. Although this lifestyle is in many respects a primitive one, the Exodites have many advanced technologies and are familiar with all the sophisticated materials used on the Craftworlds. It is by choice that they live as they do, and their way of life has proven every bit as successful as that of the other Eldar. There are many different kinds of dragons, some unique to specific worlds, and they are used in different ways according to their size and nature. The megadons are massive herbivores, slow-witted and easy to manage, although deadly if panicked or mistreated. These creatures provide most of the material resources of the Exodites, and small ones are used to transport cargoes and people across the great plains. A large megadon can carry a massive structure on its back, and they bear the most enormous weights without concern. Smaller carnivorous dragons ridden by Exodite warriors are used to herd and control the megadons. Warriors are virtually born into the tail dragon saddles, and wield their long lances with consummate ease. A stab with a lance will turn or stop a megadon without causing it any harm, but the same blow would knock the most hardy Eldar to the ground dead. Warriors are an important part of Exodite societies. Their role is to protect each community as well as to safeguard its beasts from predators.

The Exodites are a tribal people. Each tribe owes allegiance to a local ruling tribal leader, who may rule over several lesser tribes, which in turn owes fealty to the planet's king and his royal tribe. As there are relatively few Eldar there are few territorial disputes. The tribes live within substantial areas which easily meet their grazing and cultivation requirements. Open wars between tribes are rare but skirmishes between rival young Dragon Knights are common. Although not openly warlike, the Exodites are a robust, self-confident people and they have the legendary pride of the Eldar race. Knights frequently try to steal away a rival's beasts or may attempt to move their herds over the grazing areas of other tribes. Such matters are seen as part of a Knight's training, and the dangers of death or serious injury are an accepted part of a young warrior's life. These raids and occasional deaths do not embitter the tribes, and it is notable that no matter how hard fought their disputes might be no Eldar would despoil or steal the crops of a rival tribe even though these lie unprotected for months at a time.

War and battle is not uncommon on the worlds of the Exodites. Ork raids are a constant threat and human settlers are no respecters of Eldar territory. Amongst the most persistent foes are the human settlers of the Knight Worlds which lie closely intermingled with the planets of the Exodites. The human Knight Lords are aggressive, warlike people whose determined independence makes it impossible for even the Imperium to control them. Like the Exodites they are descendants of ancient settlers, raised amidst constant danger and proud of their autonomy. Their fierce war machines are a common sight on the Exodite worlds. Battles between giant war machines and valiant Eldar dragon warriors are always hard-fought and destructive. But the Eldar are capable of aggression too. They use the Webway to reach the Knight Worlds where their raids are often so devastating that entire planets are subsequently abandoned.

WORLD SPIRITS OF THE EXODITES

The wraithbone core of each Craftworld acts as a repository and conductor of psychic power. It is also the ultimate refuge for the spirits of its people in death. Every Exodite world has its own equivalent to the infinity circuit which is called the world spirit. This is an immense store of psychic energy where the minds of dead Eldar are preserved forever. Exodites too wear spirit stones and when they die they are taken beneath the earth into one of the great tribal barrows. They are laid to rest there and their spirit stories are broken upon the altars of the world spirit.

Each world spirit is a complex psychic energy grid which extends over the entire planet, stretching between the tribal barrows, stone circles and standing stones. These important places are where the spirit world and the material world can interact, where the spirits of the dead can flow together, and where the living can talk to the dead if they have the power.

The stone circles and standing stones are made from psychically interactive crystal. These towering stones are gigantic spirit stones which anchor psychic power into the earth. The links between them form part of the Eldar Webway, but the paths from the Webway into the world spirits are well hidden and protected. Eldar are able to move between the Craftworlds and Exodite Worlds by means of the Webway, and there are paths over the Exodite worlds themselves. The most potent link in the entire world spirit network is the royal circle of the planet's king. This impressive structure consists of a system of concentric circles connected by avenues of megalithic spirit stones. The royal circle is supported by outlying menhirs which carry power throughout the entire planet and focus the energy of the world upon that one spot.

Because their worlds are home to their departed spirits and shelter them from the predations of Chaos, the Exodites will fight very fiercely to protect their planets. To abandon a world is akin to abandoning the souls of your ancestors to the warp, for without constant replenishment the world spirits diminish slowly and become vulnerable. Just as the wraithbone core of a Craftworld can unwittingly harbor a daemoniac intelligence, so the standing stones can provide egress to daemons from the warp should the psychic paths be left unguarded. For a daemoniac army to pour from the barrows and standing stones of the Exodites would be the realization of their worst nightmare, but such things have happened in the distant past and remain an ever-present danger today.

OUTCASTS AND THE EXODITES

Many Eldar take the Path of the Outcast during their lives, leaving their Craftworlds and seeking adventure in the wide universe. These Outcasts travel between the stars in their spacecraft. They search for Maiden Worlds to settle, and visit the Exodite worlds where they may live amongst their distant cousins.

Outcasts are common enough on the Exodite worlds, often seeking the patronage of one of the Eldar tribes. In return they fight alongside the tribe's warriors and, for a while at least, enjoy the freedom of mind which is impossible on the Craftworlds. Sometimes Outcasts settle permanently amongst the Exodites, or upon some uninhabited world, and become the first settlers of a new Eldar colony. To the Exodites the Outcasts are strange romantic figures, the masters of a hidden lore and way of life which is arcane and archaic. They bring skills which the Exodites value highly, and so are always made welcome at the courts of the tribal Eldar.

+++THE PHANTOM CLASS TITAN+++

The Phantom, or Fynnadan, is the most common class of Eldar Titan. As its name suggests, the Phantom is fast moving and very agile, embodying the Eldar military philosophy that prefers speed and mobility to heavy armor.

Like all Eldar military vehicles, the Phantom is designed for beauty as much as function, and compared to an Imperial Titan it is very tall, slim and fragile-looking. This appearance is largely deceptive, for the Phantom is strongly built, and can absorb at least as much damage as a Human Warlord Titan.

Unlike Human Titans, however, Phantoms do not make use of void shields. Instead, they have a system of defensive screens called dathedi ('between colors'). The screens project a holographic disruption pattern, whose dispersion is linked to the Titan's movement. Thus, when a Phantom moves, its image seems to explode into a storm of tiny multicolored shards. The faster it moves, the more scattered its image becomes. When it stops, the cloud appears to coalesce into a solid shape.

Eldar defensive screens are designed to disrupt enemy targeting rather than stop incoming fire as void shields do. Compared to Imperial Titans, the Phantom is vulnerable to damage, but its screens make it more difficult to hit provided it keeps moving. While many Imperial Titan commanders see this as a weakness, it is entirely in harmony with the Eldar conception of war; hit-and-run tactics are normally employed, with the Phantoms using their speed and agility to maneuver into an opponent's blind side before firing.

The Phantom has a crew of four - three living Eldar and one Infinity Circuit. The Infinity Circuit is normally mounted in the center of the crew compartment in the Titan's head, and the living crew - frequently blood-relatives of the Infinity Circuit - occupy couches around it. Unlike their Human counterparts, they do not have specific functions. Each crewmember is equipped with a headband in which is set a fragment of the carrecenad stone; by means of this they merge their minds with the Infinity Circuit, forming a composite mind capable of handling multiple thoughts and actions. This mind is linked to the Phantom's mechanical systems by Mind Impulse Units that are far in advance of those used by the Imperium.

The relationship between a Phantom's living crew and its Infinity Circuit is intimate and all sharing; they know each other totally, and are marked by their ability to finish each other's sentences and thoughts out loud.

In any other Eldar, this would be unthinkable presumption, but Titan crews are known for the closeness they develop and the eccentricities that arise from it. To Eldar outside the Titan Clans, they are almost a race apart.

+++ELDAR CRAFTWORLDS+++

Alaitoc Craftworld

The Alaitoc craftworld relies upon the large number of Rangers who originate from the Craftworld. These Rangers scout out possible trouble spots, enemy worlds, Maiden Worlds, and scout ahead of the main force in battle. Alaitoc Rangers are trained to be self-sufficient, to know when and how to fight. The Alaitoc craftworld relies on its Rangers to give it forward knowledge on locations they are moving toward.

Iyanden Craftworld

Iyanden has suffered greatly in the past. In the years of the 41st millennium, they felt the tendrils of the Kraken. A large part of Hive Fleet Kraken assaulted Iyanden, nearly overrunning the craftworld. The craftworld was not lost, but the lives of many of its people were. The souls of many warriors were added to the Infinity Circuit, but many of these warriors fight on past death - they fight on as the Ghost Warriors of Iyanden. Even the dead Warlocks would not remain still in death, and fought on as Spirit Walkers, their spirit stone enmeshed in a Wraithlord's metal body.

Biel-Tan Craftworld

The Biel-Tan craftworld has a large number of Aspect shrines, as it places great faith in the Path of the Warrior. They have a much larger force of Aspect Warriors to fight for them than other craftworlds do, and thus their armies have less need for the artisans, farmers, and other Eldar to take up arms as often. In battle these armies of Aspect Warriors are extremely deadly.

Saim Hann Craftworld

The Saim Hann Craftworld employs the use of a large number of jetbikes and skimmers. In battle they use these skimmers to make fast hit and run attacks against their enemies, slashing at them with lasers, shuriken, and plasma fire. The craftworld is also known for its Wild Riders - jetbike riders who are very skilled and very deadly. The Wild Riders swoop down upon their foe relentlessly, destroying them with massed shuriken fire.

Ulthwe Craftworld

Ulthwe lies close the Eye of Terror, a dire realm inhabited by many vile followers and creatures of the Chaos Gods. Ulthwe has many Farseers to guide it through the strands of the future, and many Eldar of Ulthwe follow the Path of the Warlock. These Farseers and Warlocks must constantly fight off the forces of Chaos. Ulthwe is constantly in danger of being overwhelmed, by Chaos, by Orks, by the Imperium, and by another threat... the Sleeping Ones. The craftworld seems almost damned to its destiny, a destiny of destruction.

+++The Fall of the Eldar+++

Over ten thousand years ago, a great tragedy befell the Eldar. The Eldar were at the height of their civilization, and they held dominion over a large part of the galaxy. Their worlds were paradises of great beauty and peace and cultural achievement. Then came the Fall.

The Eldar were proud and arrogant, and viewed all alien races as inferior barbarians. They excelled above all races and technology. There had never been a serious threat to their wealth and prosperity, until the Fall. They created many beautiful things, and learned much of the universe that is now forgotten, they lived long lives, and when they eventually died, their spirits passed peacefully back into the Warp to be born again. There were no spirit stones to contain the undying spirits in those days, for they had no need for such things. The Warp did not hold the dangers for them it does today.

Slowly, their own pride began to eat the Eldar race, to destroy all caution and caring for their fellows. The Eldar had long outgrown the need for physical labour of any kind. The Eldar society provided all that was required, without individual effort, leaving the long-lived Eldar to spend their lives seeking pleasure and satisfying their desires. Many gave way to the most hedonistic of impulses. Cults sprang up all over the Eldar domains dedicated to different aspects of arcane knowledge and sensual excesses. As these cults gained more power over the Eldar, their society became increasingly divided. They became more and more corrupt, became wanton and abandoned. Sadistic killers prowled the streets in search of victims. The need for pleasures became more and more demanding, and for the Eldar it became harder and ever harder to satisfy their desires, so their acts became more and more depraved. The bestial roar of the crowds was heard throughout all the streets, and gutters ran with blood.

The depravity and foul sickness of the Eldar mind raised a creature born of that depravity. A new Chaos God awoke, Slaanesh, who was created in the image of the Eldar desire and depravity. No creature of the Warp was ever birthed that was as monstrous or as powerful as the Chaos God Slaanesh, the Great Enemy, and the Doom of the Eldar Incarnate.

For years, the Eldar were riven with madness, as Slaanesh dreamed in the Warp. The Eldar slew and laughed and feasted upon the corpses of the dead, while worlds burned, and Slaanesh stirred uneasily into wakefulness, reborn from his endless sleep. When Slaanesh was born into divine consciousness, there was not one Eldar anywhere who did not feel the agony. With a howl of psychic energy, Slaanesh rose into supernatural life and cried out his pain. A psychic implosion tore at the universe. The spirits of the Eldar were drawn from their minds and consumed as their god took his first infernal breath. Intoxicated with this first drought, Slaanesh laughed, and looked upon a universe of gods.

The epicentre of the psychic implosion lay within the heart of the Eldar realms. Most Eldar within thousands of light years were destroyed in an instant, their spirits sucked into the Warp to feed the hungry god. Even Craftworlds were overwhelmed as they fled, and only those furthest away from the epicentre survived. Upon the fringe of the galaxy, the shockwave slew millions of Eldar Exodites and twisted many others with the power of the Warp, leaving only the remotest worlds largely untouched. In but a moment, the Eldar had become a doomed people, reduced to refugees scattered throughout space, knowing that their Great Enemy had been born and would pursue them for the rest of eternity.

The area that was once the heartworlds of the Eldar has now become a great rend in space called the Eye of Terror. It is the largest zone of its kind in the entire galaxy. Here the Warp and the material universe overlap, Daemons bathe in the energy of the Warp, while Daemon Princes and the Chaos Space Marines rule over planets turned into Hell worlds. Here lie the Crone Worlds, the ancient worlds that once made up the Eldar empire.

+++ORKOIDS+++

The Orkish race is savage and brutal, and relish in war. Orks themselves are a warrior elite, who lord it over their smaller cousins, Gretchins and Snotlings. Orks dominate their society because

they are the biggest, toughest and meanest. Orks are muscular and robust, and a typical specimen stands about man height, but would be taller if he stood up straight. Gretchin are smaller and less developed, but they have alert and cunning minds. By nature they are cheerful, furtive, sneaky and fatalistic. Most Gretchins are owned by Ork masters as personal servants and the Orks depend on them for most of the day-to-day running of their society. The smallest Orkoids, Snotlings, are mischievous and willful but can be trained to do various tasks. Their main role in Ork society is harvesting Squiggly beasts and fungus for food.

ORK REALMS

As a result of the erratic progress of Ork space travel, and their urge to seek adventure wherever it may take them, Ork communities tend to be scattered throughout the universe. They travel in warfleets of hijacked space hulks, patched up and made airtight by simple power-field technology. Each community considers itself to be either a tribe or a confederation of tribes united temporarily under a great warlord. A tribe may be wandering in space, settled on a planet, isolated from other races or at war. Every tribe will include a motley collection of Ork clans and castes.

Orks are a very successful race, and they seem to be able to survive, expand and prosper almost effortlessly compared to struggling humanity. On the whole, they have a more pragmatic attitude to life than many other races, and seem better able to cope with the realities of a harsh universe. The secret is that they just don't care. Orks simply follow the natural life they were intended for: wild adventure, warfare, raiding and early death. Their remarkable progress has been achieved mostly by trial and error, without pausing to count the cost or question the meaning of it all.

CONQUEST AND TRIBUTE

Orks need a regular supply of armaments and technology if they are to stand up to their enemies. The Meks do a good job, but its not enough on its own. The only solution is to conquer and enslave industrial communities, mount raids or exact tribute. Often this will be an arms-length transaction with Ork space hulks turning up periodically to demand goods. Sometimes a planet will be subjected to occupation, with the Orks ruling it as an uncouth warrior aristocracy and forcing the population to manufacture arms and equipment for them.

+++General Description+++ +++of the Ork Race+++

The Orks are a savage, and brutal race who love war. They are the dominant element of a race of Orkoids that includes Orks, Gretchin, and Snotlings. The Orks are in charge because they are the biggest, toughest, meanest, and most warlike of their kind.

The Ork mind is specialised: it is devoted wholly to the pursuit of power and war. Orks are brave and tough, and their bodies have a natural resilience which allows them to survive traumatic injuries and the most primitive of surgery.

Gretchin

Gretchins are much like Orks, though not as brutal, strong, or tough as their larger cousins. The smaller Gretchin are more clever and cunning.

Snotlings

Snotlings' main role in Ork society is the cultivation of fungus. They also look after the Squigs. Snotlings are bred and raised by a class of Orks known as Runtherds.

Nobz and Warlords

Nobz are Ork Nobles. They are wealthy, battle-hardened veterans who have gotten to where they are by being bigger, tougher, and meaner than anybody else. Nobz can be found in positions of command or organised into their own select bands. They prefer the company of other Orks of equal status, and Nobz units are usually very well armed and equipped.

The most powerful and prestigious Nobz are given the title Warboss or Warlord. The finest trophy a Warlord can have is a Space Marine helmet. Orks judge the worth of a Warlord by the quantity and quality of the enemies he has defeated in battle.

When a Warlord's authority is challenged, the Warlord simply takes on any rival contenders in gladiatorial combat in a pit fight.

Ork Freebooterz

The Freebooterz exist on the fringe of Ork Kultur. They are small roving bands of pirates, bandits and mercenaries belonging to no Waagh! or clan. They are eager for adventure, combat, and booty. These motly crews have long since abandoned any clan loyalties. The Freebooter band is now the only home they have. They roam the galaxy in small dilapidated spacecraft and hide out on isolated planets and large asteroids. The band is led by a hardened Boss or Kaptin. They use the sign of the Jolly Ork to set them apart.

Squigs

Orks use Squigs for everything from food to hair and beards to ammunition, and sometimes even pets! For some reason, anywhere Orks settle, Squigs will develop. No one knows exactly why.

Orky Know-Wotz

Oddboyz

There are many types of Oddboyz, the most important of which are Mekboyz, Painboyz, Runtherds, and Weirdboyz.

Mekboyz make and maintain the Orks' weapons, wargear, and vehicles. They are essential to an Ork Waagh!.

Painboyz are the Ork battle surgeons, and they work with the Mekboyz to install mechanical bits on the Ork boyz.

Runtherds train the Gretchin and Snotlings, and are responsible for the breeding of them.

Weirdboyz are psykers with unpredictable powers. Most Weirdboyz are forced to live outside the Ork village, as they are considered too dangerous to live amongst the general Ork population.

Bikes, Buggies, and Da' Kult of Speed

The Orks' love of fast vehicles, known by the Orks as Da' Kult of Speed, accounts for the vast array of customized buggies, bikes, and ramshackle vehicles that can be mustered by an Ork warband.

Ork Dreadnoughts

An Ork Dreadnought is piloted by an Ork who has been surgically implanted into the machine by the combined efforts of an Ork Painboy and an Ork Mekboy. Most Ork Dreadnoughts have four arms, although there is a small, two-armed version. However, the fact that the four-armed version is both bigger and capable of carrying twice as much weaponry makes it the most powerful.

Kustom Weapons

Ork Kustom weapons can be bizarre and weird in form, they can be both powerful and dangerous to their user at the same time, as no Mekaniak would ever admit to any shortcomings in their creations.

The Waaagh!

Orks are evolved primarily for fighting, and this leads to rivalry and even outright war between the different tribes. Although this gives the impression that Orks are disorganised and rebellious, they are actually capable of a high degree of cooperation. The Techno-Magi of the Adeptus Mechanicus have identified low levels of background psychic energy in the minds of all Orks and Gretchin.

As a particular Warlord grows in power, other Orks are attracted to his armies, and clamour to assume subordinate positions under his command. This means that Ork armies can assemble very quickly, growing into massive hoards appearing out of nowhere and attacking unsuspecting planets. A Waagh! will last until the Orks are defeated, or until they run out of enemies

+++GARGANTS+++

Like many products of Orkoid military engineering, the Gargant relies on comparatively simple technology and devastatingly heavy firepower, an attitude summed up by Boss-Mek Badlug One-Leg in his oft-quoted dictum "S'gonna be dead shooty, wiv loadza gunz all over."

Orks do not rely on auto-systems to the same extent as other races, and Gargants carry a large crew of both Orks and Gretchins. The crew is led by a Kaptin, who relays orders through a body of

officers. A speaking-tube is the preferred method of communication within a Gargant. Each officer is in charge of one section of the Gargant, be it a weapon, the magazine, the engine room, or whatever. Under the officer is a crew of Orks and Gretchins who carry out the orders passed down to them. Repair crews are composed of Gretchins, whose smaller build suits them to crawling through cramped spaces armed with wrenches and oily rags.

Gargants are protected by up to eight banks of power fields. In practical terms, a power field is very similar to a void shield, but cannot be repaired - when a hit is absorbed, one field generator is permanently destroyed.

BUILDING GARGANTS

Ork raids are a constant hazard for all the intelligent races of the galaxy. Every two or three centuries the frequency of raiding increases, closely followed by Ork invasion and wars of conquest. This is known as the time of Waa-Ork. It is the root cause of Ork migrations and responsible for the rise of great empires. The focal point of the Waa-Ork is the construction of the mighty Ork Titans, known as Gargants.

Waa-Ork is a spontaneous happening. It can begin in the mind of a single Mek, who forms the vision of a colossal war machine in his mind, shaped in the image of the Ork war gods. From that moment on he becomes obsessed by giving real mechanical form to this dream. He immediately begins work, assisted by his Gretchins and slaves, and Mekboyz drawn in from the surrounding area, inspired by the same idea. Soon the word spreads and the psychic call is heard by Orks all across the galaxy. More and more Meks with their entourages gather at the site, which now reverberates to the clanging of hammers on metal. Slowly the scaffolding is erected and within the cradle of steel the great metal hulk that will become a Gargant takes shape.

Gradually the Waa-Ork gathers momentum, as the scene is repeated throughout Orkdom. Each tribe, realm or empire is engrossed with the construction of its own Mob of Gargants. In a process which can take up to three hundred years to reach its peak, the whole of the Ork race will become agitated, disturbed and dynamic. Waa-Ork is a time of tribes coming together, of great works, of migrations, wars and conquests. Orks throughout the universe take to the warpath.

The gigantic Titans known as Gargants stride at the core of the Waa-Ork. Each Gargant is a huge towering war machine of awesome destructive power. It is also a mechanical, fighting, fire-belching idol in the image of the Ork war gods. The machines are served by a living crew of Orks and Gretchins, stoking the boilers and loading the guns in the Gargant's turrets. The construction of a Gargant is in itself an act of god worship, and stands for all that is Orkish.

Eventually the Waa-Ork reaches fever pitch. The Gargants are near completion, and the armies of the warlords have been mustered. When the Gargants are ready, the scaffolding is pulled away and the great boilers are stoked for the first time. A cheer rises as the great beasts belch smoke and move forward. Then the Ork armies go off in all directions, wherever fate and fortune may take them, and war comes to every corner of the galaxy.

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+++Oddboyz+++

Oddboyz all possess an intuitive understanding of complex matters. It appears that bound up within an Ork's genetic structure are artificial DNA strands that carry knowledge. As an Ork matures any latent knowledge inherent in his genetic structure starts to make itself felt, and he assumes a role in society to which he is best suited.

These are the Mekboyz, Painboyz, Runtherdz, Weirdboyz, Brewboyz, Diggerz, Sumboyz, Yellerz, etc.

Ork oddboyz are identical in physical make-up to their unspecialized mates. What denotes their difference, is that Oddboyz will always have their 'gear', which is specialized to their role in Orkish society. For example, a Painboy will be found with his toof pulla'z along with other large, bloodied Orkish medical equipment (a large hammer works well).

Oddboyz can generally be found in Ork camps with their own special establishments. The only exception to this is the copper towers of the Weirdboyz and the roaming bands of deranged Madboyz.

Oddboyz are a result of the long-term planning of the ancient Brain Boyz. Knowing that their time was limited, the Brain Boyz implanted knowledge directly into Ork DNA. This allows for the Ork race to call upon a vast range of abilities without ever having trained or studied. The end results can be interesting to say the least.

Outside of the normal Ork lust for war, Oddboyz Develop the skills and abilities necessary to carry on their role in Ork society. Mekboyz are Mechanically-inclined, Painboyz 'fix-up' Orks, Runtherdz herd. Weirdboyz focus the Ork psionic potential, Brewboyz brew, Diggerz dig, Sumboyz sum, and Yellerz yell...

+++Freebooterz+++

Following the ravages of war or some other disastrous disruption of their lives, some Orks abandon what is left of their tribe and join a roving band of renegades, pirates or other outcasts. These Orks are called Freebooterz, Bad'unz & Villunz

These motley crews have long since abandoned any tribal or clan loyalties, and have adopted highly personalized insignia in place of their former clan symbols. Ork Freebooterz can be readily identified by the sign of the Jolly Ork, an Ork skull surmounting crossed bones. Freebooterz exist on the fringe of Ork Kultur. They are bandits and sell-swords roaming the universe in small, dilapidated spacecraft, and hiding out on isolated planets and large asteroids. Some of these Orks prefer to remain anonymous, some want to forget, some want to start a new life, but most have simply forgotten who they were. The pirate band is now their home. Outside of their former life, Freebooterz are eager for adventure, combat, and booty, and are quite happy to tag along with Ork tribes and armies as mercenaries.

+++Tinboyz+++

Tinboyz are designed and built by Ork Mekaniaks. Although the appearance of individual Tinboyz vary a great deal depending on the whim of their creator, their internal workings are simple and follow a common pattern. They are all worked by radio control rather than complex programming this is a simpler method of constructing a robot and the controls are easier to understand. A Mekaniak operates his Tinboyz from a distance by means of a hefty control box festooned with switches, levers and flashing lights. The limited number of controls means that Tinboyz can only be given a simple selection of commands, but these are quite enough to enable them to move about and attack.

+++TYRANIDS+++

In the 41st Millennium, the rule of humanity encompasses almost the entire galaxy, a glittering circle of stars ninety thousand light years from rim to rim. This is the Imperium of Man, the largest and most populous empire of all time, an empire of more than a million worlds and untold billions of human beings. The Imperium is ruled by the ancient and immeasurably powerful Emperor. Once he was a living man but he has long since ceased to live in any normal sense. His body is dead, yet for ten thousand years the Emperor has controlled the destiny of the Imperium, thanks to a complex life-support system which preserves his spirit. His wishes are enacted by means of the Adeptus Administratum, a colossal bureaucratic organisation based upon Earth but with the authority and means to rule the entire galaxy.

Despite the power of the Imperium, the human race remains under constant threat from the many hostile aliens which seek to destroy or enslave mankind. The enemies of humanity are strong, but man has so far proved stronger, more resourceful and ultimately more enduring. This is largely due to the armed forces of the Imperium. Human fleets travel the star clusters of the galactic core and the outer rim. Human armies wage war on planets fifty thousand light years from Earth.

Most important of all, the Space Marines stand ready to combat any threat to the Imperium. They are humanity's finest warriors, bio-adapted to survive on the toughest battlefields, trained as the ultimate fighting men, equipped with the most advanced power armour and the most potent armament from the weaponshops of Mars. In ten thousand years of battle, the Space Marines have served humanity well so that today, despite the relentless pressure of hostile foes, mankind thrives under the beneficent rule of the Emperor and the vigilance of the Space Marines.

Beyond the human galaxy, beyond the range of human space craft and astrotelepathy, lies the unspeakable cold void of intergalactic space. This is a realm into which few men have ventured and from which no-one has ever returned. It is the great barrier which divides galaxy from galaxy. Yet the void is not empty. Through it moves an intelligence, a great creature that is formed from countless billions of creatures, a mind that is many inter-linked minds. This entity, this race, is the Tyranid hive mind, and it has come from a galaxy unimaginably distant. Now its advanced forces have

reached the Imperium, and the fate of mankind and every living thing in the galaxy hangs in the balance.

The Tyranids have travelled to the Imperium in a hive fleet consisting of a great dark swarm of many millions of individual spacecraft. Each spacecraft is a gigantic living being, a creature fashioned from organic tissue by means of sophisticated genetic manipulation. The journey across the void has taken eons and during that time the Tyranids have slumbered in a state of frozen hibernation. As the edge of the love fleet approached the Imperium the spacecraft stirred from sleep and their inhabitants slowly began to thaw. However, the hive fleet is so large that its trailing edge still slumbers beyond the galaxy's outer rim. The eternally slow thought processes of the hive mind are gathering pace as more Tyranids wake and recall the age-old purpose of their kind.

The Tyranid hive mind hungers for fresh genetic material, gene-stocks that can be used to create new bio-construct creatures and organic-machines. Their own galaxy is exhausted, its creatures long since absorbed into the hive mind, their flesh turned to machine-like purposes or discarded as useless. The Imperium with its billions of humans and countless other creatures offers the Tyranids an almost inexhaustible stock of flesh and genes which will invigorate the hive mind and enable it to embody itself in new forms.

Humanity will be absorbed, broken into strands of DNA to be used to create a new generation of bio-technology. It will be the death of the human race, but to die Tyranid hive mind it is no more than the mining of a precious mineral or the harvesting of a field of wheat. For the Tyranids have no sense of pity or compassion. they are as utterly beyond human understanding as humans are beyond their comprehension. Where a man sees life. the hive mind sees only something to be consumed. Such has been the fate of a thousand galaxies, of millions of intelligent species, since time immemorial.

TYRANID WARRIORS

The Tyranids are the undisputed masters of genetic manipulation and bioengineering. By means of the Great Tyranid Norn-Queens, vast living factory-creatures whose role is to make other creatures, the Tyranids have created the countless bio-constructs that make up the hive fleets.

The Tyranids themselves have six limbs and stand twice the height of a man. Their bodies are covered with thick bony plates which overlap forming a tough natural armour. Pores between their plates exude a colourless slime which oozes over their bodies and drips from their talons. This slime lubricates the inflexible bony plates and prevents friction from gradually wearing away their surfaces.

The Tyranid's lower pair of limbs act as legs, enabling it to move, and end in hard bony hooves - although not primarily intended as weapons a kick from a hoof can easily crush a man's skull. The middle pair of limbs are incredibly strong and end in razor sharp talons - these limbs are used to rip apart an enemy in close combat. The upper limbs are more delicate and end in jointed talons which serve the Tyranid as hands and fingers - these are used to carry weapons and other devices, to operate delicate bio-machines, and for other subtle manipulative tasks.

The limbs are held together by a perforated bony girdle which protects the creature's spine and soft organs from damage. Above the upper arms is a bony neck and the Tyranid's fearsome head equipped with powerful jaws. This basic six-limbed layout is common to many Tyranid bio-engineered creatures, such as Genestealers, and it is quite likely that these creatures are derived from Tyranid gene material or a closely related species from some long forgotten planet of origin.

THE TYRANID HIVE MIND

The Tyranid hive mind is a single co-ordinating will that directs the entire hive fleet. The hive mind is formed from untold billions of individual consciousness, each of which is a Tyranid or some other living creature in the hive fleet. Some of these minds are capable of individual rational thought; some are capable of making only limited decisions; and others are mere automatons whose minds perform only basic motor functions. The extent of this ability to act and think freely varies and depends upon the creature's role in the hive fleet.

As all Tyranid technology is based upon biological engineering, even the most simple functions are performed by genetically tailored bio-constructs which have a rudimentary consciousness and so form part of the hive mind. The Tyranid spacecraft are living creatures, and even individual components such as sphincter doors, food hatcheries and teleportation cysts are also highly

modified living things. Even the most simple Tyranid devices have their origins as living tissue and have a thread of the hive mind within them.

Tyranids also use gene-manipulation to create new races of servant creatures from captives. These advanced bioconstructs are artificial races bred by the Tyranids. Their minds form part of the hive mind but they can still think and act for themselves and can make and act upon decisions within the limits engineered into them. There are many hundreds of these races, amongst them the destructive Genestealers, the ponderous Zoats, and the murderous Grabber-Slashers. Although these awesome creatures may look improbable and horrific to human eyes, they are all designed to fulfil some specific role in Tyranid society: for example as advance fighters and infiltrators in the case of Genestealers, ambassador-conquerors in the case of Zoats, and warrior assassins in the case of Grabber-Slashers.

THE SHADOW IN THE WARP

In order to move from planet to planet, human spacecraft travel through an alternate dimension known as warp space. Warp space is the medium through which human Astrotelepaths send psychic messages enabling the million worlds of the Imperium to communicate with each other. The Tyranid hive fleet also moves through the warp. Normally any spacecraft moving through the warp sets up vibrations which can be detected by a human Astropath, but the hive fleet is so unimaginably vast that it creates an impenetrable disturbance like a huge blocking shadow in the warp. This shadow is the dark, impenetrable will of the hive mind itself, before which the astral spirit of a puny psyker is about as safe as a candle in a hurricane.

Once the Tyranid hive fleet arrives, the shadow cast by the hive mind presents an impenetrable block which prevents Astropaths from sending or receiving telepathic messages, stops spacecraft entering the warp and forces spacecraft already in the warp wildly off-course. As the Tyranid hive fleet advances, the area of the Imperium swallowed up by it simply stops communicating, giving almost no clues as to what has happened.

THE ADVANCE OF THE TYRANIDS

The hive fleet has now reached the outer part of the Imperium and the entire southeastern spiral arm lies under its dominion. Only now has the full extent of the danger been realised, as fleeing refugees struggle back into free space. Only by tremendous luck have any victims survived at all, their spacecraft pushed thousands of light years through the warp by the advancing edge of the Tyranid hive fleet. A thousand human worlds have already fallen to the invader. Their populations have been consumed or imprisoned by the Tyranids. Even after so short a time new races of human-based bioconstructs are ready to join the hive mind.

Only the vaguest details of the fighting have reached the Imperium. Millions of human warriors have died. Entire chapters of the Imperium's finest Space Marines have vanished without trace with no clue as to their fate. The Lamenters chapter is presumed to have been destroyed and the Scythes of the Emperor chapter has been reduced to a few scattered remnants.

But these human warriors have not died in vain. During the fiercest fighting Space Marine spacecraft engaged ships of the Tyranid fleet. Boarding parties entered the vitals of the immense alien craft, gathering information about the Tyranids and successfully destroying untold thousands of aliens. The information gained by these brave Space Marines is essential if the Tyranids are going to be driven back.

Armed with this precious information the Imperium prepares for open war against the enemy it has called Hive Fleet Kraken after the mythical monster of Earth's ancient past. The weaponshops of Mars turn out new and more potent machineries of war, gleaming new spacecraft pour from the shipyards of Necromunda, the vast resources of the Imperial Guard gradually swing into action as millions of men prepare to embark on a war for humanity's very survival.

But the Imperium needs time - time which only the remaining Space Marine chapters can give them. The most famous chapters of all, the Dark Angels, the Space Wolves, the Blood Angels and the Ultramarines together with remnants of the Scythes of the Emperor, head towards the hive fleet. Other Space Marine chapters from all over the human galaxy prepare ships to follow in their wake.

TYRANID STARSHIPS

Tyranid starships are great living leviathans swimming through the hidden currents of space. Between solar systems, they dive into the warp, naturally adapted to survive the tides of the

immaterium. surfacing once again in realspace to feed. They consume the cosmic detritus, the comets and asteroids left by the creation of solar systems. A ship grows as it travels, adapting itself to each new source of food, creating new digestive systems to break down the different "s of matter. The old stomachs atrophy and harden so that an ancient Tyranid starship is a mass of stony growths, often forming a fantastic whorl of armour around the still-growing body.

As a ship moves slowly through the depths of space, the Tyranids hibernate. In the smaller starships, hibernating Tyranids are gathered in small chambers, contained within pods that feed them vital nutrients. In the largest ships there are great halls packed with hibernating Tyranids - in their hundreds and thousands they pass the long years of travel in a dreamless sleep. 'Me only creatures moving around the miles of passages and tubes within a ship are the countless bioconstructs that perform the mindless, repetitive duties necessary to keep the ship healthy. When a starship approaches a star system, the Tyranids begin to wake. The chemistry of the hive ship itself changes and new hormones are secreted, bringing the Tyranids back from their long sleep. As the ship moves through the outer edges of a star system the hive mind prepares for war. It is at this point in its journey that the Tyranid ship is most vulnerable. Tyranid Warriors are just beginning to awaken but the ship is as yet lightly defended. A lightning assault can punch its way through the weak defences to sabotage the ship's vital organs. If the ship dies, so does its cargo of Tyranid Warriors and bio-constructs. Those still in hibernation never awaken as the supply of life-sustaining fluids dries up. Those who are awake and survive the attack are doomed to drift on the dying spaceship as it floats out into the cold of interstellar space.

It is generally the smaller Tyranid ships that are attacked in this way. The largest ships are unimaginably vast and are better left as targets for the battlecruisers of the Imperial Navy. But the Navy can't patrol every star system - sometimes there isn't time for a message to be sent before the shadow in the warp cuts the system off. At these times, the Imperium must depend upon the loyalty and heroism of whatever forces are available. If the system is lucky there will be Space Marines stationed there, for their bravery is beyond question, their skill as warriors beyond compare.

THE GREAT TYRANID NORN-QUEENS

Within some of the spacecraft of the Tyranid hive fleet are huge chambers many hundreds of metres high. Within each chamber is a creature so vast that its great, pulsing bulk almost fills the entire structure. This is a Norn-Queen, also known as a Splicer-Beast, a creature whose function is to make other creatures. Every living creature in the Tyranid hive fleet owes its ultimate origins to the Norn-Queen, including the Tyranids themselves. Long ago the Tyranids gave up whatever primitive form of reproduction afflicted their kind, and adopted genetic cloning as their sole form of reproduction. A Norn-Queen is a huge biological machine, a factory whose only concern is to produce other creatures.

BIO-CONSTRUCTS

All the weird creatures that live in the hive fleet, including the Tyranids themselves, are created by means of the Norn-Queens. Genetic material in the form of captive creatures and corpse scavengers called Coffin-Crawlers is fed into the great maws located at the top of the Norn-Queen and synthesised by its genetic shredder organs. The dissembled DNA structures form a gene-bank which provides the raw material from which new creatures called bio-constructs are created. Once a type of bio-construct has been designed more identical creatures can be cloned by the Norn-Queens.

The many kinds of bio-construct emerge in different ways from different parts of the huge Splicer Beasts. Clusters of eggs spill from rows of ovipository orifices along its flanks, fluid filled depressions on its upper surface writhe with maggot-like larvae, foetal sacs hang like ripe fruit from umbilical branches, and huge larval Teleporter Worms burst from incubator pouches on the Norn-Queen's sides. Simpler bio-constructs may emerge already in their adult form to be gathered and directed by the horde of creatures which feed and serve the Norn-Queen. Most bio-constructs are born as tiny wriggling larvae or may begin life as eggs which must be nurtured further before they hatch and develop into adults.

The ships of the hive fleets swarm with thousands of different kinds of bio-constructed creatures. For example, tiny multiarmed creatures roam the innards sucking up detritus and processing it into a sickly nutrient which they store in their swollen bodies and then feed to other creatures.

CoffinCrawlers consume fresh corpses and grow in bulk until they are ready to return to the Nom-Queen, carrying their swollen bodies back to feed the Nom-Queen itself. Another kind of bio-construct is the globe-like creature which hangs from the upper surfaces of the ship's tunnels; these creatures synthesise a huminous chemical inside their own bodies proving a dim green light for others to see by.

These are just a few bio-constructs but there are many others which maintain the ship in good working order, provide food and guard vulnerable areas. The ship's various controls and facilities are themselves bio-constructs, although they are immobile and function much like biological versions of teleporters, air recycling systems and communications networks.

Small bio-constructs tend not to be very bright They go about their genetically-determined tasks with a satisfyingly singleminded persistence, largely untroubled by the higher purposes of the hive mind. Far more dangerous to intruders are the larger bio-constructed races such as the Genestealers, Zoats and Grabber Slashers. There are many others too, some of which are relatively rare whilst others are very common. No matter how large or how intelligent they are, all bio-constructs form part of the hive mind and are an integral part of the hive fleet and Tyranid society.

GENESTEALERS

lie Genestealer is one of the most deadly of all die Tyranid bio-construct creatures. It is very likely that the Genestealer was created from the genetic structure of the Tyranids themselves, or if not then a very closely related species. Like Tyranids, Genestealers have six limbs, including ferocious, taloned mid-limbs which are used to tear enemies apart in hand-to-hand fighting. Genestealers are the shock and infiltration troops of the Tyranids. They are fast and deadly but they can also hide in alien societies for years, interbreeding with the native creatures and producing generations of Hybrid Genestealer creatures ready to join a full-scale invasion.

Although it seems unlikely that a creature so terrifying as a Genestealer could hide in human society, they achieve this by implanting their genetic structure inside unsuspecting humans. This genetic material is passed down to the offspring of the infected humans, creating a generation which includes monstrous Genestealer Hybrids as well as seemingly normal children. The Hybrids are genetic time bombs whose own descendants will eventually become fully-developed Purestrain Genestealers. The effect is quite horrifying suddenly for no apparent reason monstrous Genestealers start to appear all over the world, destroying and enslaving humans in preparation for the arrival of the Tyranid hive fleet. Mature Genestealers, called Patriarchs act as psychic beacons which attract the Tyranid hive fleets, signalling that their world is ready for invasion. Genestealers are also ideal warrior-guardians, so the spacecraft of the hive fleet contain many of these creatures to defend against infiltrators and invaders.

ZOATS

Zoats are probably a very ancient strain of bio-construct because they share the same six-limbed structure as Tyranids and Genestealers. It is quite likely that this sextupedal form is derived from the native creatures of the lost Tyranid homeworld in whatever remote galaxy they originally came from. Zoats are robust creatures with thick powerful limbs. Only their upper arms are used to hold or carry things; the lower two pairs are used for movement and have horny toes rather like a rhino. Zoats have been specially developed so that they can communicate with alien creatures. Their minds are capable of tremendous leaps of logic and they are able to master new languages with astonishing speed. This enables Zoats to act as ambassadors to races taken over by the Tyranids and it also enables the Tyranids to find out about the races they have conquered. No matter how strange or mentally incompatible a race might be, the Zoats can learn how they think and act, and thereby access their true value to the Tyranids. Zoats are also tremendously strong and have thick horny skins. When they unleash their warrior skills they can destroy many times their own number of humans or other races, a feat which may serve to impress upon the defeated creatures just how superior the Tyranids are.

HUNTER-SLAYERS

Of all the Tyranid bio-constructs, the Hunter-Slayer most closely resembles the Tyranid Warriors. The most apparent different is only size, for the Hunter-Slayers are much smaller than a Tyranid at only two metres tall. Hunter-Slayers are incredibly fast and ferocious creatures so that although they don't have the strength or resilience of a Tyranid they're far more mobile.

Hunter-Slayers move quickly through the small arterial tubeways in the hive ships, exploiting their size and speed by wriggling through narrow ventricles and soft constricted passages. Their role is to protect the hive ships from intruders, moving swiftly from one part of the craft to another in search of their foes. When enemies are discovered, whole swarms of Hunter-Slayers burst from the narrow orifices and vents in the tunnel walls, dropping on their foes from above and wreaking havoc with their sharp talons and deadly bio-weapons.

Given the similarity between Hunter-Slayers and Tyranids, it is likely that the Hunter-Slayers are a very ancient kind of bio-construct developed from Tyranids genes, possibly as a sort of fast attack warrior

GRABBER-SLASHERS

The Grabber-Slasher is a destructive warrior assassin which has certain biological traits in common with Orks, including blood containing symbiotic algae which enables the creature to digest its prey. Indeed, it is possible that the Grabber-Slasher has been created from Ork captives, in which case it heralds the birth of new bio-constructs based upon creatures from the human galaxy. The algae in the Grabber-Slasher's bloodstream synthesises the genetic material of its victims which is then absorbed into the Grabber-Slasher's body enabling it to gradually mutate its own form. However, the Grabber-Slasher can always revert to its basic GrabberSlasher shape. although the change may take a day or so to complete.

Its powerful body is very muscular and it can propel itself along by its tail. A single flick of its tail sends it bounding through the air towards its chosen target. The target is then grabbed by the clawed hand-like organ on top, and immediately disembowelled by means of the razor-sharp protrusion underneath. Grabber-Slashers are very single-minded creatures: if instructed to assassinate a particular individual they will stop at nothing until the target is dead, ignoring all other threats to themselves entirely.

MIND SLAVES

The Tyranids have come to the human galaxy in search of fresh genetic material to feed their Nom-Queen and revitalise the hive fleet after its long journey through space. However, not all captives are fed to the Nom-Queen; some are useful simply as food for the Tyranid bio-construct. And some are sacrificed to the breeding programs of other creatures; it is their grisly fate to become hosts for immature grubs or the larvae of a bio-construct.

If the Tyranids want to store a captive so that he can be eaten, genetically shredded or used as a breeder host at a later date, then a special bioconstruct called a Shroud-Spinner weaves an anaesthetising cocoon round the victim to keep him alive and fresh. This is the reason why traps assaulting a Tyranid ship sometimes find whole chambers of these cocooned victims.

One particular creature which feeds upon a captive during its larval stage is the parasitic Mind-Slaver. The mature MindSlaver is a crab-like bio-device which is used by the Tyranids to gain temporary control over another bio-machine which has malfunctioned or been damaged. As such, the Mind-Slaver takes over the individual mind of the bio-machine and allows the hive mind to control its mechanical functions.

The larval form of the creature is about the size of a pea or small pebble. When the egg laid by the Nom-Queen hatches, the creature is introduced to a living captive. It burrows into the captive's skull and searches out the brain stem. Here it clasps in place with its legs and attaches itself to the base of the medulla.

At first the immature creature is not powerful enough to influence its host but, as it feeds from the host's blood stream it becomes stronger, allowing the hive mind to seep into the host's brain and eventually take over and direct all of the creature's higher brain functions. These victims are known as mind slaves. Although they're captives, their actions and thoughts are completely controlled by the Tyranid hive mind.

Eventually the Mind-Slaver outgrows and destroys its host but, until it does so, the mind slave moves about the ship and performs tasks under the direction of the hive mind.

If the ship is attacked, the mind slaves will be amongst the first to move to its defence, especially if they belong to an armed warrior race whose fighting skills may be usefully employed by the Tyranids. As the Space Marines move through the spacecraft they may meet mind slaves controlled

by the Tyranid hive mind and will recognise many of the creatures of the Warhammer 40,000 galaxy including Chaos Space Marines, Imperial Guard, Orks and Eldar.

The ultimate fate of a mind slave is to be sacrificed to the next part of the life cycle of a mind slaver. When it is quite large and almost fills the cranial cavity of its host, the Mind-Slaver exudes a chemical which encysts the host, dissolves him from the inside and turns his body into nutritious soup. The Mind Slaver feeds off this soup and grows into its adult form.

+++Space Hulks+++

Space hulks are massive, derelict vessels, locked in a strange eternal voyage through the warp. These mysterious vessels appear only very rarely in Imperial space- and they bring either great wealth or great calamity to those who find them.

Very little is known about the warp. Some studies were undertaken during the Dark Ages of Technology, but most of the knowledge was lost in the Age of Strife, or suppressed by the Ordo Malleus in the years since. However, it is known that there are currents and eddies in the warp, which can trap a vessel in warspace forever, or turn it from its course and deposit it back in realspace lightyears- or centuries- from its intended destination.

The vessels known as space hulks suffer a different, and in many ways, more unpleasant, fate. Space hulks have been wrenched from their course and drift helplessly through warspace, travelling wherever the currents take them. They may stay locked in warspace for centuries, or drop back into realspace minutes after entering the warp.

It is impossible to determine where or when- or if- a hulk will return to real space, and even the psychic Astropaths are unable to influence or predict the hulk's voyage. Once the hulk is returned to realspace, it is not free. Minutes, hours, days, or years later, it will be sucked back into the warp, to endure another uncertain, endless voyage.

Passengers trapped aboard a drifting space hulk face slow death by starvation- or quick death by madness. Possibly the most unfortunate are those whose vessels have efficient life-support systems: they may linger for centuries.

There appears to be some sort of pattern to the arrival and departure of space hulks, and periodically, two or more appear in realspace at the same place and time. If one is empty and dead and another is inhabited, the crew of the inhabited vessel scavenges the other for metal, energy, and spare parts, seeking to repair their own dying ship or expand their living space by binding the two vessels together. If both ships are occupied, the crews may fight savagely to take each other's vessel. Over the millenia, the patchwork vessels attain huge size.

Space Hulks and Genestealers

It is impossible to predict when a hulk will re-enter the warp, so anyone who boards them risks eternal prison. However, there are many who are willing to take that risk. Some hulks have been in existence since the Dark Age of Technology or even earlier- though their original inhabitants are long dead, these vessels are treasure houses of lost technology, containing secrets which could bring unimaginable wealth to anyone who dares plunder them.

Genestealers use this to their great advantage in the war against Man. They have boarded a number of space hulks, accompanied by their hybrid children. The hybrids construct cryogenic suspension chambers for the pure Stealers- though hardy and long lived, even the Stealers cannot survive for centuries in the awful cold and vacuum of space.

Once the cryogenic chambers are complete, the hybrids depart. The purestrain Genestealers sleep, and the hulk continues its eternal voyage. Though it may take centuries, eventually- inevitably- some day the space hulk will reappear in populated space, to be discovered and boarded by foolhardy treasure hunters.

When the space hulk is boarded, sensors are triggered, awakening the sleeping genestealers. The boarding party is attacked, overwhelmed, infected- and then released. Several stealers accompany the party back to the ship, infecting the ship's crew as well, and then hiding themselves in the ship's holds.

Psychically controlled by the Stealers, the ship's crew have little or no memory of the attack, and may not be aware that they have been infected or that they are carrying Stealers. When the ship reaches a Human-held

planet, an implanted crewman departs, accompanied by a genestealer. The vessel becomes a plague carrier, bringing its cargo of death and despair to each planet it visits.

Once on the planet, the Stealer goes into hiding, and the crewman under his control begins to form a cult.

+++HIVE FLEET BEHEMOTH+++

The first contact the Imperium of mankind had with the alien menace of the Tyranids took place on a little-known Imperial outpost in the Tyran system located on the south-eastern fringes of the galaxy. The planet Tyran was an Adeptus Mechanicus way-station for Explorator expeditions studying the virtually unknown sectors at the edge of the galaxy. Because of its isolation the base was well protected despite its small size and boasted an Astropath for communication with the Earth, over 60,000 light years away.

The first disquieting reports from Tyran told of a number of ravaged worlds which lay at the very edge of intergalactic space. In ancient surveys these particular planets had been logged as supporting life but more recent expeditions reported them to be bare, airless rocks. At first nothing untoward was apparent: the earlier surveys were hundreds, sometimes thousands, of years old and inaccuracies were not uncommon.

As time passed the Technomagi found that worlds which were known to have thriving ecosystems had been transformed into barren planetoids. Investigation teams could find no discernible cause for the phenomena and the reports filed with the Explorator General received little attention. The planets in question had supported no sentient life forms and lay thousands of light years from the nearest human-colonised systems. In a galaxy of a billion worlds such mysteries abounded, so for a time the information languished in the hundreds of miles of databanks that form the archives of the Administratum on Earth.

As the Tyran outpost dutifully continued to file reports of dead worlds the growing body of evidence attracted the attention of an organisation that abhors mysteries and unexplained phenomena: the Inquisition. Inquisitor Kryptman, well-respected for his far-sighted condemnation of the Macharlan Heresies, began to ask probing questions about events in the distant south-east. The Adepts of the Explorator's office could offer little additional information but as soon as Inquisitor Kryptman compiled and analysed the reports on the extinct worlds it became apparent that the phenomenon exhibited a distinct pattern, and was encroaching ever deeper into the galactic rim.

The Inquisitor presented his findings to the council of the Inquisition and received dispensation to commandeer a ship to travel to the eastern fringe and uncover more data. But even as the Inquisitor's ship was churning through the warp Tyran came under attack.

ASSAULT ON TYRAN

The Tyran Primus base lay in the midst of Tyran's great world-spanning oceans, dug into an island that was the very tip of a chain of ancient volcanoes. The oceans of Tyran covered over 80% of the world's surface and were home to a dizzying array of marine life ranging from the small and innocuous scuttlefish to the highly dangerous 200 metre long kraken. The base itself was fortified to resist violent storms and the attentions of the voracious oceanic life forms. Tyran Primus also had four giant defence lasers in armoured silos for defence against marauding alien space craft and any unknown monstrosities lurking in the deep oceanic abyss.

Over four hundred personnel manned the base Administratum scribes, Explorators, Adeptus Mechanicus Genetors, Engineers, Lexmechanics, their entourage Servitors and a single Astropath. They were under the command of Magos Varnak, a member of the ruling caste the Cult Mechanicus. Explorator ships passed through the Tyran system to collect supplies and deliver reports every three to six months. The last ship to depart was the Investigation, destined to survey worlds on the Eastern Fringe though Varnak feared all he would receive were further reports of extinct planets.

Over a month after the departure of the Investigation Tyran Primus detected a cloud of close to a thousand unidentified objects entering the Tyran star system. After initial studies revealed the cloud was made up of neither spacecraft nor debris Magos Varnak piloted one of the station's small system ships towards the cloud to investigate further. When approached, the ship came under attack by

unknown object almost immediately. Magos Varnak was injured, several off crew were killed and the ship itself was so badly crippled barely survived the journey back to Tyran. As he recovered from his injuries Varnak grimly ordered the base to alert status and armed the Servitors who would act as the first line defence if there were an invasion.

A week later the first attacks began on the base. The storm-wracked skies of Tyran were split again and again by the blinding flash of the defence lasers as they strove to drive the attackers away. Bolts of laser energy capable of melting through whole city blocks lanced into space as projectiles launched by the enemy above smashed down on the base. Silo 2 was shaken and cracked by several hits but the chants and ceremonies of the Tech Priests kept it firing.

The uneven battle raged on for an hour or more as the brave laser crews blasted at the hundreds of invaders around Tyran before, amazingly, the enemy simply withdrew. Varnak sent his three remaining system ships in pursuit of the foe. They added to the destruction already wrought by the ground-based lasers and confirmed Varnak's earlier observations of the attackers. The objects appeared to be creatures of alien origin vast armoured organisms with thick carapaces that were apparently fully adapted for life in space.

The system ships were quickly crippled or destroyed by the bio-ships and Magos Varnak was informed that the defences of Tyran had damaged or destroyed only a dozen creatures out of a swarm of close to a thousand. He was forced to the conclusion that should the invaders attack again and with greater vigour the base on Tyran was doomed. Escape was impossible. All that remained was to try and warn the Imperium before selling themselves as dearly as possible.

But the Astropath could broadcast no messages. The disruptions caused in the warp by the creatures' arrival made it impossible to use astrotelepathy. In a few hours or days the warp might clear but for the moment Tyran was completely cut off. To preserve what knowledge they had Varnak ordered a data codex to be formed of all the information gathered about the invaders. The data codex would be set to record the fate of the base until it was sealed at a signal from Varnak's control pulpit and dropped into a 3,000 metre deep bore shaft beneath the base. Even as the codex was being prepared the aliens moved in to attack positions once more.

As they came within laser range the invaders released thousands of pods above the planet. The pods fell toward Tyran in tight clusters and did not break up as they hit the atmosphere. Though the laser defences destroyed any pods which would have impacted on the base many more fell into the sea around it. To enter the sea was death for a human yet the aliens could be seen approaching the base on sonar scan. The seas thrashed and boiled as more aliens emerged from their pods and hacked their way through the voracious native beasts that swarmed around them.

Defence laser fire ripped into the bio-ships as they began an intense bombardment of the base. Several of the creatures fell burning into the atmosphere but the bombardment continued. Hissing acids ate through the armoured laser silos and one by one they were silenced. Magos Varnak watched the advance of the aliens on the crystal screens of the sacristy. The creatures were upright and six-limbed, clawed and fanged like fiends. The scattered defensive fire ricocheted off their thick hides and heavy carapaces like hailstones.

The aliens attacked the south dock and smashed their way through the electro field and armourplated shutters as if they were paper and glass. Servitors guarding the dock fought back with flamers and the first invaders through the breach were slain or driven back hissing their defiance. But other creatures, screaming giants with arms like great scythes, waded forward and Magos Varnak watched in horror as they shrugged off the napalm fires and hacked their way through the Servitors as if they were made of straw.

In an instant the enemy were through the dock and spreading through the base, destroying everything they found. Magos Varnak's finger hovered over the switch that would send the data codex plummeting into the depths. Every moment might give some additional insight into the enemy, but every moment brought the fighting closer to the sacristy. Smaller, scuttling creatures appeared in the enemy ranks and began to cast constricting webs over the Servitors and Tech-Priests as they fought in the corridors.

Varnak looked to the station Astropath and both understood that they could not allow themselves to be captured by this new and terrible alien race. Varnak released the codex and descended into the reactor chamber to set the station destruct sequence. Even as he completed his prayer the doors of

the sacristy were buckling and tearing before the fury of the assault from outside, and with only seconds remaining Magos Varnak struck the sacred rune of ending upon the power altar. Earth received one final, garbled message from Tyran. On the wings of death came a dire prophesy of doom and a mental image of the skies over Tyran turned black with swarming monsters. From the world of Tyran the invaders acquired a name at last - Tyranids.

THANDROS TO MACRAGGE

Inquisitor Kryptman received word of the last message from Tyran months after the attack. By the time his ship reached the Tyran system almost a year had passed and at first he could not equate the dead, dry planet he found to ocean-bound Tyran at all. After a long search Inquisitor Kryptman unearthed Varnak's data codex and learned the full horror of the alien threat menacing the Imperium. As the Inquisitor's ship left the Tyran system it encountered the acid-eaten hulk of the investigation, declared missing months before. The vessel appeared to have been crippled and then boarded: all of the crew were missing and the ship was little more than an icy shell. Clearly the same foe that attacked Tyran had destroyed the Investigation and perhaps even followed its trail through the warp back to the Tyran Primus base.

Kryptman ordered his Astropath to send a priority warning to the Imperium but the Astropath could not penetrate the warp turmoil left by the passing of the alien fleet. Even the nearby Thandros telepathica booster matrix was obscured. In desperation Kryptman set course for Thandros in the hopes of re-establishing communications there.

But the Tyranids had attacked Thandros and moved on long before the arrival of Inquisitor Kryptman. Thandros was not as well protected as Tyran. The miners living in tunnels on Thandros II and III could not hide from the Tyranids or escape into space. The telepathica matrix orbiting Thandros I was later found to have emptied all of its turret magazines and burned out its defence laser crystal before it was overrun. Nonetheless the Telepathica adepts manning the base were unable to send word of their plight to the Imperium because of the Tyranids' psychic blockade. The Thandros system fought and died alone.

Kryptman salvaged the telepathica matrix and sent his message to warn the unsuspecting Imperium of the magnitude of the Tyranid threat. The Astropath, red-eyed with weariness after days of concentration broadcasting Varnak's codex and Kryptman's report, gave the Inquisitor instructions to travel to the planet Macragge in Ultramar, the empire of the Ultramarines Chapter of the Adeptus Astartes. There he would assist the Master of the Chapter in locating and eliminating the Tyranid fleet. As dictated by Imperial tradition the alien hive fleet of the Tyranids had been codified with an ancient and forbidding name from legend: Behemoth.

The Navigator of Kryptman's ship strained to follow the guiding light of the Astronomican through the swirling energies of warp space as the ship pushed through the shoals and reefs of that most capricious medium. At times the undertow left by Hive Fleet Behemoth threatened to lose the ship in the warp forever but the Navigator avoided every whirlpool and riptide with consummate skill, the elongated teardrop formed by the warp drives of the Inquisition ship slipping through the Immaterium like oil through water.

In the Macragge system a dozen other ships already hung in orbit and each day more arrived from the warp. Lumbering Space Marine battle barges hung over Macragge like gigantic azure monoliths etched with the gaping maws of weapon bays, launch tubes and heavy bombardment turrets. These leviathans dwarfed even the sleek strike cruisers arriving from the Ultramarines' furthest outposts. Orbital fortresses and ponderous systems defence monitors surrounded Macragge with a ring of firepower.

Inquisitor Kryptman met with Marneus Calgar, Master of the Ultramarines, beneath the portico of his palace of brilliant white marble perched high in rugged mountains above the glittering seas of Hera. Calgar stood as a giant even among the genetically altered Space Marines. Nothing escaped his piercing blue eyes and even Kryptman's terrible discoveries did not disturb his noble demeanour. The Ultramarines were readying themselves for all-out war with the Tyranids. The Emperor had despatched a Segmentum Tempestus battlefleet from the orbital docks at Bakka. Calgar felt that Macragge was the system most immediately threatened by hive fleet Behemoth. Macragge itself, already well-protected, was being even more heavily fortified and would be held tenaciously by

Ultramarines and planetary defence auxilia until the combined Ultramar and Imperial fleet arrived to take on the hive fleet.

A month later the Tyranids attacked Macragge, their fleet of over a thousand vessels sweeping aside attacks by Ultramarines strike cruisers as they pushed insystem. With no sign of the Imperial fleet from Bakka, Calgar was forced to use the Ultramar fleet in a risky ploy. By leaving Macragge and retreating outsystem Calgar drew the Tyranids onto the defences of Macragge as they sought to encircle it and invade. The Ultramar fleet struck the aliens while they were spread out and vulnerable, successfully carving a bloody swathe through their fleet as Calgar tried to fight his way back through to the protection of the big guns of Macragge.

At the height of the battle Ultramar fighters from Macragge crippled one of the largest Tyranid hive ships and this seemed to fatally disrupt the cohesion of the hive fleet. The Tyranids' attacks became increasingly uncoordinated and Calgar's fleet reaped a great tally of fallen bio-ships. As the battle raged the Tyranids unleashed thousands of spores above the vital northern and southern polar fortresses which were the keystones of Macragge's defences. Each spore that fell to earth cracked open to reveal a Tyranid creature and soon thousands of Tyranids were marching across the ice fields towards the fortresses.

In space the battered hive ships retreated and, desperate to prevent their escape, Calgar's tiny fleet gave chase. Though Calgar feared for the polar fortresses he knew they were well guarded by Ultramarines of the 1st Company supported by defence auxilia and Titans of the Legio Praetor. Most of the 1st Company were formed into Terminator squads equipped with tactical dreadnought armour and the best personal weaponry in the Imperium. Entrusting the fate of Macragge to these veteran warriors, Calgar chose to pursue the Tyranid hive fleet.

The Tyranid swarms on Macragge surged on towards the polar fortresses. Sickle-clawed beasts bounded forward across snowy plains scored by lasers, their numbers blurring individuals into a shifting mass of slicing hooks and piercing talons, others wheeled through the bleak, grey skies on leathery wings and drooled their liquid fire on the defenders below. The ear splitting rattle of bolters and the thump of artillery drowned out the bestial, hate-filled screams of the swarming Tyranids but they swept on with implacable ferocity.

The veteran Space Marines of the 1st Company led the lightly armed defence auxilia in a tenacious defence of the fortresses, holding every wall and trench until the last possible moment before it was overrun by the swarm. Slowly the troops withdrew ever deeper into the fortress while making the Tyranids pay in blood for every yard of ground. The Titans of Legio Praetor stalked the ice fields and drove smoking furrows through the onrushing Tyranid hordes with shells and plasma. Crippled Ultramarine ships which Calgar had left in orbit above hurled down bolts of ruby flame and megatons of explosive death at the Tyranids, but still they came on.

The ferocity of the swarms was unbelievable. At the northern fortress they overran the walls by using the steaming piles of their own dead for cover. Titans were dragged down and ripped apart by sheer weight of numbers, like lions being swarmed over by soldier ants. Weapon barrels glowed red hot and jammed in spite of the arctic cold, ammunition began to run low though the fortress contained stockpiles for months of siege. The snows around the fortresses were stained arterial purple with Tyranid ichor.

As the fighting became close and deadly lumbering scythe-armed giants tore into the defenders' ranks like living battering rams, smashing their way through metal and rockcrete walls with equal fury. Even the Terminators could not stand against Tyranids in hand-to-hand fighting. Six-limbed, armed and armoured in shining chitin, the creatures sprang forward with blinding swiftness, their claws lashing out to rip through ceramite and adamantium with impossible ease. The Ultramarines had to rely on the heavy short-range firepower of their storm bolters, heavy flamers and Assault cannon to bring down the foe.

At the southern fortress stalking creatures penetrated deep into the labyrinthine corridors beneath the citadel through a supposedly inaccessible disposal culvert. The mantis-clawed horrors slew dozens of auxilia troopers from ambush in the maze of dark corridors and rooms before they were finally hunted down and eliminated by Terminator squads. Some men were driven mad with fear or paralysed with terror as the Tyranids broke through the perimeter again and again. With each

perimeter breach the Ultramar garrisons had to withdraw to a new defence line. The Ultramarines were forced back, step by step, by the alien tide of organic killing machines.

In space Calgar pursued the Tyranid fleet toward the ringed world of Circe at the edge of the Macragge system. The timely arrival of the Tempestus fleet from Bakka finally sealed the Tyranids' fate by catching them in a vice between the two fleets. In a desperate fight the combined human fleet destroyed the remaining hive ships at a great cost in men and ships.

The Tempestus fleet of over two hundred warships including the huge Emperor class battleship Dominus Astra was almost completely wiped out in a titanic battle around Circe. The battle was only won by the heroic sacrifice of the Dominus Astra charging into the heart of the hive fleet and triggering its warp drives. The Tyranids were destroyed in an uncontrolled warp vortex which also dragged the Dominus Astra to oblivion. Calgar's surviving ships came about and roared back to Macragge to try and save the beleaguered polar garrisons.

The remnants of the Ultramar garrisons had been forced deep underground by wave after wave of Tyranids. The survivors of the Ultramarines 1st Company were still fighting amongst the coolant stores and capacitors of the giant defence laser silos of the northern citadel but all contact with them was lost after the Tyranids completely overran the surface outposts. At the southern fortress the remaining 1st Company detachments had been destroyed when they attempted a counter-attack against a vital bastion captured by the Tyranids. Small pockets of Ultramar resistance still held out in bunkers above ground. Calgar, feeling that the situation was becoming critical, sent the 3rd and 7th Ultramarines Companies ahead in their fast strike cruisers while his remaining damaged ships limped back to Macragge.

As the sleek strike cruisers swooped over Macragge the Space Marines of the 3rd and 7th Companies were deployed by drop pod onto the poles with their supporting units following up in gunships. Scenes of unbelievable carnage awaited them below. Piles of mangled Tyranid corpses and shattered wargear lay strewn across the ice. Vast steaming craters pocked the snows where Titan plasma reactors had melted down and the stench of death lay everywhere.

The 7th Company, dropping on the southern fortress, landed unopposed and quickly linked up with the survivors of the garrison above ground. Together they pushed on to clear the subterranean passages which had been overrun. Only a handful of Tyranids remained to oppose them but they fought back with maniacal ferocity. Initial progress was bloody, with several advance squads being attacked by lone Tyranids or small groups which took their toll. But the Tyranids' attacks lacked strategy or coordination and most of the creatures were riddled with bolter fire as they emerged from cover.

In the north the 3rd Company came under attack as soon as it landed. Hundreds of creatures emerged from dark tunnel mouths and shattered bunkers to assail the Space Marines, threatening to overrun their dropzone by sheer force of numbers. Only staunch defensive fire laid down by the company's Devastator squads kept the alien swarm at bay until Thunderhawk gunships arrived to blast the Tyranids back below ground. Captain Fabian of the 3rd Company prudently awaited the arrival of the company's three Dreadnoughts before proceeding into the fortress itself to search for survivors.

The dark, dank corridors beneath the northern fortress were already subtly altered by the aliens' presence. Mucous dripped from the walls and ceilings and a pervasive musky stench filled the air. Alien screams and roars echoed and re-echoed weirdly along the tunnels. Warily, the Space Marines pushed forward, the darkness moving back reluctantly before their suit lights. The corridors were littered with Tyranid and Ultramar dead and even bio-scanners failed to identify the creatures that lay in ambush amongst the corpses. Such lone attackers wreaked havoc at close quarters, slashing into the advance squads in an orgy of destruction before they were killed.

Eventually the forward squads started to use flamers to burn their way along the passages and flush out their enemy. Even as the creatures burned they still leapt forward with claws outstretched to rip and slay.

Two full squads of Space Marines were killed in a lightning fast flank attack by a dozen Tyranids at an intersection. Only the presence of a Dreadnought blocked their rampage through the company's perimeter, and the Dreadnought itself had one arm ripped off by the creatures before it cut through

them with its assault cannon. As the company entered a great chamber below Silo 8 they were assailed from all sides as a nightmarish horde of creatures sprang from the shadows. A hail of obscene projectiles struck at the Space Marines, burning through their armour and spraying them with vile corrosive mucus. Chain swords clashed against curving blades of bone and bolters chanted their catechism of death as the Ultramarines desperately fought back. A mighty Tyranid lord, huge as a Dreadnought, thundered into the Space Marines' line. Three Space Marines fell to a single sweep of its curving blade before a Dreadnought charged into the monster. A titanic struggle ensued as monster and machine battled to the death. The Dreadnought reeled back as the Tyranid struck it a mighty blow, sparks flew as the Dreadnought's power fist crashed into beast's carapace. Pouring ichor from its wounds the creature raised its blade and chopped through the machine's leg to send it crashing to the ground. The beast howled in triumph and raised its blade to deliver the killing blow as Captain Fabian leapt forward into the fray. Power sword and alien blade clashed together with a cracking energy discharge. The beast swung a mighty overhead blow at Fabian as he staggered back from the discharge but the captain leaped aside and the blade buried itself in the rockcrete floor with a flash of power. In the fraction of a second before the creature freed its blade Fabian levelled his plasma pistol at the creature and fired, the incandescent blast catching it full in the head as Fabian pumped shot after shot into the creature. The beast reared up with a final ululating howl of agony and fell back dead.

All around, the Ultramarines were on the verge of being overwhelmed, only the psychic blasts of the Librarian were stopping the Tyranids completing the slaughter. But as the Tyranid lord fell many of its minions turned tail and were cut down by bolters as they fled. Those that fought on were blasted apart as the Ultramarines resorted to firing amongst their own troops to finally prevail. At the end of the fight barely a quarter of the company had survived and all three Dreadnoughts were damaged. Captain Fabian grimly ordered his remaining men to continue the hunt for survivors. Once more the greatly reduced company cleared its way forward with flamers and finally reached the lower penitentiary where the 1st Company had made their last stand. Tyranid bodies were piled six deep around the doors and within the room a circle of Terminators lay where they had fought back to back. They were still and lifeless, every one having given his life against the Tyranid hordes. The Ultramarines' 1st Company had been wiped out to the last man, a grievous blow from which the Chapter has still to fully recover.

Hive Fleet Behemoth had been stopped, but only at a grievous cost to the Imperium of Mankind. In the aftermath of the first Tyrannic war there was little the Imperium could do to strike back at its foe. Behemoth had arrived from a virtually unexplored quarter and had disappeared completely after the Battle of Macragge. The trail of the hive fleet led back to the empty void of intergalactic space. The Techno Magi of Mars spent many years classifying the Tyranid artefacts and bodies left on Macragge but could divine little from the evidence. The obvious facts were that, like the Eldar, the Tyranids used a form of bio-technology to organically form weaponry (though Tyranid weapons were limited to short-ranged projectiles and close combat weaponry) and that the Tyranids themselves formed an incredibly diverse race, more so than even the Orks. Gretchin and Snotlings which infest the galaxy.

The only discovery of great note was that the Tyranids had employed Genestealers as shock troops. These creatures had previously been thought to be autochthonous denizens of the moons of Ymgarl that had spread through space onboard cargo barges. Their presence amongst the Tyranid hordes was testament that this theory was in error. Genetic samples indicated they were Tyranid creatures, so why were they already established far to the galactic north-west? The Salamanders Chapter of Space Marines conducted a xenocide campaign to purge the moons of Ymgarl and Inquisitors intensified their scrutiny for Genestealer infestations but nothing more could be done.

+++HIVE FLEET KRAKEN+++

Two and a half centuries passed with neither sight nor sound of further Tyranid incursions. Some members of Earth's Adeptus Administratum began to question the necessity of maintaining so many armed forces in the galactic south-east to resist a non-existent Tyranid threat. They argued that the hive fleet had represented the sum total of the Tyranid race and that it had been destroyed at Macragge. When inhabited worlds along the south-eastern fringe began to suffer an epidemic of riots, terrorism, sabotage and, in some cases, outright rebellion the same Adeptus claimed the people had become dissatisfied with living in the midst of an armed camp and chosen to violently illustrate their displeasure.

The Inquisition suspected a plot and moved quickly to 'investigate' the dissenters for signs of treasonous thoughts or heretical influence. It was soon established that all of the dissenting Administratum officials either originated from the south-eastern fringes or had travelled there at some point in their career. No other unifying factors could be found, and many of the suspected traitors had never even met each other.

Inquisitors were dispatched from the Inquisition fortress at Talasa Prime to fully investigate the Ultima rebellions. Meanwhile, the Inquisition instigated a terrifying purge throughout the Imperium and particularly on Earth, incarcerating anyone in high office who had had contact with the Eastern Fringe. Tens of thousands were dragged away by the Arbites to languish in prison colonies while the investigation continued.

ICHAR IV

The Imperium's first concern was the rebellion on the industrial world of Ichar IV. The Ichar system is vital to the Imperium. Its gigantic factories and sprawling refineries form the lynch pin of one of the few densely populated sectors in the Ultima Segmentum. Thousands of ships carrying ore and myco-protein pass through Ichar's huge orbital docks each year.

The rebellion had been swift and bloody. Years before, a religious fundamentalist group called the Brotherhood had caught the hearts and minds of the impoverished city workers. Their preaching of the return of the Emperor had promised better times to come and a place in heaven at his side, the kind of spiritual comfort most sought after by those without power or privilege in life.

The Brotherhood's mercy missions and chapels had soon become a common sight in the poorest districts and their good works were legendary. The Ecclesiarchy had carefully monitored the Brotherhood for any taint of iconoclasm or heresy but had found nothing, if the reports were to be believed, but the most laudable of faith in the Emperor. Eventually permission was sought and granted for the Brotherhood to build a cathedral in Lomas, Ichar IV's largest city.

Shortly after the completion of the cathedral the trouble began. The Brotherhood refused to pay its tithes to the Planetary Governor and refused to allow its members to be inducted into the Planetary Defence Force. Brotherhood preachers began whipping the populace into a frenzy with predictions of the imminent return of the Emperor. Vigilante Brotherhood militias started to patrol in many areas, brutalising far more "unbelievers" than non-existent criminals.

REBELLION AND WAR

Matters came to a head when rioting broke out at a Brotherhood mass rally held before the great cathedral. Arbitrators moved in to break up the crowds with power mauls and suppression shields but were fired on from the cathedral itself. The Arbites returned fire, killing several Brotherhood militia and enraging the great mass of people. After beating off several charges by the mob the Arbitrators were forced to withdraw by the arrival of another, larger mob from the poor district.

Rioting spread throughout the city and the Arbites were unable to suppress it. When PDF troops were called from their barracks to assist the Arbitrators most of them rebelled and came out in favour of the Brotherhood. Vicious fighting broke out all over the city and, when it came to light that the Planetary Governor had been assassinated, the fighting spread to every city on Ichar IV. Within hours tanks daubed with Brotherhood symbols and flying crude revolutionary banners held most of the intersections and utilities in Lomas and the Imperial forces were being pushed back in other cities.

Dawn brought full news of the assassination of the planetary governor and most of his ministers. Some were killed by bombs, others by snipers, others were murdered with their households in horrific massacres which looked like the attacks of wild beasts or mob violence. Shortly afterwards the Brotherhood seized all broadcast stations and announced their new theocratic government.

Loyal forces still controlled much of the countryside outside the cities and the judges of the Adeptus Arbites still held their precinct fortress against the rebellious populace inside Lomas. Nonetheless, most of the world's cities had been captured in a full scale rebellion against the Emperor of Mankind. Inquisitor Agmar arrived on Ichar twenty seven days after the outbreak of rebellion, on the same day that the Arbites precinct fortress was finally overrun by Brotherhood forces. The judges were not to be so easily defeated, however. Most of their number escaped along a secret tunnel and captured the city's four main power generators.

To Inquisitor Agmar's eyes the situation on Ichar IV had the appearance of a well-orchestrated plot rather than the upsurge of popular opinion being depicted by the Brotherhood. Agmar requested the assistance of the Ultramarines Chapter of Space Marines to help the Imperial forces regain full control of Ichar IV. While they awaited the arrival of the Ultramarines the Imperial Guard regiments on Ichar bombarded the cities and held off ferocious counter-attacks made by Brotherhood militia battalions.

Repeated attempts to reach the trapped Arbites met with failure in the dense rubble surrounding the generator plant. Amidst piles of crumbled rockcrete and twisted girders Imperial Guard units were consistently driven back by the savage zeal of the Brotherhood troops in deadly close combats. The brave Arbites finally fell six days after Agmar's arrival, though in their last act of loyalty to the Emperor they destroyed the power generators they had held so diligently. The lurid fires lit by their melta bombs burned for days afterwards, casting a black pall of smoke across Lomas like a chilling shroud.

The war had reached a stalemate and ground down into an extended city-fight. Casualties spiralled upwards daily in dozens of skirmishes and ambushes fought through ruined apartment blocks, burned-out factories and mangled refineries. Predatory snipers lurked, ready to kill the unwary. Every doorway could conceal a booby trap or a hidden enemy. Entire Imperial Guard patrols disappeared without trace in the maelstrom of combat.

At the other cities the story was the same. The Brotherhood had the Planetary Defence armouries and the teeming populace to draw on for their soldiery, and they controlled the bulk of the planet's laser and missile silos. Siege and starvation would be necessary to drive them out.

Inquisitor Agmar led several small battle forces into Lomas to uncover more information about the Brotherhood. Piece by piece the picture of what had happened on Ichar IV became clear. He learned from prisoners about the ruling hierophants, heard their fanatical claims to be part of the magnificent "New Order" which would sweep through the galaxy. In a surprise raid he slew a Neophyte of the Brotherhood and saw what manner of creatures were leading this New Order. The divinations of the Imperial Tarot and Adeptus Telepathica psykers confirmed Inquisitor Agmar's worst fears. In utmost secrecy Inquisitor Agmar sent a report to the conclave of the Inquisition and awaited the arrival of the Space Marines.

ULTRAMARINES INVASION

Thirty nine days after the outbreak of rebellion the Ultramarines battle barge Octavius entered Ichar's orbit and prepared to deploy its drop pods. Ichar IV's defences were still largely ineffective because of the damage inflicted on Lomas's generatorium by the Arbites and drop casualties were light.

Companies of Space Marines seized the main defence armouries and the governor's palace where the Brotherhood militia headquarters had been established. At first the Brotherhood was taken by complete surprise and the primary objectives were quickly secured. The Brotherhood militia launched a series of desperate counter attacks to dislodge the Space Marines but their forces were critically disorganised by the destruction of their HQ and they were beaten off with heavy losses.

Outside the city the Imperial Guard launched a major assault to link up with the Ultramarines. Fire and smoke leapt into the sky as artillery shells burst upon the city. Laser fire slashed back and forth as crouched figures scrambled from cover to cover. Heavy bolters flared through the murk, their shells kicking up erupting lines of dirt and rubble. The Imperial Guard doggedly advanced using their Leman Russ tanks as moving strongpoints and the Brotherhood's lines bent back before them.

At the height of the attack Inquisitor Agmar's specially-placed spy satellite picked up militia forces leaving the Brotherhood cathedral and moving up to contain the Imperial assault. The Inquisitor knew the time had now come when one bold stroke would end the rebellion. He sent a prearranged signal to the Octavius orbiting high above.

In the echoing nave of the cathedral a crackling blue haze appeared, brightened and then in a flash of azure light solidified into a number of hulking figures. The Brotherhood guards at the doors wheeled round in time to be ripped apart by a thunderous hail of explosive shells. More than twenty Space Marines in Terminator armour stood towering over their torn corpses in the sudden silence that followed. More guards, Neophytes and Acolytes suddenly poured into the cathedral through side doors as the Ultramarines Terminators spread out from their teleport point. A storm of lasbeams and autoshells rattled off the Terminators' thick armour plates to no avail: storm bolters were raised in gauntleted fists and the walls were painted with Brotherhood blood.

A handful of survivors hurled themselves into close combat with the giant warriors. Voluminous robes fell hack to reveal bone-ridged heads and glaring eyes when the Neophytes lashed out with their inhuman claws. Some of the Terminators were overwhelmed and dragged down by the supernatural ferocity of the mob but the roaring jet of a heavy flamer cut across the survivors before they could exploit their victory. Smoke and the stink of burned flesh billowed up to the high-arched roof from the funeral pyre.

The Terminators spread out with machine-like precision, some froze into overwatch positions while the others searched the cathedral for the hidden passages they knew it must contain. Their Librarian pointed to the altar and more explosive shells blasted it apart, revealing steps down into darkness.

Flipping on their suit lights the Terminators filed down the steps to find the black heart of the Brotherhood. A dismal crypt lay below, with many twisting passages spreading out from it in all directions but the Librarian could sense the way through the labyrinth. The Terminators' scanners came to life as they left the crypt, showing multiple foes closing quickly on their location, creatures that moved too quickly to be human. The Terminators moved to the positions they would cover from overwatch and waited, ready to deal death at the slightest movement.

First came the distant clicking of claws on stone, then the thunder of the creatures' armoured bodies striking the walls and each other as they rushed forth to bring swift death to the intruders. The first of them sprang into the glare of the lights, its four deadly arms held high over its crouched body and bestial head. Genestealers! No doubt was left now, the Inquisitor was right: a viper's nest of aliens lay at the heart of the rebellion. Fangs and claws glittered as the Genestealers ran forward with insect-quickness to slay their hated foes. Storm bolters roared, sounding impossibly loud in the confined tunnels, explosive tipped bolts caromed from chitinous bodies or pierced them and blasted alien flesh to bloody pulp. The cleansing fires of flamers incinerated whole tunnels at a time but the creatures charged forward without fear or hesitation.

Each strobing flash of the storm bolters showed the foe getting closer. They swept over the bodies piled in front of the Ultramarines and tore into the Terminators. Three of the armoured giants were ripped apart in as many seconds before the rest fell back to the crypt. The Genestealers leapt after them without pause, easily catching the rearguards as they backed away still blasting. Who can say how many more of the aliens were blown apart or crushed by the Terminators' power fists before they were overrun? Not enough to stop the onrushing brood but enough to slow them while their brethren prepared to fight again. In the crypt flamers held side passages against flanking Genestealers and forced them to pour forth from one end of the room. The combined fire of a half-dozen storm bolters burst through the horde and, as the survivors leapt into cover behind great stone sarcophagi, the Librarian summoned a purifying column of warp fire. Unnatural flames filled the end of the crypt, hissing fires that ate through alien flesh as though it were fat and gristle instead of iron hard chitin and steely cartilage. Most of the brood burned in an instant, the rest fell to the explosive bolts which raged through their ranks like a miniature artillery barrage.

The Terminators moved on, cautiously now because they were few. No more of the nightmarish Genestealers barred their way or leapt from ambush as the Ultramarines pushed ever deeper into the heart of darkness. Deep beneath the city they found what they were seeking in a high-groined chamber with carved walls like the ribs of some great beast. There the Genestealer Patriarch crouched on a great dais, huge and bloated with the power of its sprawling brood. It squatted with arms outstretched, head turned upward as if listening for some distant call as the Ultramarines marched into the hall. They raised their weapons to destroy the abomination and it lowered its eyes to gaze on them with a threatening hiss.

Without warning a horde of monstrosities poured into the chamber from between the calcified ribs-walls. Three-armed hybrids, tainted humans and purestrain Genestealers leapt forward to protect their all-father. A wall of explosive bolts marched along the mob and the chamber dissolved into a scene of chaos and bloodshed as the howling fanatics hurled themselves on the Terminators. The Ultramarines Librarian cut his way forward through the creatures, the glowing white blade of his force axe leaving a trail of shorn limbs and lopped heads behind him. Each step became harder, as if he were wading through deeper and deeper water. He could feel the palpable psychic waves of alien thoughts beating against his mind as the Patriarch exerted its ancient, implacable will upon him. Deep pits opened in his subconscious, ready to swallow his psyche whole.

A shocking surge from the Librarian's psychic hood broke the spell. Focusing his own indomitable will, the Librarian forced his body out of the physical world for an instant, and in an instant he was gone. A bright flash marked his departure, another flared at his point of arrival as he teleported onto the dais with the Patriarch. The creature span round and lashed out its claws with incredible speed. Blood and sparks flew from the Librarian's armour as the claws ripped into it. The Patriarch easily ducked away from his clumsy backswing. The beast pounced again and rained a flurry of blows on the armoured figure which were almost too swift to follow.

In desperation the Librarian called to his battle brothers and the dais was swept by storm bolters. Indiscriminate fire ricocheted off the Librarian's armour but some shots struck and wounded the Patriarch. In its moment of distraction the Librarian swung his force axe in an irresistible arc which carved through the Patriarch's armoured hide with a flash of power. The force axe rose and fell, hacking the Patriarch into a bloody pulp and spraying purple ichor across the chamber.

With the death of its Patriarch the brood was thrown into confusion. In the chamber the handful of remaining Terminators slaughtered the mass of creatures assailing them. Nothing escaped the blasts of their storm bolters and the cleansing fires of their flamers as the Terminators exacted some small measure of revenge for the death of their forebears over two centuries before. In the city above the Brotherhood units resisting the Imperial Guard offensive collapsed. Small knots of fanatical Acolytes and Neophytes held out in towers and bunkers but triumphant Imperial Guard tanks swept through the rubble-strewn streets crushing all opposition.

Ichar IV was back under the iron heel of the Imperium within three weeks. All signs of the Genestealer infestation were thoroughly rooted out by the energetic Inquisitor Agmar with the assistance of the Ultramarines. Yet at the end of the campaign several mysteries remained unanswered. The first was what had become of the Magus, the human-seeming leader of the Brotherhood who had disappeared at the start of the rebellion. His body was never found and no prisoners were able to shed light on his whereabouts, even under Agmar's most persuasive questioning.

The second mystery was the reports of Astropaths and the Ultramarines Librarian who had slain the Patriarch. They told of sensing a faint psychic disturbance like a long, keening call or a signal radiating from the planet, a signal which had been cut off when the Patriarch was killed. The oldest and most powerful of the Astropaths had told the Inquisitor that he too had sensed the Patriarch's call and that he had felt a distant shift in the warp. It was a sense of something vast and seething, a shadow of a monstrously powerful entity which had turned its attention to Ichar.

When Agmar submitted his report to the conclave of the Inquisition he was warned of a growing number of reports from survivors fleeing from the outer fringes. The information was garbled and contradictory but one fact stood out, the Tyranids had returned with a new hive fleet, Hive Fleet Kraken

TENDRILS OF THE KRAKEN

This new Tyranid invasion had come without warning and no one could be sure how many planets had fallen to the Tyranid horde already. Hive Fleet Kraken appeared to be made up of many sub-fleets which moved to attack worlds across an entire sector simultaneously. The alarming disruption in the warp brought about by the hive fleet's passage had blocked out astropathic communication beyond the besieged systems and warp travel in their vicinity had become dangerously unpredictable.

Whole sub-sectors of the Imperium had been swallowed up with almost no clues as to what had happened to them. The handfuls of survivors had fled aboard ships and been flung hundreds of light

years off course by the turbulence in the warp. Their chilling accounts of the nightmare advance of the hive fleet formed the bulk of information available to the Imperium.

Tales came of skies turned black over whole continents by clouds of wind blown poison spores. Of hulking monsters that stalked the land, ripping and slashing with murderous claws. Stories of billions of creatures swarming across the face of a world, devouring everything in their path and leaving the planet a wasteland. Whole population centres had been subdued or wiped out in a single night, and those taken alive had envied the dead.

In the Miral system Imperial Guard regiments and Space Marines of the Scythes Chapter still held out against Tyranids which had overrun the lush jungles and plantations of Miral Prime. The Imperial Forces had retreated to a huge rock mesa known locally as the Giant's Coffin where they fought almost daily against raging hordes from the dense jungles below. The jungles themselves had become extraordinarily active since the invasion and only constant defoliation prevented vines and creepers engulfing the defenders' narrow island of rock overnight.

A free captain brought rumours of Lamarno, a feral planet which had come completely under the sway of Genestealers. When a Tyranid hive fleet arrived the fierce tribesmen had calmly boarded the bio-ships to be consumed by their new 'living gods'. He also brought a tale from the giant asteroid-monastery of Salem, telling of how the monks had chosen to poison themselves and their carefully built ecosystem rather than allow their sanctified flesh and bones to be consumed by the advancing Tyranids. Now Salem was nothing more than a gigantic tomb.

Another dedicated merchant captain helped evacuate millions from the mining worlds of Devlan before it was consumed. The extensive system of Sentinel space stations around Devlan delayed the hive fleet long enough for a fleet of giant freighters to escape into space. A company of the Lamenters Chapter of Space Marines held off frenzied attacks by the Tyranids until the last ship was loaded. Left surrounded and cut off, the Lamenters commended their souls to the Emperor and took a heavy toll of the invaders before they were finally overrun.

Yet there seemed to be no refuge even in flight. One giant ore ship fleeing from Devlan with its cargo of refugees arrived at its destination ominously dark and silent. No communication was forthcoming from the vessel and it made an automated landing far from habitation. Those investigating the ship found it to be a slaughterhouse of terror and death when they unsealed it. Men, women and children had been mercilessly butchered in their hundreds, perhaps thousands, it was impossible to tell. The Inquisition suspected a breach of quarantine protocol had allowed some Tyranid organism to get aboard, but nothing could be found, so what it was and what became of it remained a mystery.

Orbital defences on Graia had held the hive fleet back for a time but the invaders had overrun Graia's single moon. Now every orbit brought a rain of mycetic spores on the planet below, each spore bearing its payload of doom and destruction. Explorators reported discovering a world deep in the Eastern Fringe which had been seeded with Hormagaunts during a Tyranid terror raid decades before. Swarms of the sickle-armed beasts had killed every living thing on the planet and now battled with each other in their unrelenting bloodlust. The Squats had reported attacks by a swarm of hive ships on isolated Homeworlds close to the galactic core, tens of thousands of light years away from the main hive fleet on the south-eastern rim of the galaxy.

Inquisitor Czevak reported that the Eldar craftworld of Iyanden had been subjected to a series of massive Tyranid attacks. The once mighty craftworld had fought off swarm after swarm of attacking hive ships but in doing so its space fleet had been virtually destroyed. Several swarms of Tyranids had reached the craftworld itself and fighting had raged throughout its slender Wraithbone towers and magnificent crystal domes. Now most of the craftworld lay in ruins and four fifths of its people were left dead or dying, a terrible blow to the dwindling Eldar race.

TOTAL WAR

The Adeptus Terra was sufficiently shaken by the news from the Ultima Segmentum to convene the High Lords of Terra. Their conclusion was rapid and succinct: the vast inroads of the Tyranids into the Imperium must be stopped at all costs, the Tyranid race must be investigated and, if possible, utterly extenninated. The Imperial Tarot predicted a time of coming darkness unmatched since the darkest hours of the Horus Heresy: the Devourer of Worlds grappled with the human galaxy and thus far it had shown only the first hints of its true strength. At the command of the High Lords the

huge military juggernaut of the Imperium's armed forces turned its face to the Ultima Segmentum and readied itself for total war.

The forge worlds of the Adeptus Mechanicus produce tanks, weapons and war machines by tens of thousands. The ship yards at Bakka and Terra work night and day to build battlecruisers and warcraft to stem the tide of the Tyranid hive fleets. Millions of Imperial Guardsmen prepare to embark on a war for humanity's very survival. To the Imperium war is a religion, a crusade against the forces of darkness which wait in the shadows to enslave mankind. The Tyranids are the ultimate blasphemy, a race of creatures that brings not mere enslavement but utter extinction.

New and deadly Tyranid weapons and creatures are being reported all the time: long-ranged acidic projectiles which melt through steel like wax, creatures which attack with bolts of psychic energy or electro-static blasts, gigantic beasts as tall as Titans. The regularity of Tyranid attacks is increasing and no adequate defence has yet been discovered.

Several hundred large inhabited worlds have fallen to the Tyranids. Two entire Space Marine Chapters based on the Eastern Fringe, the Scythes of the Emperor and the Lamenters, have been all but destroyed with little more than a company of Space Marines surviving the Tyranid onslaught. The fight has not been entirely in vain. In a number of systems Space Marines have boarded Tyranid ships while they were still dormant after exiting the warp. These boarding parties entered the pulsing vitals of the immense alien craft, gathering information about the Tyranids and destroying thousands of creatures while they lay frozen in hibernation. The information gathered by these brave Space Marines has proved vital to the Imperium's search for a way to defeat the Tyranid menace.

The Techno Magi have concluded that the Tyranids originate outside the galaxy. Their voracious genetic structure and biological existence are different from even the most alien creatures of our own galaxy. Whereas human and other galactic organisms naturally diversify into distinct species over the course of millions of years, Tyranids evolve rapidly and constantly to meet the conscious needs of the entire race. The Tyranids are not one creature but a bewildering array of monstrosities created to perform specific functions. Hence Tyranids vary in size from the huge organic spacecraft of the hive fleets to tiny functionary creatures such as the beetle-sized scataphagoids which cleanse and recycle organic waste in the respiratory vents of the bin-ships.

The conscious mutability of the Tyranids means they have never needed to develop more conventional technologies like those used by Man. For example, much of the Tyranids' weaponry is created from symbiote creatures which have been adapted and combined to fire voracious living shells or generate deadly energies. These artefacts have probably not even been consciously designed by the Tyranids, rather they design themselves in response to the requirements of the hive mind, genetically adapting to their tasks from the moment of inception. As time passes generations of the weapon symbiotes constantly change and evolve to become lighter, more efficient and deadlier against the Tyranid's foes.

The hive mind appears to require a constant influx of fresh genetic material and new DNA to create new creatures and adapt to different environments. The Adeptus Mechanicus postulate that the Tyranids exhausted their own galaxy and, perhaps, others of all life before crossing the interstellar void to seek fresh feeding grounds. With its billions of humans and countless other creatures the Imperium offers the Tyranids an inexhaustible stock of organic matter and genetic codes to invigorate the hive mind and enable it to manifest new forms. The Tyranids represent the nightmare pinnacle of evolution gone mad, a ravaging super-predator of stellar dimensions which will make all other life forms extinct if it cannot be stopped.

+++THE SQUATS+++

In the earliest days of space colonization, the worlds toward the galactic core were settled. At that time the mineral resources of the galactic core worlds were a rich prize and thousands of huge specially adapted mining spacecraft and colony ships set off to harvest the vast wealth of these inner planets. The manufacturing corporations, making heavy machinery, vehicles, and weapons, also established thousands of plants on these worlds to be near the source of raw materials.

The galactic core is characterised by ancient suns which are dim in comparison with the stars of the spiral arms. Around these ancient stars orbit huge rock worlds rich in minerals, but in most other respects, barren and lifeless. With low levels of daylight and extremely high gravity, these worlds are inhospitable to most life forms.

The original settlers were miners, engineers, and technicians, and they built their homes deep underground or carved out of the rocky cliffs and hillsides of the world, creating self-contained communities out of exhausted mines. To feed themselves, they constructed huge hydroponic tanks to grow nutritious algae which could then be processed and eaten by the settlers and the communities quickly became self-sufficient.

The high gravity and harsh environment gradually changed the humans that lived there. They grew tougher, more resilient, and they became shorter and squatter. This process took thousands of years, and during that time the new race began to develop its own cultural identity, based upon feudal and guild ideals. When the galactic core was temporarily cut off from the rest of human society by warp storms, the inhabitants banded together into an independent confederation which they called the Homeworlds.

It was during this time that the race became generally known as Squats, though they are also called Dwarfs, and many of them prefer this term. During this period of isolation, the Homeworlds withstood many trials from Ork invasions to rampages of Chaos, environmental disasters, and even internal war between the Squats themselves. The early settlements have been enlarged many times and fortified to turn them into impregnable, self-sufficient strongholds.

With Earth and other sources of technology denied to them, the Squats had to develop their own alternative technologies, using local materials and the vast sources of energy and resources they found in their worlds to contain. As they invented and reinvented machines to keep them alive, the Squats acquired considerable expertise. This gathering of knowledge led to the creation of the Engineers Guild, a body of individuals whose technical expertise would provide future Squat armies with many powerful and high tech weapons of war that were unique to the Squats alone.

The Squat Homeworlds have remained independent, and have their own wars against Orks and Chaos, and on occasions, Squats have also fought the Imperium and the Eldar, but by the large, the Squats have allied with humans, and they have no particular source of discord with the Eldar.

The Squats need to trade in order to acquire items not readily available on their own worlds, and so they prefer to remain as neutral as possible. Sometimes Squat strongholds will fight each other over points of honour, or valuable mining rights, but such wars are usually short-lived, being brought to a halt by ancient laws or the intercession of the Council of Strongholds. The Homeworlds rely on the Imperium for most of their trade, but they also trade with the Eldar and even with Orks on occasion. Generally, the Squats have hated Orks with a passion ever since the ravages of Ork Warlord Grunhag the Flayer, whose surprise invasion cost many Squat lives and wiped out several ancient strongholds. Even today, thousands of years after the invasion, the Squats send out expeditions to try and uncover lost remnants of strongholds believed destroyed by Grunhag's horde. An epic ballad called The Fall of Imbach reminds younger generations of Squat warriors of the heroism of the Squats in those dark times and of the foul treachery of the Ork invaders. The deeds of treachery by the Orks have been recorded in the Book of Grudges for all generations of Squats to read.

The Squats are a hard working and tenacious race, with a strong stubborn streak. They are honourable, and take great pride in paying their debts and in keeping their word. This means they are reliable allies but extremely dangerous foes. If a Squat gives its word to do something, he will do it, even if it takes his life in the attempt. Squats have two characteristics which are hard for humans to understand.

First, they are very materialistic. Squats work hard to acquire money and possessions, and the more important a Squat is, the greater his treasure horde will be. When he dies, his possessions are divided amongst his closest relatives and so pass from generation to generation. A family's treasure is held very dear, it is both a source of wealth and a direct link to its honoured ancestors. The second quality that humans find hard to understand is the Squats' overriding obsession with vengeance and honour. Should a Squat be slain, his whole family is honour-bound to avenge his death, while any harm done to one family member by an unrelated Squat will bring the whole family together to exact vengeance. A harm done by a non-Squat will bring down the vengeance of the

whole stronghold. Squats stick together and never forget a slight, no matter how trivial or unintentional. Each Squat maintains his own personal Book of Grudges. Legends abound with examples of lone warriors battling to the death against overwhelming odds for their family's honour, and of individuals returning from apparent death or dishonour to exact lasting and bloody revenge on their foes.

The stronghold is the basis of Squat civilization. A planet may have several strongholds, but rarely more than half a dozen. The warriors from a stronghold are its Brotherhoods, so called because of their close blood relationship and ties of vengeance rights. Strongholds sometimes band together into leagues.

The leader of the stronghold is called the Lord. The leaders of the stronghold's Brotherhoods are called Warlords, and they are usually close relations of the Lord. In battle each Warlord leads a Brotherhood as well as his own personal Hearthguard.

When several strongholds from a league fight together, a Grand Warlord is chosen to lead the combined forces for the duration of the campaign. Election as a Grand Warlord is one of the ultimate accolades for a Squat warrior, and is normally bestowed on the most honoured and revered of Warlords. The Grand Warlord leads a disciplined and well armed force made up of Brotherhood warriors and fearsome weapons of war developed by the Engineer's Guild.

The Engineer's Guild is a powerful part of Squat society. Its knowledge and expertise is legendary and its leaders hold many engineering secrets. Many of the techno-magi of the Adeptus Mechanicus believe that the Squats have already learned the secrets of stable Warp fission, by which the energy of Warp space is siphoned off to produce limitless supplies of energy.

The Guild has already developed and produced the most advanced form of propulsion for spacecraft: a neo-plasma reactor powered by a Warp core held in thrall by a containment field of zero energy.

No other race has ever duplicated this drive mechanism, the Adeptus Mechanicus have given up their experiments with Warp core technology ever since the infamous Contagion of Ganymede.

The Squats produce many more conventional machines also, including airships, gyrocopters, and gigantic armoured crawlers. All of these machines reflect the landscape of the Squat Homeworlds, where isolated strongholds are separated by hundreds of miles of hostile territory. Shale deserts and chromium drifts, soaring rocky penacles, and sheer glass sided crevasses are typical topography on the Homeworlds. To cross this tortured landscape, the Squats have huge Land Trains.

All of these Land Trains are armoured to survive meteor showers, and violent electrical storms. They carry powerful weapons and are used by the Squats as armoured battlestations, mobile versions of their strongholds, able to survive in isolation on a hostile world. The largest of these vast machines is the Colossus, which is also made for the Imperium in a version called the Leviathan. These are huge war machines with extremely thick armour, carrying a large number of powerful weapons and hundreds of troops, and protected by layers of void shields.

The Squats use many armoured vehicles, fast Guild Bikes, and flying machines on the battlefield.

They use fast, heavily armed Gyrocopters for scouting and making flanking and hit and run attacks.

The sight of a Guild Bike squadron roaring down on the enemy has been known to break the enemy's resolve and create panic among the enemy troops, such is their reputation.

+++The Ancient Slann+++

History

Of all the races in the galaxy the Slann claim to be, and may actually be the oldest. The days of their bright empire are waning, but still they remain amongst the most enigmatic creatures of known space. The Slann evolved, matured and spread throughout the galaxy many hundreds of thousands of years ago. During the heyday of their empire they discovered and nurtured many primitive creatures, encouraging the evolutionary process on countless worlds, eradicating or moving dangerous species, and seeding many planets with promising stock. For millennia they experimented and played with the galaxy, possibly creating many of the races of modern times in

the process. But their empire dwindled, the pace of their civilisation slowed, and their genetic experiments were largely abandoned. The Slann retired from an active role in galactic affairs, falling into a long dream of indolence and introspection. They do not seem to have suffered from any physical conflict, there are no records of destructive wars or disasters. Instead their racial motivations appear to have undergone a sudden and drastic change, so that have lost interest in material conquest and power. Perhaps the Slann discovered something yet unknown to other races, some secret of the universe, a spiritual truth or supreme mystical insight. In therealms of psychic-philosophy and mystic-technology the Slann certainly have no equals, fulfilling themselves by study of spiritual life-forces and secret powers of other realities.

The Slann originally evolved from amphibian stock, and even today traces of their ancestry are not hard to distinguish. Their hands and feet are long and webbed, their skins cool and moist, their heads large with protruding eyes. They are quite at home in the water, and are capable of breathing oxygen from water (or other poorly oxygenated atmospheres) directly through their skin.

Slann vary in colour a great deal - green and blue are common, yellow is fairly well represented, and there is a scattering of other, rarer colour morphs as well as albino and melanistic forms. Brightly pigmented Slann are often extrovert, talented or especially noteworthy in some way. Skins are sometimes mottled, striped or otherwise marked. On some Slann worlds, and especially among primitive Slann, these markings represent tribal divisions. Height is fairly constant, with adult Slann reaching 2 metres, females are slightly larger and bulkier.

The Slann inhabit an area to the north of the galactic pole, living upon a number of proximate, prosperous worlds. The society remains closed to other races, but appears to be homogenous throughout, with a similar technical base, language and culture on each planet. Exceptionally, groups of Slann live as primitive savages on a number of worlds beyond Slann space, including planets of the Imperium. Strangely enough, these primitve Slann are scattered throughout the galaxy, and probably comprise the remnants of what was once a much larger pattern of Slann settlement. These primitives have little or no contact with their technologically advanced kin. The Slann are a curious people, rarely trading with other races and unpredictable when dealing with territorial disputes or any form of rivalry. There is little that the Slann want or need, and traders often get the feeling that they are being watched and studied, and that the exchange of goods is of no importance to the Slann.

Organisation

Slann warriors are called braves, and a number of braves plus a leader makes up a warband. The number of warriors in a band varies, but is usually between 6 and 8, although it can vary between 2 and 12. A senior officer called a warleader commands a group of warbands. Where armies are large large it will have many warleaders, all of whom will meet before a battle to make plans and exchange ideas with experienced warleaders, chiefs and mages. The warleader in overall charge is the warchief - selected from and by the other warleaders. The greatest and most respected individuals in Slann society are the Great Mages. Their aid would be sought in battle, for their knowledge of magic, philosophy and the arcane sciences are formidable. The Great Mages remain aloof from society, although their advice is constantly sought by the social leaders. Slann society is tribal, and the leader of each tribe is known as the Mage Chief. Except among primitive Slann, tribes never fight each other and tribal relations are peaceful. A schematic diagram of Slann society is reproduced below.

1. Great Mages
2. Mage Chiefs and other social leaders
3. Warchiefs
4. Warleaders
5. Warband--|
- Leader-----Braves

The concept of the the warband is important to the Slann attitude to life. Every Slann is expected to live its life according to a strange, mystic and largely unfathomable ritual, as part of which the individual passes through life-stages. The calling to a life-stage would seem a real and almost unstoppable thing to a Slann, and can happen at any time, so that a peaceful technician may

become a wanderer, a warrior, a hermit, etc. Once a Slann feels the call to become a warrior it joins one of its tribe's warbands, or forms a warband of its own. Because of this unpredictable recruiting method, warbands change all the time.